

FAMILY LAW CAREER SOLUTIONS - A WIN-WIN FOR ALL

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It's a scenario repeated in family law cases – one party is ready to end the marriage and move on. The other party, angry and defensive, will stop at nothing to extract as much emotional and financial pain as possible.

The marriage is over. The grief process must take its course: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Both parties will follow the same path, but not necessarily at the same time. When one party is stuck in the anger phase, the anger is usually generated by unmet expectations. The resulting fury is often due to fear. Fear about transition and what the future holds.

Fear in a major life transition, such as divorce, is often based on how one will survive. How will they support themselves and possibly their children? Where will they live? How will they be able to manage the day-to-day activities? Will they ever be happy again? Fear is gender neutral.

One couple I worked with faced such a life changing transition. They were Baby Boomers with grown children who had met in college. He subsequently built a career, providing the family with the luxuries of life, with little personal time left over to spend with his wife and children. She gave up her career to raise the children and participate in fund raising activities, while developing a high community profile to enhance his career success. They were a team and now that the children were grown and gone, there were expectations about enjoying the rest of their lives together.

Then, it was over.

He decided he could live with less. He was tired of the corporate world and the high profile community life, and he wanted to see the world, alone. She felt robbed of

her well earned retirement as the wife of an executive. One party wanted to downsize and change direction, the other was determined to cling to what was left of a comfortable life. He was already working through the grief process; she was just beginning.

She came to me stuck in the angry phase, ready to fight, and spending valuable energy on blaming everyone and everything. Her expectations about her life in retirement were unmet and now unrealistic. To her, the aftermath would be unbearable, the transition impossible. Anger boiled over to rage and revenge.

The first step was to help her see that there was life after divorce. Instead of anger, cooler heads could still negotiate a settlement conducive to both, and that with help, she could build her own life and, yes, it could be as fulfilling as the one she had lived.

She completed career and vocational assessments and interest inventories. We looked at her education and volunteer history. She discovered that she was more well-known in the community than she had realized. We talked about where she wanted to live and how she would like to spend the rest of her life. The anger started to subside as she realized there was life after divorce and this time she would be in charge of her own destiny.

After deciding on a career course, labor market research and salary expectations were researched so that she could make realistic plans about her own life. In this case, she had a bachelor's degree, but needed a masters degree to pursue her career goals. With additional education, she could gain the professional status she desired and could make her own income rather than relying solely on alimony. She was able to articulate and negotiate her education, monetary, and living needs based on a solid, documented research.

In this case study, the parties were able to tone down the anger and look forward to new opportunities, rather than remaining in the anger phase of grief. Each were

eventually able to reach the acceptance phase and in turn, were able negotiate a reasonable financial settlement.

As an expert in the career field, reliable career assessments, research, labor market and salary information, and counseling have proven effective in working with individuals going through a life changing transition. It works whether the individual, male or female, is with or without education, or has ever worked in the world of work. When unmet expectations are reframed to more realistic expectations, change can occur and solutions can be found.

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