

Navigating Divorce: How a Coach Can Transform Your Experience

Introduction and Guest Announcement

Candace Dellacona: Welcome to the Sandwich Generation Survival Guide. I am your host, Candace Dellacona, and I am thrilled to announce our guest for this episode, Karen Covey, a divorce coach. I know so many of our listeners are anxious to hear all about you, Karen, who you are, what a divorce coach is. So many of our listeners and family members have gone through this process.

Candace Dellacona: So, why don't we start at the top and tell us who you are.

Karen Covey's Background and Transition

Karen Covy: I am a divorce coach and a recovering lawyer, right? I'm all things divorce except divorced myself. I'm a lawyer, mediator, arbitrator, collaborative professional and a divorce coach. And I sort of morphed my practice from being just a lawyer to being a coach, oh, I don't know, half a dozen years or so ago.

Candace Dellacona: And how did you or why did you make this transition? What precipitated the change from a traditional matrimonial or divorce attorney to where you are today, which is kind of a hybrid role?

Karen Covy: It's a very hybrid role. And it was interesting. When I practiced law in my own firm, I never wanted to be an empire, I just wanted to have my own firm.

Karen Covy: So it was me and a secretary one day in the office. It was hot, so I had my office door open, it was only the two of us in there, and so she heard the conversation with the client that I was having. The client leaves, now this particular secretary had worked for all of the big firms in town, right, for all the big matrimonial law firms.

Karen Covy: And the client leaves and she said, "You do know that nobody else does that, right?"

Karen Covy: And I said, "What do you mean? Does what? I just, I told them their options, I explained how things work, I gave them choices."

Karen Covy: And she said, "That. The other lawyers,"

Karen Covy: and I said, "well, if they don't explain everything to them, what do they do?"

Karen Covy: And she said, "they hand them a contract and say, here, sign here. I'll take care of everything. Don't worry about it."

Candace Dellacona: Right.

Karen Covy: And I know that that's not the way divorce works. And I saw so many people in court making decisions that weren't going to be in their long term best interest simply because they didn't know they were going to have to make that decision that day.

Karen Covy: They didn't understand what was coming. They didn't understand how the system worked. They didn't know what their choices were going to be, so they weren't prepared, and they made bad choices. And I said, that, to me, makes no sense. And so, I kept looking for that better way to do divorce.

Karen Covy: And I realized that as one person, I am not going to be able to change the whole system all across the United States, but I can change it for the clients that I work with. And so, that's what I started to do.

Candace Dellacona: I love that. And in sort of taking on a role as truly a counselor, right? I mean, we're called counselors at law, and you'd think that would be innate, that an attorney particularly advising people on something that is incredibly personal and painful in most circumstances and the stakes are quite high relating to finances and child custody and, certainly assets like your home that you'd hope that someone would explain the process and the ramifications and what's coming next.

The Role of a Divorce Coach

Candace Dellacona: So if you could, in the best way that you can impart this information to our listeners, what does a divorce coach do? So walk me through the process of what a divorce coach is and how one would engage a divorce coach and the order in which they get counselor, lawyer, divorce coach, mediator, give us sort of a summary of that process.

Karen Covy: Well, I can't speak to all divorce coaches because, as in any other profession, not all divorce coaches are the same or do exactly the same things.

Candace Dellacona: Sure.

Karen Covy: I start with people, the minute they start to wonder, should I stay or should I go?

Candace Dellacona: Ah.

Karen Covy: And that's a place where people get stuck for a very long time.

Karen Covy: Because notwithstanding that, there are a lot of people in the world that think divorce is too easy, I've been doing this for a very long time. There is nothing easy about divorce. And I have never had a client who was in a perfect, happy marriage and woke up one day and said, I think I'll get a divorce.

Karen Covy: I mean, it doesn't happen that way, right? People go, yes, no, yes, no. They're worried about their kids. They're worried about their money. They're worried about their future. They're worried, about the promise. They think about the vow that they made all those years ago and they take it really seriously.

Karen Covy: So they get stuck in that decision making stage sometimes for years, sometimes for decades.

Candace Dellacona: Sometimes forever. Right?

Karen Covy: Yeah. And sometimes they never leave.

Candace Dellacona: Yeah. I love that. I never actually thought about a divorce coach coming into the equation before you get to the brass tacks of the law.

Karen Covy: Yeah. Because a lot of what I do has nothing to do with the law. And the truth is that most divorce lawyers don't want me to say is that a lot of divorce has nothing to do with the law.

