

What to Know About Divorce Mediation

Carmela
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Vanella

As the only full-service mediation practice in the region, **Advanced Mediation Solutions** helps clients get through divorce in a cooperative and stress-free setting. **by MATT COSENTINO**

Divorce proceedings are a time of heightened emotions and defenses. It's easy for a separating couple to lash out under the stress of navigating new lives as they disentangle themselves from the old one they shared.

It's a big reason why Roseann Vanella recommends that couples getting divorced consider a qualified mediator to help them arrive at mutually beneficial resolutions.

"Clients need to feel that we, the mediators, are neutral, are educated about their situation, are experienced," she says. "As mediators, we don't spark the conflict. We keep the atmosphere in the room calm and we help them reasonably come to an agreement so they can move forward with their lives."

Vanella and Professional Mediator Carmela DeNicola co-founded Advanced Mediation Solutions (AMS), the region's only full-service practice exclusively dedicated to mediation. For more than a decade, the firm has guided clients through divorce and other disputes in a collaborative, peaceful manner.

Divorces are increasingly resolved through mediation, as it gives both parties control over the outcome, while saving them time and money compared to a litigated divorce.

"Mediation really allows you to tailor the agreement specifically to that family," Vanella says. "We've never done two of the same agreement. Every family is different, every situation is different and the values people put on certain things are different."

"It is certainly not one size fits all," agrees DeNicola.

Despite a prevailing misconception otherwise, opting for mediation does not preclude either party—or both—from seeking the additional assistance of an attorney.

"Clients can use attorneys in a consultative support manner to advise them through the process and/or at the end for review of the final agreements," Vanella explains. "That's the beauty of mediation: It allows for people to have options and to have more control over the outcome of their divorce."

Vanella continues: "People tend to think that they need to be 'friendly' to mediate their divorce, but that's not the case. They simply need to be committed to the process." Whether couples choose to mediate or use attorneys to represent them, in the end, it's about negotiating.

"It's extremely important to have an experienced mediator," says DeNicola. Every person, every couple will need to be guided and informed uniquely based on cultures, personalities and a variety of other factors, which a skilled mediator can do with ease. "We pride ourselves on the fact that we are extremely customized to the couple that we're working with and how they best receive and understand information."

From high net worth individuals to parents of special needs children, AMS can handle unique circumstances and help both parties focus on the important issues. They help their clients keep their eyes on the big picture, addressing all factors of divorce including parenting agreements, spousal support, child support, equitable distribution and even future concerns like education costs or the introduction of a new significant other.

The average divorce case the firm mediates takes between two to three months over the course of four to six sessions. Vanella and DeNicola are supportive from start to finish, having earned a reputation for being warm and down to earth.

"People get a sense of comfort here," Vanella says. "When they first come in, they're almost always nervous, but by the second session you can really tell they are relaxed, they're letting their guard down and they understand that this is a collaborative and cooperative process where everyone has a say and everyone's concerns are being talked about."

Since both Vanella and DeNicola have years of experience as executives at Fortune 100 companies, and have been entrepreneurs and business owners themselves even before AMS, they are effective in complex cases.

DeNicola handles the bulk of the practice's business disputes as well.

They will also bring in neutral third-party experts for issues such as business valuation or tax planning.

"As mediators, first and foremost we have to educate the clients not only on the decisions they have to make, but how they can go about making those decisions," Vanella says. "Sometimes there's a need for creativity and flexibility, and that's where mediation is really beneficial. We will think outside the box and help clients come to agreements on things they would typically have a hard time doing."

Educating their clients about the mediation process is key to managing expectations and minimizing new challenges. Since every client and divorce is different, introductory consultations help Vanella and DeNicola familiarize themselves with both parties, as well as earn their trust.

"The first part is actually getting to meet the mediator, who's going to handle the most difficult decision you're making in your life," says DeNicola. "Having trust in that person is really an important step. Then it becomes that education of exactly what to expect."

When Vanella and DeNicola can educate their clients and help them make informed decisions, it gives them a sense of accomplishment. With both having gone through divorces themselves, they know how important it is for people to have a neutral and professional guiding light through the process.

"When clients are at the end of a divorce, they will actually thank us for helping them, and that is worth everything," Vanella says. "It is a tremendous feeling knowing their kids are going to have parents who know how to negotiate with each other, know how to work together and have a plan. These kids can grow up to be productive human beings because their parents have set an example for them in how to deal with a conflict." ■

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