

Split Decisions

The Troubled Relationship Between Women and Divorce

The Guide to Good Divorce aims to guide women during one of the most trying periods in their lives.

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Image: [Paul Naughton](#)

“Ladies, my mantra for you is, you is until you ain’t,” said Trey Yates, addressing a small crowd at the Houstonian Hotel one Saturday this spring. Several of the 20 or so attendees nodded in agreement. Yates, who has been a certified family law mediator since 1999, is a favorite speaker at the Guide to Good Divorce, a program that aims, over a six-hour session, to help women transition out of their marriages with the least amount of damage—financial, emotional and otherwise. In the audience that day were women in their 30s and women in their 70s, women whose husbands had cheated on them, women whose spendthrift husbands had put them in financial jeopardy and at least one woman whose husband abused cocaine. Some had already filed for divorce, some were about to and some were still considering it.

“Women come in here worried about their finances, children and future lifestyle,” said Pamela Schied, a PR and marketing consultant who assisted Yates in creating the program. “Those worries aren’t separated by income level. Women with stable careers with some sort of financial control come in just as worried as corporate wives.”

Their fears are not unfounded, according to financial advisor Patricia Barrett, who spoke to the group first, at 9 a.m. “Texas isn’t very good to women when it comes to things like alimony,” she said. “You have to know your situation, ladies. And beyond that, you have to know what that means for you after your divorce.”

Barrett’s talk was fast and informative—she had to dash off to her daughter’s wedding, as it happens—but she and Yates still managed to provide much food for thought for the women, many of whom appeared to be just then coming to terms with the legal and financial barriers they faced. Indeed, one attendee, a corporate wife for the past 30 years, confessed that despite her husband’s constant infidelity, she was still reluctant to file for divorce, fearing an uncertain financial future—a realistic concern in a society where women currently earn only 78 cents for every dollar earned by a man.

“I’m preparing to stay at my mother’s on the weekend I petition him for divorce,” another attendee told us, her voice worried yet strong. “He’s a lunatic on a regular basis. I can only imagine what he’ll be like then.”

Giving the women the emotional strength to persevere during one of the most trying periods in their lives was the task of Melissa Nickelson, a personal life coach. Among other things, she advised the group to begin journaling about their fears, insecurities and goals. Nickelson is herself divorced, and, like many of the women in the room, had had to get past the notion that a divorced life is a failed one.

“This time period is about taking back your emotional energy,” she told them. “You have to empower yourself, and you have to be your own superhero.”

It was Yates who first came up with the Good Divorces idea. Having litigated divorces for years in Texas, he saw how often women in particular seemed ill-prepared for the experience. Initially, Schied only handled the marketing side of the program, but then she went through her own unexpected second divorce. The seminar that Yates created turned out to be a godsend.

“Although it was ironic, I think my divorce actually benefited the program’s direction,” Schied said. “I was in the target age range we set out to help, and Trey was able to use me as a gauge on how to reach the women.”

At 3 p.m., when the seminar ended, there were still quite a few nutrition bars and croissants on a tray in the back of the room. The day had been too eventful for some to eat. “There’s a whole world within a marriage, and within a divorce,” summed up one exhausted but relieved participant. “To get your arms around it, it helps to have all of the different teachings and experts. What to do about real estate and homes, how to manage money on [an] ongoing basis and how to make your finances work for you is something that often gets overlooked.”

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