Client Experiences and Benefits

Candace Dellacona: So what do you mean by that, Karen? So when you talk about it, what are the issues that you would coach someone through after they do come to you and the should I stay or should I go, and the decision is I'm going to go?

Candace Dellacona: What's the next step for you as the coach? What your personal approach is?

Karen Covy: My personal approach to the next step is, what do you want? Where do you want to be at the end of this? Because as Stephen Covey, who is unfortunately no relation to me as he would say, you start with the end in mind.

Karen Covy: Because if you understand what your goal is, You have a much better chance of actually achieving it and being there at the end of your divorce. Because the one thing I know for sure, in every state in the union, no fault divorce is a thing. Right?

Candace Dellacona: Uh huh. Yep.

Karen Covy: So if somebody wants a divorce, fundamentally at the end of the day, you're going to be divorced.

Karen Covy: So that's not the right question to ask. It's where do I want to be? At that point in my life, where do I want to be when I'm divorced? How much money do I have? What kind of relationship do I have with my kids? Where am I living? What is my lifestyle? What is my identity? What do I care about? So at the very beginning, what I as a coach help you do is figure that out, figure out what matters to you so that once you're divorced, You end up with the things you care about and not the Tupperware or your Aunt Jane's crystal that you really, stays in a box and you never look at again.

Candace Dellacona: That totally makes sense. Thinking about it from that perspective and knowing what your end game is helps you advocate for yourself, even just with your lawyer. And it sounds to me as though you're getting to the heart of the matter with the client so that they realize and are able to articulate what's important to them.

Karen Covy: Exactly. And in a perfect world, not all lawyers are open to working with coaches as part of the team, but just like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a team to get a divorce, at least if you want to do it in the most effective way. And if I'm working together with a lawyer. For the benefit of a client, I can help translate, because I speak lawyer and I speak human, right?

Karen Covy: And so many times lawyers have the curse of knowledge. They say things in a way that is perfectly understandable to another lawyer, but the client and, People don't want to feel stupid, right? So they're going to smile and nod to the lawyer and pretend like they understand. They don't have a clue what the lawyer just said.

Karen Covy: Or they're so emotional and they're so distraught that it's not really sinking in. So I can come in on the back end and say to the client , don't you remember your lawyer said this, or this is what this means. Here's what your choices are. And then I can go to the lawyer and also be the intermediary too, so that everybody is in the same boat with oars rowing in the same direction, rather than against each other. It makes things so much more effective. I make the lawyer easier to work with for the client, and the client easier to work with for the lawyer, so it's a win-win.

Candace Dellacona: While you were speaking, I was thinking about the process of a divorce.

Candace Dellacona: And what normally happens, a spouse will go and sit with an attorney. It's a very solitary event for a lot of reasons, right? The client is talking about, a

really tender thing, which is the end of a marriage, and many people see it as a failure, maybe, or they feel sad about it, embarrassed about it.

Candace Dellacona: There are topics, maybe, that they didn't even tell their best friend or their sister about, and those topics have to be shared. With the divorce attorney in order for the divorce attorney to effectively represent you, let's say. So having someone like you there who knows the law and the person is able to share those details with, to have the second set of ears seems like what an amazing service and so shocking that this isn't a thing and hasn't been a thing for very long, and that, it took you to articulate this role by seeing a need for it.

Karen Covy: Yeah. What lawyers used to be back in the day, the family lawyer, where they would sit and they got to know people and they had relationships and they were counselors of a sort, right?

Karen Covy: Well today, lawyers are so busy and there's so many other pressures on them that they often forget the counseling part or there's no room for that in their practice, which is really sad too. And so I help bridge that gap and help the lawyer be more effective. And also, feel better about what they're doing because sometimes no one wants to toot their own horn, right?

Karen Covy: You don't want to look like you're the bragger or whatever. But lawyers, I've been in cases, involved in cases where the lawyer did amazing things. And the client doesn't understand the magnitude of what just happened. And they think that's normal, right? Well, of course, everybody does that. And when I'm in the background, I can look at them and say, no, no, no, no, no.

Karen Covy: This, your lawyer, you should be like kissing the ground that they walk on right now, because they just did a really difficult thing and they didn't want to tell you how hard it was. But it was really hard, and they did a great job.

Candace Dellacona: Yeah. I think, that will lead to the satisfaction of the client, of the person going through that process, really feeling like, the person fought for them, and with all of the facts and circumstances that the best possible outcome was achieved.

Candace Dellacona: And largely in a situation where it feels pretty terrible start to finish, even if you're the one who initiated the divorce.

