

Seven simple tips that will save you thousands of dollars in your divorce

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The following tips will help you get the most effective service from your lawyer, at the lowest cost. Read these before you meet with any lawyer. I guarantee that they will save you thousands of dollars in legal fees.

1. Begin With The End In Mind

Whether you are filing for divorce yourself, or were just served with a divorce complaint, take a moment to ask yourself what is your best case scenario. What do you want from the divorce? It may be primary custody of the children. It may be that you want to stay in the marital home. It may be that you want to punish your spouse for what he did to you. Gather your thoughts, and make a list before you go to see a lawyer.

Whatever it is, make sure that you know what you want. If you don't, you are liable to meet with some lawyer who says, "We'll make him *pay* for cheating on you!" or, "We take your wife's deposition, and every one of the girls she went out with on Fridays to find out what she did." These kinds of ideas are built-in money makers for the lawyer, but they could be a natural disaster for you. Unless their suggestions are something that you want, don't go for it! If you really want to punish your spouse and are willing to pay the price, go ahead. Just make sure it's your idea, not your attorney's.

2. Check References

Any lawyer will tell you that they're good, and all lawyers can be expected to have reasonable knowledge of the relevant law. But that doesn't mean

you'll like working with them. Ask around. See if your friends or relatives have any experience working with this lawyer. Go to their website and look for testimonials of past clients. You will get a feel for the type of lawyer they are, and how well they interact with clients. A lawyer that is haughty and arrogant can make you feel inferior and reluctant to ask questions. This is not who you want to be working with for the next few difficult months. This is *your* divorce, and you need to find someone with whom you are comfortable.

3. Visualize Your "Ideal Lawyer"

In any case, lawyer and client work closely together, but this is especially true in a divorce. The most brilliant lawyer in the world won't do you any good if he fails to communicate with you, or disregards your concerns. Just as many of us visualize our "ideal mate," take some time to think about the kind of person you work with best. Do you need hand-holding? Do you want someone who is friendly and informal with you, or would you prefer someone who keeps a professional distance? Many people change lawyers during a divorce because they discover they cannot work with the lawyer they chose. This is an expensive mistake to make; choose right the first time!

4. Get Your Ducks in a Row

Take some time to dig out all of the paperwork you can that is relevant in your divorce. For example, mortgage statements, retirement and investment account statements, letters or emails from your spouse that you think are important, bills, or bank statements. By putting this together early on, you prevent the possibility that your spouse may make some of this paperwork disappear, *and* you prevent the need for your lawyer to have to send out expensive subpoenas to get the information on her own. Either way, bringing this paperwork to your lawyer eliminates the need to use the "discovery" process (the civil law means of obtaining information) to get it. And that can save you thousands of dollars.

5. Decide to Take the High Road - For Your Sake

In a divorce, there are always hurt feelings. And when you talk with some high-powered lawyer who tells you all of the excruciating ways they will inflict pain on your spouse, it's easy to feel tempted to "stick it to him." Don't. First of all, punishing someone for their marital "crimes" through the court system is massively expensive. Second, it backfires. The man you just humiliated in public at trial is the same person you are going to ask to swap weekends with you when you have plans and can't be with the kids. (Guess what he'll say?) You can never un-say the hurtful things that are said in the heat of trial.

6. Take Your Spouse's Temperature

Not literally, but try and find out if there are things the two of you can work out on your own. Understandably, if the two of you had great communication you probably wouldn't be getting divorced. Nevertheless, many times in a divorce case the lawyers bill thousands of dollars fighting over something (like custody) that the parties could have agreed on. You and your spouse know who takes care of the kids, and how involved each parent is. Doesn't it make more sense to base physical custody of the children on whomever actually provides their care? Custody battles are some of the biggest, most expensive, and brutal fights there are in a divorce. It's worth the effort to try and talk it out beforehand, not only custody, but property settlements as well.

7. Let Your Spouse Keep the Spatula

Many times in a divorce, the parties will work everything else out, and then get stuck on something ridiculously small...like a spatula. Of course it's not really the spatula they are fighting over. The item represents some emotional line in the sand that one party feels they cannot let the other cross. The result is a costly battle in an amount which would have paid for several thousand spatulas.

I once had a client who was body-slammed by her husband in a fight over cookbooks. The result was: police were called, criminal charges filed, more court hearings in the divorce case, etc. They would have been better off buying a whole new set of identical cookbooks!

Resolve ahead of time to be aware of when you start fighting over spatulas, then don't do it. You'll be glad you didn't.

For more questions and advice on divorce and family law, visit our website at www.lady4justice.com