



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lauren Fair

You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 16. Today, I'm sharing tips and insight from my unique background as a divorce coach, mediator, and lawyer as I talk with fellow divorce coach Dr. Stefanie Huff.

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.

Hi there. Welcome back to the podcast this week. On today's episode, I share with you an interview that I recently sat down for with Dr. Stefanie Huff. Dr. Stef is a mom, a physician, and a divorce coach. And she had questions for me about the differing roles of divorce lawyer, divorce mediator, and divorce coach.

And so, I share in this interview, my perspective from each of those three different roles, insights, and tips from those specific perspectives. Also, we talk about the number one struggle that we see working moms face in the divorce process, and our advice to women who are in that struggle right now.

So, I hope that you enjoy this episode with Dr. Stef. I will link in the show notes her website for her coaching business, which is called Figure Life Out, if you want to check out the video version of this interview. It is posted on her website. Alright, I hope you enjoy.

Dr. Stefanie Huff: Lauren Fair is here with me today. Hi, Lauren. How are you?

Lauren Fair: Hi, Stefanie. I'm doing great. Thanks. How are you?

Lauren: Great. Thank you so much for being here. I am so excited to talk to you. Because Lauren is a unicorn, I would say, of divorce experts. Because not only are you a divorce attorney, you're also a mediator, and you are also a Master Certified Coach. All of those focused around divorce, correct? I mean, so awesome. It's like if you need something, a one-stop shop right there.

So, I'm really interested in hearing how this came about to be. Let's go ahead and we'll get started. If you could just share with us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be this unicorn of divorce expert.

Lauren: I'm really excited to chat with you, Stefanie. Thank you. I'm a divorce lawyer, mediator, and coach, as you said. I'm based in San Diego, California. I first started working in the divorce industry back in law school, actually. So, since the very beginning of my legal career I have been focused on family law. And so, I started out doing that in the Bay Area back in 2007.

I started on a traditional path of how one gets into family law, in the sense that I worked at a firm that was primarily litigation focused. I did litigation thereafter. After I passed the bar, I moved back to Southern California. I got an associate position at a family law firm, and I litigated for about 15 years in family law. I became a Certified Family Law Specialist, and devoted all of my practice to that.

And while I got a lot of satisfaction from that, over time, especially after I had a kid, I kind of got to a point where I was experiencing some burnout. And that happened to coincide with COVID. It was the first time where, in my career, there was a forced slow down. Because the court in California, as it was in most states, I think for at least a while, closed initially when COVID hit.

And so, we had to close our office. About, let's say 13 years ago, I started my own firm, and I have a firm now with a partner. We had our own firm at the time, and still do. We had to close our office, and so we couldn't go to court. We weren't going to the office right now. And it really allowed me some time to think about where I want to take things from here for myself.

Because I just didn't feel like going on in the way that I had been up to that point. It wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do. And so, that brought me to a crossroads. And that's kind of what had me initially look at what are other ways of helping people going through this transition.

Stefanie: And so then, did you do the mediator and the coaching part at that time? Or had you already done the mediator part?

Lauren: I had gone through the mediation training. I hadn't done a lot with it after that, initially. It was more out of curiosity. There were things in litigation for so many years that stuck out to me as 'there's got to be another way to do this better.' And litigating was always like a bit of an extension of my personality. And it just seemed like there was a better way to approach this, that serves families better, than trying to put what's a very unique kind of legal dispute...

We're forcing a legal dispute that's really centered around people in their daily lives, and the sharing of their children, and their financial future and things, into a system that is much more designed for other types of legal disputes. To be handled in a [crosstalk]

And so, put simply, there were so many problems that families who went to the family court system... they had problems that just couldn't be fixed by it. And then they were left without adequate help to figure out, "Well, what do I do now with all of these issues that are not being fixed by a judge? That I thought the judge was going to fix for me."

Stefanie: One thing to note, real quick. Sorry, I didn't mean... Probably some people don't understand the difference between what litigation means and what mediation means. So, if I'm stating it correctly, litigation would be the process of actually having to go to court and present your case. Like what you want for a parenting plan, or what you want for alimony, child support. You have to present both sides to a judge. And then, the judge decides based on the evidence presented by both parties.

And not all divorce cases go to litigation, right? Some can be solved with mediation, which means you don't go in front of the judge. Some can be solved without any mediation, and they can do it on their own. I think that's pretty rare. And then, some try mediation. And if mediation doesn't work, then they go to litigation. Right? So, the difference between litigation, like what that really means, is the process of your lawyer presenting your evidence and your case in court.