Karen Covy: Yeah. It's, look, it's a tough process no matter who you are or how you're going through it. So, anything that you can do to make it a little bit more efficient, a little bit less painful is always gonna be a really good thing.

Karen Covy: And the one thing, even though I am a lawyer, I'm not a lawyer in all 50 states.

Candace Dellacona: Right.

Karen Covy: And I'm not going to, when I'm, engaged in the role of a coach. I'm not going to give my clients legal advice because that's not my job. My job is to facilitate the relationship with the lawyer and the client not undermine it. So I'm not gonna armchair quarterback anybody. But I will help the client understand what's going on and I will help the lawyer say hey What you just did might have been good, but the client doesn't want that. They want something else. They want this, or they don't feel heard, or whatever that is.

Karen Covy: Now, if the lawyer isn't open to that kind of relationship, having a coach as part of the team, and some lawyers, I have to tell you, are not, then I work behind the scenes and tell the client, ask your lawyer this, ask your lawyer that, ask your lawyer this.

Karen Covy: But it's so much more effective if we can all work together.

Economic Considerations and Efficiency

Candace Dellacona: As someone who is also a practicing attorney, albeit not in, in the family law space or matrimonial space I will tell you that, what I hear most from my friends, from our listeners, from my peers who are going through it, we're all in the sandwich generation where marriages continue and marriages end.

Candace Dellacona: One of the common themes. That I hear is the expense. What a divorce costs. And, I think for our listeners, one of the things that should be considered is hiring someone like you, in many circumstances, is probably a better economic decision because your wishes can be articulated effectively and immediately to your own lawyer.

Candace Dellacona: Can you talk about what the cost is for someone thinking of hiring you? Not exactly what your rate is necessarily, but maybe we'll talk about, what the added cost may be and why it would be beneficial to someone to consider hiring someone like you.

Karen Covy: If I said, Oh, there's no cost or you're always going to save money, that wouldn't be true.

Candace Dellacona: Yeah.

Karen Covy: But I can say, cause I can't quantify any specific amount of money. But most of my clients do save money and a lot of money because what happens is they understand how to use their lawyer more effectively. Everybody knows that conceptually, but when you're an emotional wreck and your spouse just did something stupid and you want to call your lawyer and go on and on and on about it, but it's not a legal problem, you're going to pay hundreds of dollars an hour for that privilege, right? And it's not going to be effective. There's nothing your lawyer can often do about it. So I help people. Use their lawyer for what lawyers are good at and be organized. If you hand your lawyer a stack of papers that are all disorganized and you're not sure if they're really what the lawyer needs or what they're not, but you don't want to leave anything out, that lawyer, you're going to pay them to go through every single piece of paper, organize it, analyze it, do all the things.

Karen Covy: But if you've done that legwork on your end, Then what you pay the lawyer is considerably less, and the lawyer then has more time to do the actual legal work.

Candace Dellacona: And that's exactly where I was going, Karen. That, often I think clients, particularly going through a painful divorce and are dealing with an estranged spouse who may be acting out in a certain way, the urge is to call the lawyer, the person who's fighting for you, to inform them and make sure that they have all the information, but you are able to parse through whether or not that information is material and it makes any difference to the standing that your client has and positively impacts their case or not.

Karen Covy: Exactly. And so I help my clients get organized and regulate their emotions and regulate their responses so that they use their lawyer more effectively, they save a lot of money in legal fees as a result of that, and everything is again, more effective and more efficient. You're not leaking resources from every direction because you're using the resources that you have inefficiently or ineffectively.

Karen Covy: So for anyone who is thinking of, a divorce and wants to save money, even though a divorce coach is an investment in the long run, it saves people money, it saves people time. And it also saves people because today, even people who have a lot of resources are considering using lawyers in a different way.

Karen Covy: They're using them on like an. A la carte basis, shall we say. They use it as unbundled service is what we call it in the legal profession. But they say, look, I don't want full on representation. Interestingly, it's usually not, it's about money, but it's also about, they don't want the lawyer to stir the pot and make a fight.

Karen Covy: And they're afraid that's what the lawyer is going to do. So they'll say, look, I want your advice. I want your counsel. I want you to write my documents, but I want to negotiate this with my spouse myself, or I want to go to mediation with my spouse

myself. That's great. But if you don't walk into those conversations, whether it's a kitchen table negotiation, whether it's an informal mediation, whether it's an arbitration, if you don't walk in prepared and understanding what you're going to face and what you want to get out of there and having a strategy for achieving your goal, you're not as likely to be successful in doing that. And then you've just wasted more time and money and resources. So I, as a coach. A big part of what I do is help people prepare for whatever course of action they've decided to take.

