

DIVORCE

TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

***Simple Strategies For
Creating A Healthy Divorce***



Powerful Insights from Today's
Top Certified Divorce Coaches

DIVORCE

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Simple Strategies for Creating a Healthy Divorce

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DEDICATION

To my partner, Randy Cooper, who makes it his ministry every day to help individuals and families to take the high road and has always believed that the divorce coach is the missing professional in divorce! (Pegotty Cooper)

For my beloved family. (Kira Wilson Gould)

To my beautiful children, Pearce, Darian and Addison, who inspire me each and every day to be the best that I can be. (Marc Levey)

To all who experience the transition of separation and divorce and work to remain their best-self. (Glenys Reeves)

I wait for the Lord; I wait, and put my hope in His word. ~Psalm 130:5 (Lori A. Burton-Cluxton)

I dedicate this chapter to my beautiful children. I take the high road for you. Braelen Brysen and Belicia. I give you all my Love! (Pamela Y. Dykes)

To the people I love and feel honored to have in my life...my parents - Anita & Leo; my children - Matthew, Meghan & Aiden; my grandchildren - Hailey, Aries, Adalyn, Aniah & Baby-to-Be; and my incredible husband - Jeremy McNally. (Lisa McNally)

Dedicated to all those dealing with a marital breakup. Like hell, when you're going through divorce, keep going 'til you're through it. (Marie Marhan Dropkin)

For Stephen, Conor and Mackenzie (Tracy Callahan)

For Isabella and Evan (Kurt B. Chacon)

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Thank you to the following individuals who without their contributions, support and concept for this book, it would never have been produced.

Jeremy Kossen, our ever-inquisitive interviewer, is a professional writer and journalist. His advocacy and passion for collaborative divorce proved very effective in eliciting powerful insights from the professional contributors of this book.

Thanks also go out to Renee Harrison, our publisher and fearless project manager. Her organizational skills and positive attitude helped get all eleven co-authors through the often overwhelming and tedious process of content creation.

Jeremy and Renee are co-founders of www.Divorcebuddy.co and are on a quest to educate, empower and inspire couples to choose a more mindful and collaborative approach to divorce, and to always put the needs of kids first.

PREFACE

It is Mother's Day and one of my clients, let's call her "Carol," celebrated with her daughter, her husband and her ex-husband of now ten years, and her sister.

Several factors made this celebration today a milestone. Despite the fact that both parties in the divorce had agreed to mediation and not making it a contentious divorce, there were plenty of opportunities for veering off the high road.

Here are a few of the detours that were taken ten years ago:

- Carol's ex-husband had left her for another woman wanting to see if this relationship would work out before he decided if he wanted a divorce.
- Their daughter was very young at the time, and Carol confided in her how angry she was with her father for his irresponsible and cruel behavior.
- Carol refused to accept his terms and drew the boundary that if he pursued the other relationship, it would be as a divorced man.
- Carol's sister harbored resentment and anger towards her sister's husband because he had treated her sister with so little respect and had in essence also rejected the whole family.
- Carol's second husband, whose relationship with his own daughter had fallen apart due to parental alienation, found himself sometimes playing second fiddle to the dynamics of a daughter, ex-husband and the ex-husband's father who lived nearby.

It is never too late to take the high road...

Fast forward ten years:

- Father (ex-husband) and daughter have a close and supportive relationship.
- Husband and ex-husband share a bottle of expensive scotch enjoying the day and the company.
- Carol's sister and ex-husband exchange travel stories and information about unusual places they have visited.

And...

- Everyone participates in dinner preparation honoring the woman whose love they all share.

Families are complicated these days, and high conflict divorces tear apart not only families, but neighborhoods, communities, and multiple generations of relationships. Taking the high road means recognizing the need to preserve your dignity during the process, to develop at least working relationships to fulfill the conditions of the marital settlement agreement; and honoring the differences between you and your spouse so you can move into the next chapter of your life with your confidence and dignity intact.

Consequences of NOT Taking the High Road

But taking the high road and having a healthy divorce is easier said than done. Guilt and the other side of that coin, resentment, are powerful forces which cause unfortunate relationship damage not only within the nuclear family but also within the extended families.

