

A COURSE IN DIVORCE

Growing specialty: Financial planners for women getting divorced

By Tammy Chase, Business Reporter
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When women walk into Nancy Liebman's office in Evanston, they're seeking more than just financial advice. They may need a hug as well.

Liebman, 54, is one of a growing number of financial planners specializing in helping women going through a divorce. No offense to husbands getting divorced, but many men with assets like homes and investments likely already have relationships with their accountants, bankers and lawyers.

"Guys have fraternity brothers, or they play tennis with their broker. They have these cronies they go drinking with, or play basketball or golf with, that they can ask" for help in a divorce, Liebman said. "Women don't know that, unless they have friends who have gotten divorced."

When a couple (or one spouse, at least) decides it's time for a divorce, finding an attorney is usually the first step. But while a lawyer will be needed quickly, especially if the couple has assets, Liebman said it's wisest for a divorcing woman to get a financial planner first, because she will need a "total network" to look after her financial and legal needs. That can include child support, dividing up investments and a family business, and analyzing what the lifestyle will be post-divorce and developing a budget to match that.

That may sound like Liebman, who owns Liebman Associates Inc., is just trying to drum up business—services like hers can cost \$150 to \$200 an hour—but there are arguments for doing so.

For one, 21 percent of women who are divorced wind up below the poverty level, compared with 9 percent of men, said Carol Patinken, director of the Lilac Tree, an Evanston non-profit agency that offers women divorce workshops, advice and referrals.

According to government statistics, 50 percent of first marriages and 60 percent of second marriages fail.

It's an uncomfortable premise, the idea that women don't know as much about financial matters as men.

Liebman, a mother of two who went through a divorce 20 years ago, said it's not that women aren't smart enough. It's just that she tends to work with women in their 40s and older, who traditionally have left the financial stuff to their husbands as they had careers or kids or both.

Younger women, too, like stay-at-home moms in their 30s, also sometimes have trouble. Even if the women have some knowledge of the household finances, not all of them are prepared to dive

into complicated legal and financial battles if they haven't been running the financial show during their marriages.

One client of Liebman's didn't know—and didn't know how to find out—the value of her husband's business, which is important in devising a legal settlement that is supposed to divide assets fairly among husband and wife. Turns out his business was losing money, in part because the husband had been paying salaries to family members who didn't actually work for the company.

Liebman finds that even when they've figured out the finances, many clients don't understand their divorce settlements. She helps translate the legalese for them.

Then, there's the human part of divorced that makes these challenges even harder for some clients.

“If your husband has walked out and has a young girlfriend, you're hurt, you're angry,” she said. “The emotional part is tremendous. It's the only time I've worked with people that they give me hugs.”