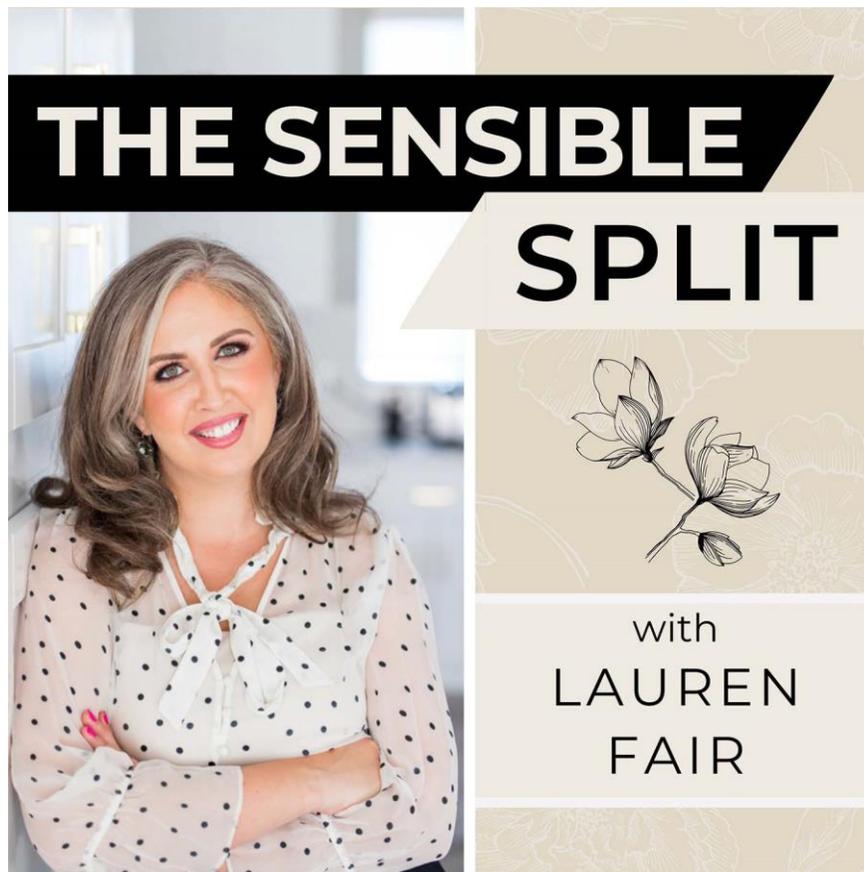


Ep #8: How to Make Divorce Decisions That Align With Your Values



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With Your Host

Lauren Fair

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You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 8. Today, we're talking about a topic that's often overlooked but it's critical in divorcing successfully, the importance of knowing your values during divorce.

The Sensible Split is a podcast for smart but overwhelmed women in search of a roadmap to a successful separation and divorce. If you are looking for guidance in navigating the practical, legal, and emotional aspects of divorce with confidence, this is the show for you. Here's your host, Master Certified Life and Divorce Coach, Divorce Attorney and Mediator, Lauren Fair.

Hello, ladies, I am recording this the day after daylight savings time. I'm really excited about the fact that it's going to be lighter later, and I'm going to be able to walk more after work. I'm focusing on that instead of the fact that I feel a little strange with the time change, in terms of what time my body thinks it is versus what time it is. But it's kind of a mixed bag, and maybe you feel the same.

I wanted to also share with you a little bit about something I'm learning right now. I love to learn; I'm always looking for how I can deepen my knowledge on topics that I have kind of a working understanding of. That is, right now for me, grief, and Post-Traumatic Growth. I'm doing an advanced training on coaching and grief, and Post-Traumatic Growth. It's fascinating. I'm learning a lot, and I look forward to bringing you some content on those topics, as they relate to divorce, here soon.

For five weeks I had the privilege of coaching widowed moms. So far, my experience with that has been really just a joy to support women going through another really significant life transition involving a lot of loss. And so, it's just been something that has been really valuable and eye opening, and I really look forward to bringing you more on those topics soon.

So, in the last episode, we talked about one strategy to get you unstuck in decision making when you're hung up on making the right decision. And this week, I'm going to give you another strategy for making better and more efficient decisions in divorce. This strategy is actually going to do double duty for you,

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because it's not only going to improve your decision-making during divorce, but it's also a crucial step in setting yourself up to thrive after divorce as well.

As we know, going through divorce is undeniably one of life's most challenging experiences. It can feel like being in an emotional tornado, and it becomes crucial to anchor ourselves so that we are not completely swept away in that. So, why does knowing our values matter in this context?

First, let's talk about its role in decision making. Because we are expected to make a myriad of decisions legal, financial, and personal, etc. when you're going through the divorce process, it's just really important to be mindful of what kind of space you're making those decisions from. And when you're being swept up in that emotional tornado, it can be very difficult to make sound decisions that are in your short-term and long-term best interests.

Having one shot at making these decisions can cause paralysis in making a decision at all, sometimes, because you're thinking you might get it wrong; like we talked about last week. And/or you might upset someone with your decision.

