

But Are You a Pit Bull?!

I have one of those careers that either makes people extremely uncomfortable or fascinated by my daily work. I am a divorce attorney and mediator. Technically, I am a FAMILY attorney and mediator; my focus is on preserving families, but in reality my day is spent dividing families in half.

Once the inevitable cocktail hour question is asked: "What do you do?" I am usually given a sly smile and it's suggested that I must be a real pit bull, or shark, or some similar animal perceived to be aggressive.

On the contrary: it is the stinky attorneys who have to be jerks. The bad ones don't have a steady line of client referrals so they unnecessarily stir the pot, dredge up bad memories, and rack up the legal fees.

The good attorneys know that, after the papers have been filed and the attorneys have been paid, the family unit still exists. It's now living in two separate homes, but it's still there. It's there for fifth grade graduations, and confirmations, and school plays, and high school graduations, and decisions about where to attend college, and weddings, and grandbabies. Of course there are times when I must be aggressive and serve as my clients' zealous advocate, but where the real service to clients occurs is a strong knowledge of the law and a preservation of the co-parenting relationship.

My job is to help the family comes up with a division of the marital estate and a co-parenting plan that both parties can stomach. Notice, I didn't say both parties would like. When the divorce is over, both parties own approximately one-half of the stuff that they owned before the divorce started and go to sleep with their kids not always in the next room at night.

Divorce is appropriate and necessary for some families, but I would encourage anyone who is facing this process to try to select a legal advocate who will deliver results that will set you up for success for the next twenty years. Don't waste your money on a pit bull who will unnecessarily prey on your hurt feelings, and profit from your anger and vulnerability.

Next month we'll discuss whether mediation or litigation is right for your family.