

CONFRONTING PERSONALITY DISORDERS AND ADDICTION IN DIVORCE

Karen Pinkert-Lieb of Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP understands it takes a unique set of skills to successfully navigate divorce cases involving addiction, personality disorders, and high-conflict individuals.

WORDS BY CAITLIN MCCAULEY / PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBIN SUBAR

Throughout the course of her 30-plus years as one of Chicago's leading and most respected family law attorneys, Karen Pinkert-Lieb has witnessed a surge in divorces caused by narcissistic personality disorders and addiction issues, often involving a party who lacks a formal diagnosis. Previously named Family Law Attorney of the Year in Illinois by Best Lawyers of America as well as the Top Woman Family Law Attorney in Illinois by Leading Lawyers Network, Pinkert-Lieb has evolved her practice to expertly handle these delicate cases.

Pinkert-Lieb's background in psychopathology and her depth of experience helps her identify disordered personality traits and addiction quickly and adapt her case strategy accordingly. Through client education, practical tools, involvement of mental health professionals, and the use of the mediators who are seasoned in handling high-conflict matters, Pinkert-Lieb can seamlessly guide her clients through what could otherwise be an expensive, protracted, and emotionally devastating divorce.

"I educate my clients about co-parenting with someone with a personality disorder," says Pinkert-Lieb. "You must be prepared and preemptive to address issues that may arise." For example, clients must learn skills to create a type of emotional armor to protect themselves and their children. Communication styles should be specifically tailored to avoid additional conflict. The availability of a third-party arbiter to quickly resolve future parenting disputes is also beneficial. Pinkert-Lieb does not see her role ending as soon as a divorce is granted. Her goal is to have protections in place to ensure a successful outcome for the family well into the future.

After many years of practice, it can be easy for an attorney to employ a cookie-cutter method, but that has never been Pinkert-Lieb's approach. "Each case is unique as are my client's needs and priorities. My goal is to listen carefully and consistently to my client to ensure that I am guiding them toward a solution which is best suited for their specific goals." Pinkert-Lieb and her client function as a team during the divorce process. "My style is focused on client preparation, communication, and client-involved strategy and decision-making. Often my clients have been subject to long-term gas-lighting and manipulation by his or her spouse. This can result in self-doubt and fear. My job is to help my clients rediscover their confidence and voice."



Karen Pinkert-Lieb

While Pinkert-Lieb earned a reputation as a fierce litigator during the first twenty years of her practice, today, seventy percent of her practice is dedicated to alternative dispute resolution such as mediation. "I've litigated high-conflict cases that have been expensive and have been bounced around the system. While the adversarial system may be fine for dissolving business disputes, it is unsuitable for families, particularly parents who will have a continued relationship because of their children. Moreover, the court system only seeks to embolden a high-conflict party, who now has an audience for his or her narrative," says Pinkert-Lieb. "Mediation is infinitely better

for the family." What is remarkable is Pinkert-Lieb came to this realization well before many lawyers in the field were advocating for alternative dispute resolution.

Pinkert-Lieb warns that individuals who possess addictive or narcissistic personality traits may lack the empathy necessary to lead to an easy settlement, but she maintains that mediation is still the best forum for resolution. "It is in these cases in particular that we must bring calm to the storm and order to the chaos."

The Schiller DuCanto & Fleck, LLP Chicago office is located at 321 N. Clark Street, Suite 1200, 312-641-5560. The Lake Forest office is located at One Conway Park, 100 N. Field Drive, Suite 160, 847-615-8300. The Wheaton office is located at 310 South County Farm Road, Suite 300, 630-665-5800. For more information, visit sdflaw.com.