And so, I think it is really good to have somebody who has that litigation experience, especially in the Family Court, where it is so nuanced, and presenting that emotional evidence that isn't... Like, if it's some sort of tax case,

where it's 'follow the numbers, follow the money,' that's a lot more cut and dry. Whereas, like you said, Family Court is a lot more emotional and personal and situational for each family.

So, with the mediation, you said you hadn't really used much of it. When did you start doing more mediation than the litigation? Or what was that transition process?

Lauren: Well, yeah. So, it was really after a COVID, as we were kind of getting back into the swing of things. It was like, "Okay, now I'd really like to take the opportunity to try to make a shift into a role that is more alternative dispute-resolution focused." And what I mean by that is, how can we help families resolve these issues outside of court as much as possible?

Anytime you allow a stranger in a black robe... Who, by the way, they're doing their best. But you're losing all control over the resolution of issues that are likely to impact your daily life for some time.

Stefanie: And your entire family

Lauren: It's more expensive too, yeah. It takes a long time, the resolution of things. It costs a lot. And I think the biggest thing for me is just the lack of control over what that outcome looks like. And usually, both people, when they allow a judge to make decisions for their family, end up dissatisfied to some degree.

Stefanie: And then some people try to go back to court and see if they get a different answer, and then it just cycles. So, now do you do mostly the joint resolution type of work, but you can do the litigation if you need to? Or do you really just stick to the joint resolution?

Lauren: Good question? So, I have a firm. I employ other attorneys who litigate cases. I actually had a colleague tell me recently that he kind of viewed it as like a "choose your own adventure" type book. But I can really help clients, at the beginning, understand what the different pathways are to get from the beginning of the divorce through the end of the divorce. Because there's not just one way. And I think that's really important for people to understand.

That education is often not made available to them at the beginning; that they do have different options. They look very different. They take different amounts of time, they ask for differing amounts, and it also impacts the degree to which they have control over what the resolution looks like for themselves. And so, I like to be in a position to be able to offer them that education.

And from there, I have the ability to kind of help them. Whether it's me personally, or transitioning them to someone else in my firm. Depending on what they want to do. Because those cases where they are going to end up in litigation... I have people to do that. I personally do less of that now, because of the fact that I just so much enjoy the challenge of helping people work through conflict in different ways. I'm kind of at a point in my career where that's really what I personally like to focus on.

But yeah, they can go that route, through litigation, or I can serve as a mediator for families. Alternatively, one of the ways that I really like helping people now is in a coaching context. And so, that can look different depending on what the client wants to achieve through coaching. But alternative dispute resolution really, with the methodologies, is what I'm really most focused on now.

Stefanie: That's so great. So, now that we kind of have an overview of all three things that you do, let's kind of go through each one. You've kind of touched on a few things, so we may be repeating ourselves. But it's all good. So, what is it that you enjoy most about being a divorce lawyer? I know some people are like, "I need a shark lawyer." What is it about divorce law that from the get-go really drew you to it?

Lauren: Oh, I think what was most interesting to me was two things. One, I did not go to law school, by the way, with the intention of going into family law. It just happened. I got a job opportunity while I was in law school. But why I chose it, sort of in response to your question, when I got to law school, when I started really diving more into the law, I really realized I wanted a client with a face, as opposed to a corporation.

And so, I really liked the idea that I would be able to help individuals through a really difficult time. Family law allowed me to do that... There's family law and

criminal law... it kind of spoke to me in that way. And ultimately, I liked family law because it just seemed like a colorful puzzle to me.

Stefanie: That's fun. That's great. I love that analogy.

Lauren: I mean, colorful in the sense that each case had somebody different, right? There are different people involved. There are different issues involved for that family. But also, there are different subject matter areas that you need to have a lot of knowledge in from case to case. In one you need to know a lot about; parenting and co-parenting issues. Sometimes we have bankruptcy issues that overlap with family law issues.

There are estate planning issues that you need to know something about as part of family law matters. You need to understand retirement plans. How do they differ from one another, and how are they divided in divorce? There are just a lot of different topics that you need to understand that form different parts of a family law case.

And I just thought that was interesting. For each case, figuring out the people involved and what was unique about them, and what were the issues that they had in their case, and how did that all fit together. How is that impacted by the emotions that they were experiencing? How long ago had they separated? How much conflict was there? What led to the breakdown of the marriage, and how is that impacting where we are in the case.

