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10 Things I Learned About Divorce/Vicki Lansky

By Joan Bramsch

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Divorce: 10 Things I Learned
by Vicki Lansky

For anyone who hasn't been divorced, trust me, divorce is never what you imagine it to be. Here are a few insights that may save you a trip to court, or at the very least, give you some idea of what may lie ahead. Everything listed here might not apply to everybody. There will always be exceptions to every rule, but it covers most of us.

1. It takes longer to get your divorce behind you than you think, or can allow yourself to believe.

I thought I had it together after a year. Then I thought I had it together after three years. Then I was impressed when I could say I had been divorced five years. Then I was devastated that I could be brought to tears in seconds after eight years when something inappropriate, I thought, was said to me. I guess it's always "there," but fortunately with each passing year it feels longer ago, less important and more comfortable. But unlike your child's owies, it's never quite all gone. As that old saying goes, marriage may not be forever, but divorce is.

2. Going through divorce is a physical experience.

This one took me by surprise. My body seemed to experience a death-defying whirlpool. I hate speed, roller coasters and the feeling of one's stomach dropping when on a turbulent airplane ride. But I can remember having all those feelings -- simultaneously -- while just sitting in a chair after we separated. Yuck! Fortunately this usually passes in three to nine months. Shorter than #1, but not short enough!

3. It never works out according to plan -- yours, that is!

And even when it does, it's only for a short time. Life after divorce is always changing and you won't have a lot of control over those changes. We often get hopelessly caught up in parenting plans when we first separate, and, while that is important, it doesn't usually prepare you for the ongoing changes

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and negotiations that go on for years — changes that you don't always like but learn to live with. There is the ongoing tradeoff of deciding which battles will catch your children in the middle, and figuring out when one must learn to lose a battle to win the war. Or should I say the peace — the peace of mind your children need. Life takes twists and turns that will never be in the "plan," so you must learn to go with the flow or be hopelessly mired in your own anger or disappointments.

4. Parental time (a.k.a. custody) and shared financial responsibility (a.k.a. child support) are NOT tied together.

Though they might be tied together in the eyes of your mother or your mother-in-law, these are two separate issues. When you confuse them or make them cause-and-effect items, you do a squeeze on your kids. It seems like such a natural ("If he doesn't pay support on time, well then the kids just won't

be ready on time or at all" or "I'll be damned if I'm going to send a check this month if she and her honey are going on a ski trip with the kids — that's not what I'm sending support for.") but this is not a life situation where each month comes to an even tally. It never is even. Equitable is the best you can hope for. Marriage isn't even, so divorce sure ain't gonna be.

5. You never outgrow your wish to be the favored parent.

Remember when your kids asked you who you loved best, you knew what a silly (but honest) question it was because everyone likes being first in the hearts of those they love. Unfortunately in a divorce, when parents aren't together to hear news in a shared situation, your child will tell one before the other. It doesn't mean you're the less favored, secondary or unfavorite parent, but it sure does feel like it. So you have to learn to forgive yourself when those competitive feelings crop up from the dark depths of your soul and learn to laugh at them. Remember you're not alone.

6. Divorce doesn't "fix" your ex.

If your former spouse was cheap, never on time and thoughtless before the divorce, he or she will continue to be tight, late and prone to saying stupid things in the divorce. The things that you tolerated in marriage under the perfume of love will infuriate you in divorce. You thought you were done with putting up with "_____" (fill in the blank), but it continues just like it was in your marriage. You have to learn to accept, overlook and forgive, or else you are going to expend lots of wasted emotions on someone you're not even married to. You can only be angry with or hate someone you care about. (Ain't that a bummer!) Also, your lawyer can't make your ex-spouse be a sensitive person or parent, so don't waste unnecessary dollars trying to have your lawyer get "through" to him or her. When you can begin to replace the word "wrong" (as pertains to parenting skills, money values, personal habits, etc., etc., etc.) with the word "different," you'll have come a long way toward acceptance.

7. Divorce, unlike marriage, is FOREVER when there are kids.

Unless you really wish to lose your position as a parent (which is THE hardest on kids), you will have family occasions, graduations, shared holidays, christenings, weddings and funerals that will continually bring you together over the years. Those knots in your stomach at shared public events,

especially in the beginning, are known only to others who have been through divorce. No one else has a clue. Approaching your ex first with a friendly word at such events puts everyone else at ease and is a worthwhile practice. And with practice, and some history, you may find those stomach knots actually loosening. Mortal enemies have been known to actually become friends, sometimes good friends, and many find they can be kind of comfortable "cousins."

8. If you don't hate your exiting spouse when you first separate, you will within three months to three years.

It's next to impossible to skip this one, though it always seems to come as a surprise. Why, I'm not sure. Now you both have different agendas and no way will your priorities (usually money concerns or kid issues) be the same as your ex's. It's okay, and sometimes even important, to be angry with your ex (for a certain amount of time — not forever), but it's not okay to share or show that anger with your children or in front of your children. Not easy, but for their mental health, their need for a safe haven and their need to love both parents, you've got to keep these volatile feelings to yourself — or limit them to your therapist or support group.