Relationships that once revolved around the words “I love you” now convert the lovers into warriors fighting to the death, wielding these weapons in the most painful and public of ways! Social media allows people to vent and throw accusations around without having to be accountable to the person being accused. Taken to an extreme, intimate moments shared by two lovers can turn into revenge porn on social media, so the whole world gets to witness the relationship turned unto retaliation!

Children torn between two parents whom they love take the blame for the hostility and conflict. And their view of marriage could logically become: “Marriage? Never! Why would I?” Is it any wonder that so many men and women have children today without being married?

Want more proof of the devastating consequences when you choose not to take the high road and have a healthy divorce?

One of my Canadian colleagues Maria Manley shared this story she saw in the Toronto Sun in which an estranged wife became so consumed with jealousy, anger, and resentment upon discovering her husband, and the father of her only child was moving in with another woman. She ended up waging a divorce war that would last three years and cost the former spouses a combined \$500,000 in legal fees.

Ontario Superior Court Justice Alex Pazaratz, who decided the case in January 2016, found the actions of the mother “unreasonable behavior,” including her attempts to alienate the child from her father, “intolerable.” The judge reproached her for “manipulating and falsifying evidence,” for “provocative and dangerous behavior,” that included “stalking” the father during pick-ups of the child. Also, he accused her of being “overt, manipulative, scheming, deceitful and oblivious to the needless family suffering she perpetuated for at least three years,” and said this: “Our family court system has zero tolerance for this type of emotional abuse of children.”

According to Pazaratz, “All of this could have been avoided. All of this should have been avoided. Courts have an obligation to deliver that message, so parents will stop pretending that hard-ball custody litigation is ‘for the sake of the child.’”

Consequently, the mother was denied sole custody and ordered to pay \$192,000 in costs to the father to offset his legal fees as she had repeatedly rejected her former husband’s multiple offers to settle out-of-court and “ended up getting a deal far worse than those she rejected.” (Michele Mandel, Toronto Sun, www.bit.ly/1XeSEo9)

Simple Strategies Provide the Fuel for the Journey

This book is divided into two parts: Part 1: Changing the Perspective, and Part 2: Changing the Process for Decision-Making.

Part 1: Changing the Perspective

The first section of the book provides you with some compelling examples of clients who have faced challenging obstacles and detours in taking the high road. Most importantly they had been willing to acknowledge the value of not doing divorce alone. They realized the power of tapping into the experience of others who could help them through the rough spots and realign their actions with who they know themselves to be when they are at their best, let’s call this “Your Best Self.”

Each chapter contains specific steps you can take in shifting your perspective so that you can make different choices and get different results.

Part 2: Changing the Process for Decision-Making

The second part of the book contains chapters which provide compelling reasons to explore the range of options for making decisions, negotiating the marital settlement agreement, and moving through the transition process to create the next chapter for yourself and your family.

In the chapters that follow – you will find simple strategies for dealing with frequently complex issues of divorce which often manifest themselves as destructive or disempowering emotional reactions – reactions which make it challenging to take the high road and create a healthy divorce. In such a state of mind, it is difficult to make the best decisions for your future.

Each of the chapters are derived from interviews with high-integrity CDC Certified Divorce Coaches®. Many of these highly-trained divorce professionals also represent other divorce professions such as therapy, family mediation or collaborative law. Each provides you with very specific actions that you can take which could result in your changing perspectives or changing processes which in turn could dramatically impact the outcome of your divorce process.

ABOUT PEGOTTY COOPER, CDC®



Pegotty Cooper is a Leadership, Career, and Divorce Coach in addition to being the Co-Founder of CDC Certified Divorce Coach® Program and co-author of the book: “Divorce: Overcome the Overwhelm and Avoid the Six Biggest Mistakes – Insights from Personal Divorce Coaches.”

Practicing as a coach since 2002, Pegotty builds on a long career in management and executive leadership in helping people to recognize their strengths and to bring out the best in themselves and others with integrity, strong values and making decisions aligned with their best self.

A leader in the International Coach Federation and co-developer of the CDC College for Divorce Coaching® and the CDC Certified Divorce Coach® designation, Pegotty has experienced first-hand the transformational power of coaching to change the experience of divorce!