So, that's what I mean when I say 'kind of a colorful puzzle.' There are a lot of pieces that need to come together in order to reach a resolution. And to be able to kind of work that puzzle while helping somebody through one of the most difficult times in their lives. That's really what just drew me to it initially.

Stefanie: I don't think people realize, like you said, just how many different components there can be to a divorce. And so often people think getting a lawyer involved is going to make it worse or harder or more expensive, which it can. But there's a reason why, and it's because we don't know... all of us, the normal, regular person isn't going to know... all those gazillion colorful pieces, components, that go into making the divorce happen. And happen maybe in a more strategic and calm and effective manner. I like that.

Okay. And along those lines, is there a piece of advice you would give to people who are looking for a lawyer? Because when I typically meet with somebody... I'm not a lawyer... I usually detail them; talk to two to three lawyers. Obviously, you don't have to go through a divorce. But I always think it's good to get a sense of what lawyers think about their situation. What kind of advice do you give to people who are on their first look out for a divorce lawyer?

Lauren: So, this is more from a coaching perspective. I think it's changed my perspective a bit on this issue. I think my number one piece of advice to somebody looking for a divorce attorney would be to take a step back first, if you can, and figure out what kind of legal process option you want to opt for. Get that education and that support, that coaching, in making that decision up front. And from there, you find an attorney, if you want one, that will support you in that process.

Stefanie: Well, I like that. Because there are definitely those lawyers who are like, "I want to litigate," but it's hard. How do you find those? Maybe that's what it's about, is knowing 'I want to do it this way, as much as I can.' So that then, when you go interview the lawyer, you can see what their response to that is. Right? And then you'll know if that is a fit or not.

Lauren: Yeah, I think a key issue here is understanding that you should be the captain of your own ship, if you will. The attorney is an important part of that oftentimes, because it is a legal process, right? It is helpful to understand what my legal rights and obligations are in this process.

But they should be an advisor for you, rather than taking the reins completely. And you're not having an understanding of what they're doing, or why they're doing it, right? Like totally delegating your power over to somebody else. It's just something that sometimes has unintended consequences.

And so, I like to empower clients to be able to understand, okay, I do have more than one option here. Litigation and having an attorney kind of run the case is one option. And maybe that's right for you. I'm not there to tell the client what they should do with their own divorce. What's important for me is for them to understand that they do have options.

Here's what those are, here's what they might look like in terms of duration, cost, level of control, etc., and support them in making that decision that's best for them. And from there, who's the right attorney to plug into that for me, so that I get what I want out of the legal advice? What role do I want the attorney to play in this?

Yeah, and like you say, some attorneys just don't offer all of those different services. And candidly, when I started out in family law, I didn't approach it that way. I wasn't taught that way. And that's not to fault the people that I learned from, because that they were taught the same thing. You approach all the cases in a legal process in a similar way.

I think just over time, especially in focusing more and more on the alternative dispute resolution, options, mediation, divorce, coaching, etc., it just sort of opens your mind more to okay, there are actually more ways that you can handle this than one, and it's not a one-size-fits-all situation. And so, making a really intentional decision about, here's how I'd actually like an attorney to support me in this, here's what fits with my budget for this process.

It allows them to make a better decision from the outset about who the right person is for them.

Stefanie: Wow, that's a huge shift; you're in control of this, and having the attorney support you. Because I think so often we go into it like, "Help me." And a lot of times it is overwhelming to be making so many decisions. A lot of times people just want somebody to be like, "Just tell me what to do."

But you're right, if you can kind of have that mind shift into this is your divorce, and this is your family, and let's make sure that things are happening the way you want it to. In a way that feels right and authentic. And intentional in your own pathway. So, I love that. Awesome. Alright. Now, what about mediators? You kind of started into dispute resolution, so what is it that you enjoy the most about mediating?

Lauren: Really, for me, it's about getting to be in a peacemaker role. Helping people work through conflict in a way that doesn't escalate the conflict. Allows them to design what their next chapter is going to look like. Taking that into

consideration, and coming up with a resolution that... You know, it never feels like a great win for either party, right? But it's about coming up with, okay, here's what we both can live with in order to move forward.

And ultimately, when you're able to work through difficult conflicts like that... because there is conflict, right? There's conflict in every divorce, it's just a question of how much conflict that there is. So, to the extent that we can take what that conflict is, and we can work through it productively, and come up with a resolution, especially when there are kids involved, this is kind of where I get passionate about it.