Candace Dellacona: I mean, I think, you could make the argument and, you're being quite humble, Karen, in talking about how you can't be sure that you're saving people money.

Candace Dellacona: But as someone who's been in practice for 22 years, litigators are taught to litigate. And so, the point that you made before of, someone who is a little more sophisticated and hires a lawyer a la carte to guide behind the scenes because they're concerned that having a lawyer will cause a situation that's not adversarial to become one, I think that's really important to consider that there are circumstances where having a lawyer to quote unquote litigate a divorce is unnecessary.

Mediation vs. Divorce Coaching

Candace Dellacona: So, you, you said at the top of the episode that the other role that you play in addition to divorce coach, perhaps not in the same case is to play the role as a mediator. Can you explain to our listeners what a mediator is and how that differs from hiring a lawyer as a matrimonial attorney to represent you, and also how it distinguishes from your role as a divorce coach?

Karen Covy: Right. So the first thing people have to know is there are these different roles and that no one person can or should cross boundaries, right? You don't want your lawyer being the coach and the mediator. That doesn't work because a mediator is a neutral third party whose purpose is to facilitate an agreement between you and your spouse. So a mediator, even though he or she may be a lawyer, is not supposed to give you legal advice. They can say, the law in your state says blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. What they can't do is say, and this is how it applies to you. And if we do that, then you've got this argument and this strategy.

Karen Covy: That's a mediator can't do that. They can tell you the law, but they can't give you legal advice. And so the mediator is, their role is very different from that of a coach because typically when I'm coaching in the context of a divorce, I'm coaching one side. Not both people. A mediator is going to mediate with a couple.

Karen Covy: And the point is to help them brainstorm ideas, to help them speak to each other in a way that they each feel like they're being heard. A mediator is going to help

you make agreements. Sometimes very creative agreements out of the box agreements, agreements you would never get in court.

Karen Covy: So that it works for you. You come to an arrangement in a settlement that works for you, that works for your kids, that works for your family, that works for everybody. And then once you've got that agreement. You take it to your lawyer and you say, here, write it up. But what most people don't understand is that there's still a role for the lawyer.

Karen Covy: If you don't understand what your rights and responsibilities are, and you walk into a mediation, not knowing that, you are going to make mistakes, you're going to do things that You didn't know you should or shouldn't do, right? You can give away the farm without realizing you had a farm to give away. And so then what happens is people, they think they can do it all themselves without the lawyer, without the coach, without anything.

Karen Covy: And they make agreements and they take it to the lawyer and say, write it up. And the lawyer says, are you out of your mind? Why did you do this? And they go, do what? And then the whole thing falls apart. Now they're in a worse position because now they're reneging on an agreement that they made and it makes what could have been an amicable divorce into a big fight.

Karen Covy: So having that team put together and having the right people in place and everybody, like I said, going in the same direction gives you as a client the best chance of achieving the outcome you want.

Candace Dellacona: So let me ask you this, let's say someone didn't know about the concept of having a divorce coach.

Candace Dellacona: They've already entered into mediation and they're doing their best, or they've hired a lawyer and they've started the formal divorce proceedings. Is it too late to ever bring someone like you in Karen to help?

Karen Covy: That's a great question, and the answer is no. It's never too late. Well, I shouldn't say that.

Karen Covy: If you're already divorced. It's probably too late.

Candace Dellacona: Fair enough.

Karen Covy: But, all the way up until then, you can use a coach to help you say, okay, we're stuck. Because you and I both know that in the court system, everything starts with

a bang. And then you hit sort of this no man's land of discovery where the case just goes on and on, things are happening behind the scenes.

Karen Covy: And then, if the court system is backed up, which is pretty much every court system in the country at this point, nothing is going on and clients get frustrated and they say, can you help me get this done? Can you give me some ideas for how we can move this? Or I've also coached people on how to appear in trial.

Karen Covy: You know, like witness preparation for trial, which every lawyer is going to say, Oh no, no, no, no. I do that. But the problem is the lawyers don't have as much time and often what they don't understand is the client is super nervous. The client has never done this before, right?

Candace Dellacona: Yeah.

Karen Covy: The client wants to be uber prepared and the lawyer isn't going to spend 10 hours with them preparing them for how to be a witness in a case when the lawyer knows that the range of possibilities are pretty limited, it's going to go okay, they're going to be fine, but the client is scared out of their mind. I can help to prepare the client because there's an emotional component to testifying.