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INTRODUCTION

DIVORCE COACHING AS ACCESS TO TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

by **Pegotty Cooper, CDC®**

*“Just as the 1990s brought the rise of life coaches, the new millennium is the age of the divorce coach.” —
Geoff Williams, Reuters*

Personal Divorce Coaching: Making a Difference in a Process That Often Debilitates People for Years

Most people have a story about why they chose to become professionally involved with divorce – almost all of those stories derive from a very personal experience that they or someone close to them experienced. For me, I heard the commitment in my husband Randy’s story about his parent’s divorce and the impact it had on him. In his mid-life career expansion from CFP® to CDFATM to Supreme Court of Florida Certified Family Mediator, he adopted divorce mediation and then divorce coaching as a way to help relieve children of the gut-wrenching experience of having family and friends torn from them as he had experienced as an adolescent. I also knew the shame from my early divorce which I hid for many years.

With seven years of experience behind me as a coach helping people through tough circumstances like workplace conflict, leadership challenges,

performance issues and job loss, I knew that Randy would also be a great coach who could shine the light on the fears people had about money and finance. He has a way of simplifying very complex issues and helping people to wrap their arms around the process they need to follow one step at a time in order to arrive at a new approach to looking at an old problem.

When Randy completed his coach training, a lightbulb went on for him, and he could see that until then, the Personal Divorce Coach was the missing professional in divorce. Based on our work together in divorce starting when he became a mediator, we began to systematize and create a training program which we rolled out to our first class of the CDC Certified Divorce Coach Program in 2011. A few classes later we were interviewed by Geoff Williams, a writer for Reuters, who was writing an article about the emergence of divorce coaching. One of his quotes in that September 2012 article is “Just as the 1990s brought the rise of life coaches; the new millennium is the age of the divorce coach.” In that article “What Can a Divorce Coach Do for You?” (Geoff Williams, Reuters, www.reut.rs/2aHewLD) he shared many perspectives on the value of divorce coaching.

You will also read other stories from our 10 CDC Certified Divorce Coaches® about how they came to this commitment called Personal Divorce Coaching.

What Exactly Does a Divorce Coach Do?

We have adapted the definition of divorce coaching which appears on the American Bar Association (ABA) website as part of what we base our divorce coach training on:

“Divorce Coaching is a flexible, goal-oriented process designed to support, motivate, and guide people going through divorce to help them make the best possible decisions for their future, based on their particular interests, needs, and concerns. Divorce coaches have different professional backgrounds and are selected based on the specific needs of the clients.”

And we add –

“Personal Divorce Coaching takes place where the rubber meets the road in the decisions, large and small, every day, which set the stage for creating the next chapter in the best way possible.”

A Personal Divorce Coach supports the individual caught in the stress and overwhelm of divorce to keep moving forward towards that future one step at a time. To make the best decisions possible, a person experiencing divorce may need to increase the effectiveness of the tools they have at their disposal. In divorce, this is especially important when it comes to taking the high road and creating a healthy divorce.

Here is the framework that highlights the important actions which lay the foundation for taking the high road. All of the actions are connected to “Best Self” – that person you know yourself to be when you are at your best.



What Does “Taking the High Road” Mean?

“Taking the high road” means creating the best intentions for yourself and others who are impacted by your presence – be they family, friends, co-workers, people you do business with, neighbors, and anyone within your community circle.

It means retaining your dignity and preserving your self-esteem. And it means pushing through the times when you feel overwhelmed and hopeless by these circumstances which have the potential to turn anyone into someone they don’t recognize.

It means choosing healthy boundaries, healthy practices, and healthy relationships even when you feel like doing just the opposite. In this way, you are modeling for yourself and others how to deal with challenging circumstances and be connected to who you are when you are at your best.

You Don't Have to Do This Alone!

While these may be simple strategies for taking the high road, the high road is not an easy one to stay on!

The whole landscape of divorce is filled with hazards which cause you to feel under attack and desperate to fight for your survival. There are changes at every turn in the road which you must deal with – from feeling isolated and alone to being out there on a limb financially with others relying on you for their survival. And the terrible feeling of not knowing how you are going to manage these changes without falling apart. And then there is the legal process with all of the unfamiliar rules and protocols and highly paid professionals who can't promise you anything!

A Personal Divorce Coach can be your thinking partner, your sounding board, and your champion to help you lay these foundations and be better able to take the effective actions you will need to be your best self and make the best possible decisions for your future based on your interest, needs, and concerns.

