

RE-DEFINING A “SUCCESSFUL” DIVORCE

During Jessica Bank Interlandi's 20-year career at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP she has redefined what a successful divorce outcome looks like. Today, her focus is on providing advocacy while empowering her clients with knowledge and control over both process and outcomes through mediation, a form of Alternative Dispute Resolution.

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Jessica Bank Interlandi has practiced exclusively in the area of family law for two decades at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck. Interlandi watched her mother attend law school and become one of the most well-regarded family law attorneys in the Washington D.C. area, setting in motion her own career aspirations; she never considered a different practice area.

Interlandi was trained as a litigator and successfully advocated for clients at trials and in other contested court proceedings on countless occasions. She observed a pattern over the years, regardless of the outcome: clients almost universally expressed anxiety about litigation stemming from a lack of control over the judicial process and the outcome of their case.

As a result, Interlandi's clients have increasingly chosen Alternative Dispute Resolution over litigation as a more cost-effective and less adversarial choice to resolve their issues. The final resolution is agreed to by the parties with the help of the mediator to facilitate the process. The attorneys provide legal advice throughout; this involves explaining the law and the potential outcome in court as well as other more creative resolutions which a judge may not be able to order because the law does not provide for them. Because mediation occurs in a more controlled environment and at a pace dictated by the parties, Interlandi's clients experience reduced anxiety and uncertainty. In the hands of a skilled mediator and under the guidance of experienced attorneys, both parties are given the opportunity to express their financial and child-related needs and interests and to have them addressed in the resolution. This is far less likely to occur in court, where the result can be unpredictable, inequitable, or both due to congested court dockets and the constraints of the laws under which judges must operate.

Alternative Dispute Resolution and litigation are radically different methods for resolving family law disputes, but Interlandi believes she is more effective as an attorney in a mediation setting because of her training as a litigator. Courtroom experience is the only way to truly understand the probable outcome in court on a given issue and to use that knowledge in mediation as leverage, to develop strategy or to help a client understand the costs and benefits to taking a certain position. Regardless of the forum, Interlandi's approach is to develop a strategy informed by the client's goals.

Interlandi is committed to providing her clients with as much knowledge as possible to allow them to make informed choices. "I always talk to clients about all options for resolution, and I go through the potential pros and cons with them, including the potential difference in cost and time between mediation and other options," she says.

Interlandi believes that the most effective family law attorneys are responsive and have a high degree of emotional intelligence and empathy.

"It is my job to answer questions and address concerns quickly in plain English. Clients should not be left wondering about their children or financial life and I respond with the timeliness and sensitivity that those issues deserve," says Interlandi.

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