So, most of our thinking happens subconsciously and automatically. And that can be a big problem when you're going through a divorce, because negative emotions and an activated nervous system can drive us to make decisions that are not well reasoned, or it sometimes has us not making decisions at all.

We tend to subconsciously make decisions based on bias and emotion. And when survival emotions run the show, we tend to make decisions based on fear and bias, which can escalate conflict, increased legal fees, and impact the length of the divorce process. And also, just generally result in outcomes that we find are not ultimately what we really want.

Some of those negative emotions that come up in divorce, that can drive poor decision making, include overwhelm, anger, jealousy, desperation, maybe even hate, hopelessness. We just really want to be very mindful of when we are about to make a decision from one of those types of emotions, because they usually don't lead to the best decisions for us.

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The other piece of kind of the driver of bad decision making in divorce is those biases that I mentioned. And I want to give you a few examples of common biases in divorce. One is status quo. The bias of wanting things to stay the same.

Our brains love the status quo in a lot of circumstances because what we already know and understand can sometimes feel a lot safer than the unknown. Even if the status quo isn't good, sometimes moving out of the status quo is more scary to our brains than staying in an unpleasant status quo.

The second bias that is often seen in divorces, loss aversion. Focusing on what you're losing and not what you're getting. I see that a lot of the time when we're talking about settlement proposals, and entertaining settlement proposals.

The third bias in divorce is anchoring. Anchoring really is getting stuck on initial expectations that were mis-set. This can look like having expectations set unreasonably, by perhaps someone else who gave you their experience of divorce and made it seem like yours would be similar or the same.

It could be getting bad advice at the beginning from a professional, who didn't properly set expectations and focused on something else instead, other than kind of giving you the straight talk. Or this could even be from googling a question that you have, reading an answer online, and thinking that was a likely outcome for you.

Such that now you're really stuck on that piece and don't want to move off of it, because perhaps you've already made statements to your spouse about how that's your position. And it's really hard sometimes to come off of that when you've already stated it, because of what you think that's going to do, in terms of how you're viewed. Or how the dynamic is between the two of you, in terms of negotiating issues.

The fourth bias in divorce decision making is endowment, and that's where we overvalue our own belongings. I see this, oftentimes, when we're looking at, for example, the value of household furniture, furnishings, and appliances. This is a

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really big one, where we really tend to overvalue our own items. And if you actually put them up for sale on the open market, you'd probably find that they are actually worth, or they would sell for far less than what we think they're worth.

The fifth bias in divorce decision making is confirmation. Confirmation bias can really get in the way of conflict resolution and co-parenting. Confirmation bias means when we believe something about the other person, or about a claim in our case, our brain tends to then look only for evidence that confirms what our belief is.

And that can be really problematic in getting into a space of flexible thinking that is required in order to successfully resolve a case through alternative dispute resolution methods.

The last bias in divorce decision making is overconfidence. That really just is being overconfident in what your position is on a legal issue. So, this similar to the anchoring bias. This could result from something like, "I Googled it, and Google told me I had a good position on this particular issue. This is what the law says on this particular issue," and in actuality, it's not true. You kind of go into something thinking that 'no judge would...' That, for me, is always kind of a red flag.

When we're looking at overconfidence, the statement, 'no judge would do' this or that, I assure you that there's probably some judge somewhere that just might. So, you always want to check overconfidence with proper legal advice.

Aside from negative emotion and biases in divorce decision making being challenges in the decision-making process, also, when we get tired or lazy the quality of our decision making just goes down. Our brain does not want to focus on things that require significant mental effort and concentration. And divorce is exhausting, is it not?

It's much easier to make decisions based on emotion and bias, it's sort of that automatic response for your brain. Rather than things that require identifying,

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perhaps, what bias might be going on, whether there's a bias present in the thought process. And instead, doing the work to make some separation between the negative emotion and the bias, and what objectively would be the decision that you would like to make from a well-reasoned place?

So, how do we counteract this default process that our brain goes through? Through informed, intentional decisions. Because those are the most likely to lead to your desired outcome. Those are the types of decisions we want to aim for.

How do we know if we're making those decisions? We align them with your values. So, your values are like a guiding compass, especially during turbulent times. They define who you are and what truly matters to you. And by staying connected to your values, you can navigate the storm of divorce with a sense of authenticity, and a focus on what is most important to you in the short and long term.

Identifying your values is an integral part of divorcing mindfully. These values help you understand yourself, your motives, and your principles, and allow you to explore the future you would like to create. And when you use your values as a filter in decision making, you can make better decisions and make them more efficiently.

When you are going through the process of identifying your values, one thing I want you to look out for is, you want to be very honest with yourself about what your values are. Don't judge yourself for any values that you identify.

When you go through this process, and you're doing an inventory of what your values are, and you're being really honest with yourself, sometimes you might have a reaction of like, "Oh, wow, that's interesting. Huh, what does that say about me, if these are my values versus these others, that don't stick out to me as something that are as important?"

So, it's really critical that you just don't judge yourself for what those values are or aren't. And something to get curious about too, is how are those values

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playing into actions that you've taken in your marriage or separation or your divorce? How do they fit into your substantive legal goals? Remember to check in with your values during the process.