Some of the tools you will need for your journey on the high road include:

- Dealing effectively with conflict.
- Harnessing your emotions.
- Developing resilience.
- Being effective in two-way communication.
- Being a credible participant and client who is heard throughout the divorce process.

These tools are essential for every step in the process of divorce.

How is Your Decision-Making Impacted by Divorce?

Divorce overwhelms everything so it makes sense that it would also overwhelm decision-making.

The emotional roller-coaster of divorce, the multiple areas of change, and the often unfamiliar territory of the legal process of divorce can cause a drain on your decision-making capacity.

When the brain is impacted by sudden threats and chronic stress, chemical changes happens which are designed to keep you safe by activating your survival instincts – which usually involve fight, flight, and freeze. When your survival instincts take charge, the oldest part of your brain, known as the reptilian brain, takes over and the other parts of your brain, the creative and logical problem-solving parts, become disconnected. When your reptilian brain takes over, the emotional part of your brain, the amygdala, hijacks your ability to respond – and knee-jerk reactions happen in the blink of an eye. Good for survival in the wild – not useful for decision-making in divorce!

In these crucial moments – when you will be considering decisions which could have a significant impact on your future, and the sustainability of your family relationships – a divorce coach can help you to tame the reptilian brain and avoid some of the common pitfalls of decision-making.

Can a Divorce Coach Help No Matter What Process You Choose for Going Through Divorce?

While the choice of process is crucial – no matter what method for arriving at a divorce settlement you decide – there are ample opportunities to benefit from engaging a Personal Divorce Coach.

A Personal Divorce Coach can help you save money in the divorce process by helping you:

- Get organized for the process.
- Prepare for the meetings in advance.
- Think through what it is you want to get from the meeting.
- Acquire information you need.
- Be clear about what is important to you so that your attorney can make the case for that request.

Attorney Representation

Building a better relationship with all of the divorce professionals you work with by being a more credible client also helps you to be heard and to be a full participant in the process. This happens through aligning your expectations with what the attorney has agreed to provide; by being a better communicator about what is important to you and why; by letting go of the divorce story and being focused on the business of divorce; and being organized and responsive to attorney requests as you move through the process.

Legally Authorized Divorce Options

Collaborative Divorce

If one of you engaged in the process gets stuck and the process looks like it may derail, a Personal Divorce Coach can work on-on-one with one of the parties to help them see where their thinking may be hung up. Often a different perspective outside of the collaborative group can allow you to bring a new awareness to the discussion. In addition, lawyers are not trained as divorce coaches and do not have the breadth and depth of skills. And if they do, lawyers charge three to four times more than a divorce coach would to provide the same service. Mental Health Professionals (MHP) have many of the same skills, but in the collaborative process, the MHP is neutral. A divorce coach is a thinking advocate for you.

A divorce coach is a thinking advocate for you.

Mediation

Perhaps one party knows what they want, and the other hasn't thought it through or there is a significant knowledge / understanding gap. Having a one-on-one thinking partner can help them to get educated, to fill in the missing pieces and to self-discover alternate options and a pathway to an agreement.

Pro-Se Divorce

A Personal Divorce Coach cannot provide legal advice as that is only the purview of a licensed attorney. But a Personal Divorce Coach can help someone think through what is most important, helping them to be open to listening to what is important to the other party in the divorce, and to find

the common ground upon which to create agreement on how to split assets and debts. And a Personal Divorce Coach can refer each client to an attorney who is available just to review the agreement before filing with the court.

Personal Divorce Coaches Can Spot the Biggest Mistakes Before They Happen!

Overwhelm leads to serious decision-making mistakes in divorce which have long-term consequences for all parties involved. Everyone needs support in developing an awareness of their thinking so that they can weigh the decisions which have to be made and understand the consequences of those decisions as they go through the process of divorce and the process of transition from married to not-married. Many, if not most people, need support in keeping the overwhelm at bay and this means taming the reptilian part of the brain that out of necessity responds to threats quickly and precludes the slower more deliberate thought processes designed for creative problem solving from being engaged.

