

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 161, No. 175

A divorce coach can smooth the road

Every divorce carries with it a series of emotional reactions unique to the individuals involved, and although the emotional component of a divorce is not lost on attorneys, an overly emotional client can often be a barrier to successful advocacy. Including a divorce coach in the process, however, is one option when looking to help manage client expectations and emotional reactions.

Role of collaborative divorce coach

The only type of divorce coach allowed to participate directly in the collaborative process is known as the collaborative divorce coach. This type of divorce coach is often a licensed mental health professional, however, he or she does not act as a therapist during the process and does not provide therapy to the couple.

In fact, the coach is prohibited from having a dual role; the individual cannot act first as a coach and later as a therapist. Instead, this coach works with the parties' attorneys, a financial neutral and possibly a child specialist to defuse emotionally charged conflicts and aid in productive communication.

Each party to a divorce will either maintain his or her own divorce coach throughout the process, or the coach can be hired to work jointly with both individuals. It is determined at the outset which approach will be utilized.

If there are issues with infidelity, for example, it is more likely than not that each party will have an individual coach. In the alternative, a one-coach model works well in less contentious divorces.

Kate van Dyke, a Chicago area collaborative divorce coach stated, "Divorce coaches are trained to understand where the

client is coming from. [The coach's] goal is to stand next to the client and see how the world feels to them, what their worries and fears are and help translate these concerns into positives."

Van Dyke further stated that her role is to facilitate communication between the parties. Often, she helps her clients reframe and craft messages that increase the likelihood of engaging in a less adversarial process.

The collaborative divorce coach may only aid the parties in matters directly associated with the divorce. Accordingly, this coach's role after the divorce is limited to assisting parties with post-decree matters, such as parenting issues. Of note, collaborative divorce coaches are not confined to the collaborative process as they often act as coaches in mediation and litigation.

Role of a divorce coach: licensed attorney

Divorce coaches who are licensed attorneys bring similar and distinctive qualities to the table. The role of a coach who is an attorney is not as strictly defined as the role of the collaborative divorce coach, however; this coach also works to address and navigate the emotional

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aspects of divorce by helping clients to formulate practical solutions.

In fact, this coach cannot participate directly in the collaborative process. This type of coach works with a client through mediation, or litigation, to help the client become a better advocate and to plan for the divorce outcome.

COLLABORATIVE CONCEPTS



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Since each process is unique, the number of sessions a divorce coach has with a client is based on the client's individual circumstances. Regardless of the type of divorce or frequency of sessions, the goal of the divorce coach is to bridge the gap between the parties' discord.

As an attorney, the coach may help to create a divorce plan and aid the client in finding an attorney based on the personality of the relationship and the divorce. This coach is aware of essential documents that the family law attorney uses throughout the divorce and is able to practically explain the legal aspects of a divorce to clients.

Furthermore, having a background as an attorney, this type of coach is able to uniquely prepare a client for trial, understanding that emotions often get the best of clients on the stand.

Divorce coach Linda M. Perry, a licensed attorney and experienced divorce coach stated, "The role of a divorce coach is action-oriented. The process is really about forward movement and giving clients an appropriate outlet for the natural ups and downs of divorce. A coach helps to strengthen clients so the attorneys do not have to."

When to include a divorce coach

Both divorce coaches, van Dyke and Perry, agree that the most ideal situation is when a client comes to them before the process has started. Both professionals agree that it is important and often helpful for the client to understand the wide variety of procedural options he or she has when getting divorced. Meeting with the client early on allows the coach to understand where the client stands in the process.

"The initiator is often facing the future," van Dyke explained, "while the non-initiator is looking back on the marriage. The goal is to gently turn a person toward the future in order to have two people going in the same direction."

Additionally, the coach can help the client early on with facing difficult emotional realities such as how to tell his or her children about the divorce and how to financially prepare for the process."

Each coach believes working with clients as early in the process as possible helps attorneys by mitigating the likelihood of working with a destabilized or high-conflict individual. Both agree that working with a coach throughout the process injects growth into the client and lessens emotional distress, giving the attorney the opportunity to do what they do best — advocate for their client.

Including a divorce coach for trial

In litigation, it is helpful to have a coach sit with the client and the attorney in trial and deposition preparation. The coach can hear what the attorney is saying in ways that the client cannot because he or she is simply too flooded with information.

The coach will often spend many more hours with the client on trial preparation at a much lower hourly rate. The attorney can then focus on what he or she does best.