Karen Covy: If you can walk into that court knowing that you're prepared, you will feel more confident you're going to testify better than if you walk in and you completely fall apart and you're a mess because you're nervous and you don't know what to say and you start stuttering and stammering and crying and being upset and all the things you're just not going to be as effective, right?

Karen Covy: And so part of what I'll do is witness preparation.

Candace Dellacona: I think for our listeners it's really important to note that as lawyers, particularly for those of us who have been practicing a long time, it can be easy to forget that we have gone through this process thousands of times in our career.

Candace Dellacona: I'm talking about death and dying and disability. People haven't gone through these conversations before in their life, hopefully. The same is true with matrimonial attorneys in that, to your point, they've prepped hundreds of witnesses. They know that there are things that are not going to be covered.

Candace Dellacona: Nonetheless, the client still has anxiety surrounding those subjects. And while I do think that many lawyers would put that time in, clients can't afford that. So in New York, let's say the average billable rate is \$1,000 an hour to sit with your lawyer for the 10 hours that would make you comfortable is \$10,000.

Candace Dellacona: So from a cost benefit analysis, and also quite frankly, having a coach, a person who, is sensitive to those needs as opposed to the legal answers and what the legal ramifications are of answering questions a certain way or whatever the case is, the comfort level has to be exponential to your clients.

Karen Covy: A hundred percent. But, to go back, to bring this back to our previous topic of conversation, if a lawyer and a coach are working together, we can tag team the preparation and make the client so much more comfortable, drop their anxiety level, and help them be better prepared more cost effectively.

Karen Covy: There are some things that no matter how much I, as a coach, am going to prepare the witness or prepare a client, I'm also going to say to them, make sure I have to know what's your lawyer's theory of the case, what direction are they going, what do they want to, what kind of testimony do they want to highlight, what do they, what would they rather play down, right?

Karen Covy: And if all of us are working together as a team for that end, it's a beautiful thing.

Candace Dellacona: Absolutely.

Final Advice and Contact Information

Candace Dellacona: And so, you've provided us with so much valuable information, especially for people thinking about starting this process. And maybe this is going to be a hard question, but I'm going to ask it anyway.

Candace Dellacona: So Karen, if someone is at the point where they're ready to actually make a move and commence, the dissolution of their marriage, is there advice that you would give about hiring the divorce coach and going the mediation route? Or the opposite. And maybe, your answer might be biased because you're a mediator as well, but I would love to hear your perspective on that.

Karen Covy: I'm going to answer like a lawyer.

Candace Dellacona: Okay.

Candace Dellacona: It depends.

Karen Covy: It depends. But the truth is it does depend on the circumstance, and that's one of the things as a coach that I can help people parse out, is in your particular circumstances, does mediation make sense or is it going to be a total waste of time?

Karen Covy: Because it could be, but in the beginning, the first piece of advice I would give to anyone is to get prepared. Do not just dive into a divorce, not understanding what the ramifications are going to be, not having a plan for your kids, your personal life. Where are you going to live?

Karen Covy: Are you going to live with that person you're divorcing in the same house? I mean, there are times when that makes sense. There are times when it really doesn't. And either way, it's uncomfortable as all get out. So you have to have some sort of a plan and be prepared and educate yourself about how this is going to go before you jump in and before you just walk into a lawyer's office and say, yeah, I want a divorce, write up the paperwork.

Karen Covy: That's pretty much the worst way to go about it because that's when you get caught off guard and that's when things can, you can turn them into a war right out of the gate and that then you're playing catch up. Then you're trying to, tame down the flames and keep this from being an all out nuclear attack.

Karen Covy: And that's a hard place to retreat from. It is much easier to have an amicable divorce if you start that way. You can always ramp up. It's hard to pull back.

Candace Dellacona: I think that's really good advice, Karen. At the end of the day, it's painful. So why suffer the suffering? The best way to go is having a little bit of education from the outset and knowledge is power, and that's partly why we do this podcast for our Sandwich Generation members, to have some orientation as to all of the different folks that can really help them in the Sandwich Generation, and divorce happens to be one of those topics. So I've loved this conversation, Karen.

Candace Dellacona: I'm sure that we're going to Plenty of questions and people who want to get in touch with you. So for our listeners, you can reach Karen directly and we'll put this in the show notes at karencovy.com. She is an incredible resource. I think you'll agree with me and I just wanted to say thank you so much for your time today, Karen.

Karen Covy: Candace, thank you. It has been my pleasure. I've thoroughly enjoyed our conversation.

Candace Dellacona: Likewise.