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A divorce coach can help clients see big picture, ease an attorney's burden

Spoiler Alert: Attorneys cannot be all things to all clients. Who knew there was such a thing as a divorce coach? Encouraging a client to work with a divorce coach may not only aid the client in achieving clarity about the divorce process and their own emotional reactivity, but also may alleviate some of the emotional burden placed on the divorce attorney.

Divorce coach vs. therapist
"I emphasize that divorce coaching is different than therapy," said Kate van Dyke, a professional certified coach who previously practiced as a therapist for 10 years and president of KatievanDyke.com and atdivorce.com.

Therapists work with patients (receiving medical treatment) and coaches work with clients (receiving professional services). Therapy seeks to heal the patient. Coaching seeks to support a client in achieving a specific goal by providing training, advice and guidance.

A divorce coach does not go backward to rehash the past. Instead, divorce coaching is future focused, goal-oriented and intentional.

The coaching process seeks to identify a client's needs and interests in relation to how to best move forward. A divorce coach focuses on present actions and outcomes and builds on client strengths to compensate for the client's apparent weaknesses.

For example, a divorce coach can provide the client with tailored tools to address specific issues, like effective communication with their spouse. This is often done within a constrained time period. As a result, the process is less organic than therapy. The focus is on managing the client's behavior and emotions so immediate issues can be resolved.

In contrast, therapy is process-oriented and includes looking at the past. A therapist focuses mainly on feelings within a framework of psychological and emotional issues.

In therapy, clients discuss the impact of past events on present circumstances. The connection is

organic and moves slowly, with less focused goals to begin with and more tailored goals as time goes on. The focus in therapy is to provide a path to healing by understanding the past and present issues to aid in achieving long-term emotional health and stability.

A divorce client is equipped with both a therapist and a divorce coach throughout the entirety of the divorce process under the best case scenario.

Team approach

One of the divorce coach's first tasks is to build a relationship with the client and the attorney so that all are on the same page. Clarifying expectations and the roles of the attorney, coach and client right at the beginning make for a smoother divorce process.

Van Dyke often engages in client-attorney meetings throughout the process.

"The benefit to the attorney is having more healthy people in the room — especially when it is a high conflict case — and for the client to hear the same thing from two people. In addition, the divorce coach is trained to determine if a client has taken in the information accurately and can clear up any gaps immediately."

When a client is flooded or fearful, the coach is able to ask clarifying questions and engage in active reframing.

The work of the divorce coach

Van Dyke stated one of the early challenges in working with clients is figuring out their capacity to take in information that does not conform with what they feel certain is true.

"Many clients believe they know how the divorce process works, often hearing from friends and family about their own experiences. This is problematic, because these clients have a preconceived notion about how parenting and finances should be resolved and often get stuck in their mindset."

As a coach, van Dyke works to "increase flexibility by right sizing expectations." She educates the client on how divorce really



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works, goes through issues one by one and explains how the action the client may want to take might impact the client's desired outcome in the short and long term.

"After having this conversation with the client, the attorney and I help the client separate their preferred outcomes from the range of possibilities. Repetition is important for a client who is going through a stressful situation. Hearing the information more than once helps with retention," van Dyke said.

When right sizing expectations, it is important to communicate information to the client in the most meaningful way for them.

According to van Dyke, clients receive information differently:

Therapy seeks to heal the patient. Coaching seeks to support a client ... by providing training, advice and guidance.

Around 20 percent of clients are auditory learners, 40 percent are visual learners and 40 percent are kinesthetic learners. She provides information in a multisensory format so that, whatever their style, a client will have the information presented most effectively for them.

"The more the information can be organized and chunked with plenty of white space on the page, the less the client will have to work to read it," said van Dyke. She also believes that having the client hold the document, look at

it and talk through it increases the client's comprehension and retention.

The result is a client who can better understand the information and complete the task at hand.

Van Dyke works with clients on how to collect financial information for their divorce. She has created a financial checklist that is concise and contains only the essential information so the client is not overwhelmed.

The financial checklist is chunked into sections like cash flow, current access to cash and assets and liabilities. "When a task is presented in manageable chunks, the client can build confidence by completing each part. I tell my clients they can eat an elephant one bite at a time," said van Dyke.

In addition to the financial component, she works with clients to dig beyond their emotions and identify their needs and goals to achieve emotional clarity. "Clients who have clarity can leverage their attorney's expertise and become more effective decision-makers. I do this by leading by example and asking open ended questions."

Everyone moves through the healing cycle differently. Van Dyke notes that "Clients often reach an impasse and seem unable to make decisions when they get stuck in

feelings of loss and grief."

At this point, she refocuses the client on the future so they can transition from grief to resolve and finally on to hope.

The goal is to efficiently achieve a level of hope and positive energy about the challenges to come.

Healthy client, happy attorney

Involving a divorce coach in the process alleviates some of the hand-holding clients often require. Having a healthy and forward-thinking client paves the way for a mutually beneficial professional relationship, leaving the attorney with more capacity to help other clients who don't have access to this tremendous resource.

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