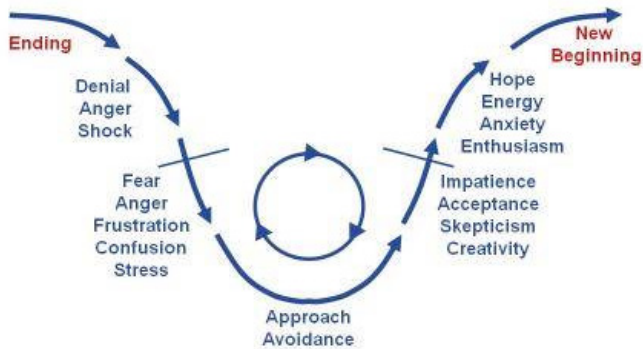
Here is the good news about the biggest mistakes people make in divorce – they are related to your thinking and perspective; your mindset, which you have the ability to change, thereby avoiding most of the legal and financial mistakes that are caused by this thinking. A CDC Certified Divorce Coach® is trained in recognizing these mindset mistakes before they result in irreversible decisions.

Where are the Breakdowns in Taking the High Road in the Divorce Process?

You have a hostile spouse who is not on that road...yet.

Even if your highest commitment is to take the high road and showing up as your best in the process, your spouse may need time to get to that place. If they have not initiated the divorce, they have started the process of adapting to this change at a different time – perhaps even several years later than you. You have already gone through the grieving process about the end of your marriage and all of the emotions related to that: denial, anxiety, shock, confusion and anger as noted in the illustration below. And now they need the time to go through the same process.

You are each in different places in the process of transition.



When change happens, it often occurs in an instant – circumstances change, a decision is made, something happens outside of us - and it sets in motion a whole series of adaptations that we have to make internally to adjust to that change. These are described in the work of William Bridges who has been working with this cycle of change and transition for the past forty years. His most recent book on the subject “The Way of Transition” (www.amzn.to/2aBdVc1) is his journey through his own personal transition.

The process is one that moves from Endings, through a Neutral Zone where exploration can take place along with personal growth as you deal with the uncertainty of the in-between, and finally, you arrive at the New Beginnings. And you can see examples of the emotions and feelings you might have as you move through the process.

Each person goes through this process of transition starting at a different time, and also traveling at a different pace depending on so many different factors derived from personal history and experience, physical and spiritual well-being and general view of the world and change, among other considerations.

There are so many changes going on at the same time in divorce that you may have many of the transition processes overlapping. This can make it a process which also is not linear – there will be times when you are pulled back to a phase you have already been through because you may be impacted or triggered by another overlaying transition process. Be patient and remember you do not have to go through this alone!

There may be places where one of you gets triggered by a threat you perceive to be real even though it hasn't happened.

And this is where you get stuck and cannot let go and move on. You are holding on to an assumption or a belief that you aren't equipped to handle the decisions that need to be made, or you don't know how you will be able to survive on your own. Or you are unwilling to let go of old habits and ways of interacting with your spouse.

The ability to find greater purpose in your life beyond the divorce and to reconnect with your values, your strengths and who you are when you are at your best is how a divorce coach can support you as you move through the process of transition.

Here are some examples of how a Personal Divorce Coach works with someone as they go through this process:

Example 1:

Mary had been struggling to make the decision to divorce her husband for several years. They had been married for twenty-five years, and for the past ten years she had been miserable, and it was clear that they didn't see eye to eye on many of the decisions they made about finances, parenting, and lifestyle. And the bottom line was that Mary was having a hard time letting go of the marriage even though she filed for divorce. In working with the coach and identifying where her fear about the future was coming from, the Mary gained clarity, confidence and some degree of certainty that things would be OK as she moved forward.

“My coach is a tremendous support and helped me see things more clearly and gain the insights I needed to move forward on my life journey.”

Example 2:

Elaine came to me for coaching after her divorce was final. She was complaining about being overwhelmed and confused about her job and career direction. As we explored what she wanted moving forward, the divorce and the past emotional abuse in the relationship kept coming up. Elaine had been working with a therapist and healing the wounds from a very domineering now ex-husband. But she was stuck and floundering in other areas of her life. One of the impacts was that she was afraid to make any decisions.

Since she had just moved into a new house, we explored some ways to celebrate and be kind to herself. The ideas included hanging up a few pictures in her new house so she would be surrounded by things that made her happy and enhanced her environment. The gift she gave to herself was the opportunity to make a decision without fear of the insults and criticism she had experienced during her marriage. This action was the thing that helped Elaine break through the fear of making decisions and be able to move forward with more decisions that helped her create her new life after divorce.

