

PERSPECTIVE:

Separation Does Not Absolve You From Blame

January 29, 2018

It's not a new concept. Time and events changes us. Many people joke that the traits that made them fall in love with a person (eg. You're so funny) become the things that they come to resent (eg. Why can't you ever be serious?). Although not always the same comments, the same sentiment is heard on a regular basis in the area of separation and divorce.

Perception equals reality. How a person perceives the world has a direct impact on how they will interact with the world. For example, one could look outside on a day when the sun is shining, and there are a few clouds in the sky. Depending on their perception, one person may say "It's a beautiful, sunny day," whereas another may say "It's cloudy outside." Neither is incorrect, but they are fundamentally different perspectives of the same event.

Over time, perspectives can change. What once reminded someone of a wonderful experience may now remind them of loss. As a result of life experiences, the lens with which they view the situation has changed. The person then interacts differently. In separation and divorce, once the separation process (ie. the life experience) has begun, the paradigms (ie. the lens) often begin to shift.

A common example of this relates to financial situations. There are many individuals in today's society whom are self-employed. Of them, there are some who work for cash, and do not claim that income. This has a direct impact on the amount of income tax that is paid at the end of the year. Although this is a form of deceit, many individuals are ok with it because the one being deceived is the "Tax-Man;" not a real person. The acceptance of this practice often shifts however, in separation.

Although the practice may have been perfectly acceptable during the relationship, it is often no longer considered acceptable by one of the partners post-separation. This is because the deception during the relationship benefited the relationship and both people in it. Post-separation, this is generally not the case. Although deceit or lies by omission are not acceptable, there should be some accountability placed on both individuals, even during the separation process. Both parties owned that truth during the relationship and in post-separation, both parties still own some of that truth. It is not acceptable to place full blame on one party for continuing a practice that was previously acceptable by both parties, simply as a result of separation or divorce.

Another example of this possible paradigm shift is with respect to parenting. Many times, one parent is seen as the primary caregiver during the relationship. Although the other parent may be a very caring parent, they may also work long hours, work out of town, or simply not be engaged in parenting. Post-separation, it is not reasonable to expect the other parent to miraculously become a model parent. Yes, for some, separation is a wake-up call, and they can become candidates for parent-of-the-year. For others however, they may be content with only minimal parenting time; just like they had in the relationship.

If something was an endorsed and agreed-upon practice during the relationship, it is problematic to condemn those actions post-separation; especially when the condemnation is based on what benefits only one person. When assessing this, individuals need to look closely at what role they played in the situation pre-separation, and how their actions contributed to the conundrum. With some acceptance of their participation, parties are better equipped to move forward from any obstructions to settlement, and move forward with their lives.

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