

ALISA PESKIN-SHEPHERD | THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2013

Guest Blogger: Alisa Peskin-Shepherd

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Alisa Peskin-Shepherd, Bloomfield Hills divorce attorney, mediator and family law expert from Transitions Legal, the Law Offices of Alisa Peskin-Shepherd, has been practicing law for more than 20 years and now runs her own practice.

Peskin-Shepherd recently was featured on *FOX 2 Detroit* in honor of Valentine's Day, to discuss how to have a "loving" divorce. She believes fully that she can help her clients maintain dignity and integrity even through a cantankerous divorce process – and emerge better, stronger and more peaceful toward their ex-spouse.

A graduate of the University of Michigan and Case Western Reserve School of

Law, Alisa Peskin-Shepherd has practiced law in metro Detroit for more than two decades. She is a member of the Oakland County Bar Association and its Family Court Committee; she was a board member of the Family Mediation Counsel-Michigan for many years and continues to be an active member of FMC and she is a member of the Collaborative Practice Institute of Michigan. She is also a member of the Family Law and Alternative Dispute Resolution Subcommittees of the state of Michigan Bar Association and served as continuing legal education chair for the Oakland County Bar Association for several years. Peskin-Shepherd lives in West Bloomfield and practices in Bloomfield Hills.

Navigating Your Business

No one goes to law school thinking they want to specialize in divorce. At least, I didn't; in fact, the exact opposite – I saw too much of it growing up. But I ended up with a natural proclivity toward helping individuals and with great mentors who specialized in family law. Ultimately, I realized that I could help people going through a very difficult, challenging but empowering time in their lives if I chose this niche.

I may not be the lawyer for someone who only wants a knock-em-down, drag-through-the-mud fight. I am the lawyer for someone who wants to end a marriage with grace and respect, even if there is anger and hurt involved (which there almost always is).

In my industry and in every industry, really, there is a lot of competition. There is no shortage of lawyers nowadays! So I've carved out my own path of mediative divorce.

I fully believe there is enough to go around. If I do the hard work in front of me to the best of my ability and style, it will all work out. This is a great philosophy to take into any business, and it is the philosophy that allowed me to move from a firm to a solo practice. There was a certain sense of security when I worked as an associate in a larger practice; but at a certain point it was time for me to grow and give my own identity to the way I practice family law. Before going out on my own, I had already established a positive reputation in the legal community as well as with my current and former clients. Most importantly, though, the driving force was believing in myself and trusting the realization of my philosophy. It is also the philosophy that I continue to keep top of mind as I have now been rebranding my practice (the new name is Transitions Legal).

I also keep my business values in front of me at all times – that's how I determine if a client is a good fit or if I should refer them to someone else. In any business,

it helps to articulate – and to write it down – what your vision, goal and values are. Once you put them out there, they become real, the driving force propelling your business forward.

It isn't always easy to be mediative in my approach, but I can remain calm and keep my clients on track. I had a recent situation where my client wanted to be swift and efficient with her divorce and it was important to her that we not be overly argumentative. Her soon-to-be ex-husband did not share that perspective. So even though we were facing circumstances from the other side that we didn't mirror, we could still keep our focus on her expressed values, maintain dignity and be proud of the way we went through the process.

In business today, it's not enough to offer a service or a product. People are lonelier than ever even though we are more connected than ever before. It's not enough to be Facebook friends or to connect on LinkedIn. And when a person is going through one of life's greatest challenges, the dissolution of a marriage, it can feel like they are more alone than they ever imagined possible.

So, when clients come to me, it's not just to facilitate a divorce. It's to know that they are in good hands, with someone they can trust and that I actually care about the way they go through this process and emerge on the other side. Many of my clients come to me post-judgment to take care of issues that are ongoing even after the divorce is final. It's about adding value, balance and peace to their lives more so than just the nuts and bolts of legal issues.

That's what every business owner should remember: you are dispensable. Your services are available from many others. But, what distinguishes you as the best choice?

It is all about relationships, in the end. Even though I'm in the business of legally ending relationships, my relationships with my clients are my livelihood. When a client retains me, I know he or she is putting trust in me, trusting me to guide them in making decisions that will affect them, and perhaps their children, for some time. I strive to reinforce this trust throughout my client's divorce process. If I have done a good job, then the trust survives the divorce which means that I have the opportunity to maintain a relationship with my client post-judgment.

I do this by first ensuring that the action points in the divorce judgment are followed through to completion. Then, I check in with my client periodically – whether by phone or a card or an email, just to see how things are going "on the other side." I don't do this just to maintain the work relationship; I truly care about their well-being and progress. That relationship transcends a mere business transaction. And that transcendent place allows us to maintain a relationship

throughout the life of the divorce, where many people need help post-judgment. The trust, the longevity, the relationship we've developed maintain that client bond. This approach is true really for any business – because after all, people do business with people.

Since my business is about relationship-building to build business – in addition to my relationships with my clients, I am also involved in professional organizations where I meet other practitioners, lawyers, mental health professionals and financial specialists, who share my mindset and philosophy. We refer to each other, rely on each other, creating a community of peace-seeking divorce practitioners. It takes a village to run a business these days.

I am not alone in my mediative focus for divorce and family law issues – there are lots of collaborative attorneys out there. Even so, divorce attorneys still have a reputation of making trouble. It's cutting-edge to put yourself out there pledging to not get involved in the fray of argument, but to do a good, clean job for your client in the most dignified way possible.

Like attracts like; what you put out there from your business is truly what you will attract.