Now, let's turn to the second way that values are so important in the divorce process. One was using them as a filter in decision making it, so you can make decisions that are the most aligned with you and who you want to be in this process, and also are more likely to then be in the future decisions that you don't regret.

The second is the importance of knowing your values in your next chapter, so that it can be set up to be as fulfilling as possible for you. Divorce is not just an ending, it's a new beginning. I used to love that song lyric, "Every new beginning comes from some other beginnings end." You know that song? From the 90s I think it was. I don't remember who sang that song, at the moment. But that lyric always resonated for me.

Your values act as a blueprint for crafting a life post-divorce that aligns with what truly brings you joy and fulfillment. They contribute to your long-term wellbeing. When I went through the process of identifying my values, and using those to write out the details of what I wanted my life to look like, it felt like coming home to me.

Then, I looked at where my life was, and how it was not completely in alignment with my values in certain respects, and I started to make changes. When I look back at that work from time to time, it's pretty neat to see how much more in alignment my life is now with my values. I'm going to give you a couple of examples of that.

So, with respect to the decision-making piece, and how my values played into the decision-making process during my divorce, I realized during my first marriage that I highly valued stability and I didn't feel like I had it, or that it was possible at that time in that relationship. And so, that value led me to the decision to separate.

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I also valued fairness. And because of that value, I decided to propose a settlement offer to my then husband, that had me assuming more than my share of certain financial responsibilities under the law, because I believed I would be better able to carry that responsibility then, which I did not have to do. I find now, even with distance and less emotion that I had then, I still believe that this was the right thing to do.

Because in my mind, it was the fair thing to do. And that is how I wanted to conduct myself in that. Part of the proceeding was, I wanted to propose and agree to a settlement that I thought was fair, even if that meant it was less advantageous to me than what I would have possibly gotten if we had gone to court.

But one note on fairness. Be aware of the fact that what you think is fair, and what your spouse thinks is fair, may be very different. So, I want to just caution you on that one. Fairness can be... Well, fair, in and of itself, I'm partial to the word of course. It can be the other "four-letter word" in divorce. So, just be careful with that one. But for me it resonated and led to a conclusion that I liked.

And so, that was one value that worked for me. But be careful of ones that maybe don't work for you in that same way. Because fairness might have you getting stuck in an emotional position that perhaps isn't supported by what your best alternative would be to an agreement.

With respect to my future in my life, one of the values that I got really curious about was, I value my health. Because, for a lot of reasons, right? I want to be around for my kids in the future. I want to be able to travel and honor other values that I have like adventure and things like that.

But when I took that value, when I looked at my day-to-day life, I realized that my life was really not prioritizing that. I was not really prioritizing that value in my life. I wasn't making it a priority when I looked at my day-to-day schedule. So, when I looked at how am I incorporating that value into my life, I really wasn't making enough time to focus on my health.

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I was putting too much time into other things like working, and other things that were priorities as well, for different reasons, but to the point of not making space for something that was at the top of my value list. And so, that allowed me to be able to identify, “Hey, moving forward in my life, this is something that needs to change, so that then I can start to put together the pieces of what would that change look like and how would I get there.”

Let's now explore some practical tips on how to reconnect with your values during a divorce. You can engage in self-reflection exercises. You can get coaching. There are different ways to go about identifying your values and determining how to incorporate those into your divorce decision-making process and into your post-divorce life vision.

There are tangible steps you can take to staying grounded by doing those things. And you can start by doing something as simple as looking at “a values list” you find on Google and circling the ones most resonant with you. Or you can do a deeper dive with a coach.

For decision-making purposes, here are some sample questions you could ask yourself to use your values as a filter for your decision making. There are others, but here's just kind of a sampling.

What decisions are you considering? What are your options? How do your options align with your values? How do your options conflict with your values? Which values do you absolutely have to honor here? Which values are you willing to be flexible on? Based on those answers, what decision is the best fit for your values and why?

Consciously anchoring your decision making in your values helps in making decisions in all areas of your life, not just in the divorce process. So, I highly recommend exploring your values as a tool to utilize and living a more fulfilling life in general. And listen, it's easy to lose touch with what you value as an individual, and not as a couple, when you're in a marriage and you've compromised some of who you are in that. And when you're just busy being a mom and putting everyone else before you.

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As you move forward toward your brighter horizon, I encourage you to take time to explore and reconnect with your own values. That is what actually brought me to the point of me being here talking to you today. It was a re-examination and a further discovery, and a recommitment to my values, that fueled my decision to shift my focus from divorce litigation to helping people through divorce utilizing alternative dispute resolution methods.

So, it's actually pretty cool. I really wasn't even so much thinking about that when I started thinking about this episode, and the more that I spent time with this episode, I thought, "Oh my goodness, that's what brought me here." How fun is that?

As we wrap up today's episode, remember that knowing your values isn't just about surviving a divorce. It's about successfully engaging in the divorce process and thriving beyond it. And by anchoring your decision making to your values, you set yourself up to avoid costly mistakes and make better decisions for your present and your future.

Thanks so much for listening today. I'll see you on the next episode.

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