

FINDING YOUR FIT: WHAT MATTERS WHEN HIRING A DIVORCE LAWYER



Anita Ventrelli hears a lot from people who regret things about their family law cases. A common theme she sees in those with regrets comes from a lack of connection to the lawyer they hired and how that relationship affected their experience. Ventrelli discusses the importance of looking for what you value in the lawyer you select and treating the hiring process as an investment in yours and your family's future.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBIN SUBAR

Most people who hire a divorce lawyer don't see it for what it is, an investment in both their present peace of mind and in their future. Anita Ventrelli, of Schiller DuCanto & Fleck LLP, knows what prospective clients should ask about and what qualities they should look for when interviewing potential attorneys.

One of Ventrelli's career-defining cases found her when a quadriplegic mother of four special needs children reached out to her. She hoped to find an attorney who believed in her case instead of telling her she had no way to avoid surrendering custody. Ventrelli told the naysayers they would see that that her client had a better team to meet the children's needs. Today, that mother has sole legal custody of her children who live with her full time. Why? Because Ventrelli found ways to make a Guardian, two evaluators and a Judge see her client as a person, not a disability. While it surprised many, there was never a doubt in Ventrelli's mind that her client didn't have everything she needed to parent her children.

"When you believe in somebody's case, working through it and putting it together becomes a labor of love," says Ventrelli. "Believing is the whole ball game." The right attorney listens to what someone wants, thinks creatively, and helps with goal setting, education, and cost benefit analysis. Well-rounded lawyers know how to research, write, do discovery, run a team, roll with the unexpected and navigate courtrooms. They work in dispute resolution and litigation, and they excel at communicating. For clients, this

means listening without judgment or agenda. Good lawyers adapt and work with client strengths while counseling realistic expectations and issue spotting for risks.

"It's not just about the law, it's about the law as it touches people's lives," says Ventrelli.

Ventrelli sees people asking only about legal process and not about how the relationship will work. While experience and rates matter, equally important questions deal with how the lawyer works, for example: "If I send you an email, when will you answer? How do I reach you for an afterhours emergency? How will you help me understand the processes that the case requires? What role do I play? Such questions will provide insight into communication's style and methods. If you feel better leaving the consultation than you did when you went in, it's a sign of good fit.

"My goal is to get my clients through the process on a no-regrets basis," says Ventrelli. When clients tell her what they want, why, and what might change their goals, it gives her a clear picture of what she has to work with and priceless insight into a client's personality, motivations, and how they work best. This fuels Ventrelli's creative drive to tell each client's story in the most persuasive and legally supported manner possible.

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