“I had an outstanding experience with my coach! She has helped me to set high goals (higher than I would have set by myself), my coach helped me to understand how and why I approach challenges and opportunities the way I do, and she helps me to reach the goals I’ve set.”

Example 3:

Anita had been told by her husband of over thirty years that he wanted a divorce. When she came to me she was exhausted and feeling overwhelmed. Anita and her husband owned a business together, and she had always been the one to take care of all the operations in the company. She was under a lot of pressure to get this whole divorce project done.

Further examination of this revealed that she was the one putting the pressure on herself. There had not been any legal filing made, no legal process initiated, and no deadlines set. She was operating from habit and handling everything as urgent as she had in the business for several years. She was the one who could control the pace at which the divorce was moving forward.

When she saw that she had the choice to either drive herself to get everything in order OR to take care of herself and do some things she knew would be good for her heart and soul, she developed a new sense of freedom to choose. Anita could choose what would be most valuable to her based on a number of factors at the moment.

“I am so glad that you were the first person I talked with about my divorce. It was so helpful to get another perspective and to feel like I have the ability to decide what is best for me, including slowing the process of divorce down so that I can adapt to this new reality. I can work through my feelings of hurt, anger and sadness regarding the end of what I thought would be a life-long marriage. And I am now beginning to imagine some of the exciting things I can explore, things that engage my heart AND my head in ways I hadn’t even been able to imagine earlier!”

What you can see in these stories is that a Personal Divorce Coach can help you:

1. Slow down – to change the pace of the process so that you can adapt to the new reality.
2. Identify small steps which can help you get unstuck and begin to move forward towards your new future.
3. Let go of old habits and redefine your future based on who YOU want to be.

And you will read more stories in the following chapters and get many more specific actionable steps that you can take in your desire to stay on the high road and create a healthy divorce.

How Do I Choose the Right Personal Divorce Coach for My Unique Situation?

As with all personal service relationships, you want to be sure there is a good match between you and the Personal Divorce Coach. Most offer a free consultation during which they will take the time to understand where you are now, what your goals are, what obstacles you are experiencing, and then identify how they can help you and what your divorce roadmap might look like.

You also want to be sure they have been specially trained to handle the unique aspects of the divorce process and that they have a Divorce Coaching Code of Ethics which they adhere to.

Also, ensure that they have a commitment to continuing education so that they are current with the tools and knowledge to best help individuals going through divorce. A Personal Divorce Coach needs to be equipped to deal with someone who may be on an emotional rollercoaster, who is operating from their most basic survival instincts, and dealing with an enormous magnitude of change with a legal process that they may be totally unfamiliar with.

Personal Divorce Coaches are also not bound to any one geographic area. They are free to practice without regard to state or provincial boundaries. Your choice of divorce coach may also depend on how you feel most comfortable engaging with your coach. Many hold sessions over the phone, some by Skype, Zoom, iPhone Facetime, or other video options; or they can meet with you face-to-face if they are located within a reasonable driving distance of your work or home.

P.S. Not Sure About Divorce?

Divorce Coaches can also help someone who hasn't yet decided to divorce and is grappling with the "Should I or shouldn't I?" question. They may be trying to understand the impact of divorce on all aspects of their life – approaching divorce from an "eyes wide open" standpoint to determine if the tradeoffs and consequences of divorce are the best decision for themselves and their family.

Personal Divorce Coaches do not advocate divorce, but if you find yourself in the situation where you need someone to help you through the rough spots in divorce, isn't it nice to know that you have a thinking partner and sounding board? You also have a champion who will partner with you to discover the best options for you; help you to learn new ways of looking at these overwhelming challenges, and rediscover who you are as you lay the foundations for your future.

The roll-up-your-sleeves kind of work that a divorce coach does helps their clients in ways that are different from a therapist, a mediator, and an attorney. A divorce coach complements these professionals' work in helping their clients make the best decisions for their future based on their wants, don't wants, and their needs. This work has a good chance of empowering them to take the high road and change their experience of divorce – for the sake of themselves and their family and their community!

For a list of CDC Certified Divorce Coaches[®], go to the Find-A-Divorce-Coach Directory on our website: www.certifieddivorcecoach.com.