9. The day your ex remarries is really painful.

The only thing worse than hearing from a third party that your ex is remarrying, is actually hearing the news from your ex. Obviously this is a no-win situation. No matter how glad you are that your ex is your ex, you'd never take him/her back, and you're thankful you're divorced, it's still a painful time. It's that last nail in the coffin of what was once your marriage, and your hopes and your dreams. If you know anyone whose ex is getting remarried, don't let them spend that day alone. And if you know your ex is getting remarried, don't spend it by yourself, unless you really enjoy digging a dark hole and crawling into it. (Obviously the kids will be attending the wedding and unsure of how to be of comfort to or deal with the other parent.)

10. After all this, know that there is still such a thing as a good divorce.

Yes, you read that line correctly. Now this is not to be confused with divorce is good, but there are ways of turning this lemon into lemonade. Read up on how to do it. There are lots of books to help you — I've written one. Making peace with life's changes is good for you, for your kids, and for your life. Divorce is not the path to be recommended easily, but it's not a terminal illness, or a contagious disease either.

I did not come up with the term "good divorce." I'll credit that to Constance Ahrons, author of the book "The Good Divorce." "A good divorce," she says, "is not an oxymoron.

Astonishingly, in my studies I found half the divorcing couples we interviewed had civilized, and many amicable, relations with each other.

Another surprise was that almost everybody wished to be on better terms with his or her ex, even the ones who had bad relationships.

I'm tired of the doomsday reports and the label of the 'broken home.' We have been so inundated with negative stories of divorce, that men and women need to hear the message that they can make their families work better, minimize stress, and not feel like total failures. In a good divorce, a family with children remains a family — one that is sufficiently cooperative to permit kinship bonds to continue.

Perhaps if we begin to revise our expectations of what divorce means, all parents who divorce can do so with civility and respect."

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Vicki Lansky's practical, common sense approach to parenting and household management is familiar to thousands throughout the world. Her books, audiotapes, newsletter, media appearances, magazine and newspaper articles and reviews, make her one of America's most popular and visible parenting figures. According to one parenting newspaper, "If you have young children and you don't use Vicki Lansky's books as a reference, you are working too hard!"

Visit her website at <http://www.practicalparenting.com>

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JOAN BRAMSCH is a family person, educator, writer and E-publisher. Her articles appear internationally in print and online. Six of her best-selling adult novels – near one million copies – have worldwide distribution. Her Empowered Parenting Ezine serves 1000 parents around the globe.  
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## **THE "SEVEN Cs": PARTNERSHIP DANGER SIGNS – Conflict Becoming the Norm - Part 2**

**By Dorene Lehavi**

A series of articles exploring the seven critical areas that can indicate a partnership is in trouble.

### **Conflict Becoming the Norm - Part 2**

In a previous article, I wrote about how unresolved conflict can create havoc in your business and can often end in a failed partnership. Today, I share with you a story about a pair of clients I recently worked with.

Sue and Vicki were partners in a service organization that thrived on new membership and putting on events. Sue and Vicki had been coaching with me for over a year and had learned well how to keep things running smoothly between them. Now they were stuck on an issue that they weren't able to resolve on their own. They knew enough not to escalate it before their next coaching session.

Vicki had decided that one of Sue's responsibilities had more appeal and status than some of her own.

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Sue enjoyed the task and was loathe to relinquish it. In our session when Vicki pressed, and because they had developed deep caring for each other, Sue was ready to say a reluctant yes.

Before allowing that to be the unsatisfying resolution, I asked Sue to explain what the task meant to her. She said that everything she did prior to that task was build up towards it and that completing the task was closure to a job well done.

Vicki had never looked at it that way. To her it appeared as an isolated task. It was a revelation and she had a different understanding, backing off of her request.

Sue looked relieved.

However, I wanted Vicki to feel satisfied as well, so I asked if any part of her responsibilities gave her that same feeling of fulfillment. She pondered for a few minutes and was able to affirm that a lot of what she did was that meaningful to her and she preferred to continue doing what she was doing.

What happened here? Conflict was averted early even before it became a festering resentment.

And Sue and Vicki got a bonus — they each achieved an appreciation and understanding not only of the other partner but of themselves and the work they did. Their self knowledge increased and their partnership bond deepened even more.

Here is an example of another conflict with a different resolution. The Home and Garden TV Show "Designing for the Sexes" is a brilliant example of resolving conflicts for a win-win with very little compromise. A designer goes in when a couple has two opposing views on how they want one of their rooms to look.

A recent episode was about a husband who did the cooking and wanted his kitchen to look like a restaurant, industrial and stainless steel throughout. His wife wanted a traditional old world look. You couldn't be farther apart than that.

I always appreciate how the couples (probably coached) never argue for their point of view, but always in a reasonable matter of fact voice state what they want or what they like or don't about a suggested item.

The outcome is always a beautiful room with very little compromise. What I have observed is the designer is able to incorporate each person's wants within other options that they hadn't even thought about.

In this episode, sleek wood panels on the cabinets and refrigerator, stainless steel appliances, granite counter with tiles used as accents created a look that thrilled and pleased both people.

Lesson to be learned: your way is not the only way. If you open your mind and keep your emotions in check you could discover many other and perhaps even more pleasing ideas than the one you think you must have.

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Dorene Lehavi, Ph.D. is principal of Next Level Business and Professional Coaching. She coaches Professionals and Business Partners and teaches teleclasses on techniques to break through barriers to the next level. Dr. Lehavi offers a complimentary coaching session so you can experience how coaching can work for you. Contact Dr. Lehavi at

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