

ATTORNEY LESLIE RYLAND, CFLS

Navigating Your Divorce



Was the legal profession an early choice when deciding upon a career?

No. I was much more interested in pursuing a career in medicine ... until I took Organic Chemistry my freshman year of college. I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a History degree from UCSD, and the choice was a Ph.D. and a teaching career or a J.D. in law. I chose law.

What factors helped you decide to specialize in family law?

I was fortunate to become a first-year associate at Luce Forward Hamilton and Scripps in 1989, a firm that offered the full array of legal services. While there, I met Susanne Stanford, who was the first woman partner at Luce Forward; her specialty being Family Law. The assignments she gave me involved making an enormous difference in peoples' lives, and I never looked back.

What are the differences between a collaborative divorce and the traditional process?

The collaborative approach treats divorce as a problem to be solved rather than a war to be won. The clients and their team of professionals work together to fashion a solution that focuses on the family as a whole and the children's best interests. Resolving a family's problems in Court is an imperfect process that often traumatizes the parties and their children. It encourages polarization between the two sides and almost never leads to the result a party wants.

Which other professionals might be brought in to assist with a divorce settlement?

We routinely work with economic experts to determine the value of a business or income available for support as well as real estate agents and mortgage brokers who specialize in divorce situations. We also work with specially trained mental health professionals to assist parties with custody and co-parenting issues. Professionals help clients and attorneys identify the operative facts which can then be used to craft appropriate solutions.

What role does client control play within the divorce process?

Every divorce is different, and the clients rarely appreciate the nuances involved with the facts, the law, different opposing counsel, and the judicial officer. I do my very best to explain to each client their options and which course of action I believe will lead to a positive outcome. Ultimately, it's the client's case; and if I strongly disagree with their choice of action, I may refer them elsewhere.



What roadblocks typically surface between couples encouraged to negotiate?

The biggest roadblocks often come from resentments and unresolved anger from events that happened during the marriage. Other roadblocks are caused by clients believing they can "win," or wanting to teach the other party "a lesson."

What legal remedies or sanctions are available when one side defaults?

If one party fails to respond to a petition for dissolution, the party who filed still has to present facts to the Court supporting their requests to divide the marital estate and for support.

What best advice can be given to a spouse when choosing a representative?

Talk to a number of attorneys before choosing a representative. Ask other attorneys you know, or friends who have divorced and who were happy with their attorney for a recommendation. Make sure you feel comfortable with your attorney and can ask them questions.

Describe the greatest reward in helping a family through such an ordeal?

While few parties celebrate the end of their marriage, I feel grateful that I can provide support and practical assistance to people navigating a very difficult process.

Had you not chosen family law, where might you have landed?

If I were choosing my career path knowing what I know now, I would likely become a Ph.D. in psychology and perform child custody evaluations. I find human behavior and relationships endlessly fascinating.

LESLIE RYLAND, CFLS, is an attorney with the Schaffer Family Law Group, a full-service divorce, mediation, and family law firm known for effective legal representation and compassionate client service. For more information, please visit www.schafferfamilylaw.com.