The more cooperation we can have, the less conflict we can have, the better outcomes there are for children from divorce, right?

Stefanie: Now, when you do your mediations, do you have a set way you go about it? I know some people have them in the same room. Some people have them separately. Or separate Zoom rooms. Or do you take it on a case-by-case basis? How do you typically do your mediations?

Lauren: I mean, personally, I always like to consider the individual case. But when I'm mediating with two people who are in mediation without attorneys... Because there are different ways you can use mediation. Sometimes you can have attorneys present, and sometimes you don't. But assuming we're talking about mediating just with the spouses together, I like to start off together and try to stay together as much as possible, especially if they have kids.

Because they're then in a position of needing to transition their relationship from former romantic partners into co-parent. And this is one of the things like we talked about, kind of turning things over to an attorney and thinking they're going to save you. They do play a valuable role. I think it's important to think about what that role should look like in your situation.

But especially when you've got kids, they're going to be around forever. Yeah, well, the attorneys are not going to be around forever to solve the ongoing problems or communication issues or things that come up with the kids. And so, to the extent that we can start to build the skills necessary to transition the relationship into a co-parenting one that's functional, that can start in the

mediation room, the better. The better for both parties, in terms of their ability to live peaceful lives after the divorce, and also for the children to be able to do so.

I think it's important to do that. But you've got to assess the situation, right? You've got to make sure the case is even right for mediation to begin with. And if it is... Because I know there are lots of people who are like, "I don't want to be in the same room with her."

And I will say, I came to mediation with a background in what mediation and settlement conferences look like in the traditional attorney role, which is a lot of what you call "shuttle" mediation. Where you might start out in the same room for five minutes at the beginning, the mediator gives an opening speech, and then everybody goes into separate rooms. And then, the mediator just kind of shuttles back and forth.

Stefanie: Yeah. Our first one, we were all in the same room, lawyers beside each of us, spent hours on it, and then at the end, nothing came of it.

Lauren: I'm curious about that. May I ask, was there a mediator there? Or was it just the attorneys?

Stefanie: Yes, there was a mediator. But then, someone refused to sign anything, so we didn't complete it. And then ended up litigating. But any future mediations we had were separate, completely. Where we didn't interact.

Lauren: I find when there are attorneys involved on both sides it's less frequent that everybody is in the same room. It tends to be more of the shuttle mediation, at least in the jurisdiction where I...

Stefanie: You can have more discussions.

Lauren: But when there aren't attorneys, then I think that having everybody in the same room is helpful a lot of the time. But again, you have got to assess, as a mediator, would it be helpful to this family in getting past an impasse for us to... What we call "caucus". When we meet separately to discuss where we are, where we're running into issues, how might we move forward? Because I do

think that there's value in having some separate discussions when necessary or appropriate.

Stefanie: I could see it being very valuable when there's definitely some trauma, even “Capital T trauma” between... or more of a very high-conflict type situation. I always get a little concerned that someone going into mediation is going to feel pressured to kind of get it over with, as opposed to really looking out for their own best interest, and their kid’s best interest. Just to get it done with. Can you kind of see that happening?

Lauren: You definitely got to have a read on the room; what you see. You've got to listen beyond what's being said, and really try to understand, “Okay, based on what I'm seeing here, what do I think the conflict history is, in terms of patterns? Am I seeing one shut down over the conflict here?”

Stefanie: Twenty years of experience is pretty helpful in reading that room

Lauren: Yeah, you start to notice that type of behavior and pick up on... Examples of what you see about what's really going on inside here. Like, “Okay, this might be what's happening here. Maybe we need to check in with this person.” But I think this is actually one of the things that I really most enjoy. It's supporting women to successfully engage in mediation, as a coach for them outside of the mediation room. So, in that context, they would be going through mediation with a different mediator. And I'm in the role of helping prepare...

Stefanie: [inaudible]

Lauren: Yeah, oftentimes, it's the woman. It doesn't have to be but that's a lot of who I work with... to prepare to be successful in the mediation room. And that's one of the things that we do. We think about what's likely to happen for me in the mediation room when I'm encountering conflict? What do I do when I have a conflict with my spouse? Am I going to blow up? Am I going to scream?

Am I going to freeze? Am I going to leave? What's likely to happen? And how might we employ some strategies to help them work through that, to the extent that they want mediation to work, and they want to be able to stay at the table

and continue the negotiations, but know that they're going to have challenges in doing that?

Stefanie: Oh, definitely. That's a huge part of it, just the whole mindset, almost visualization of it all. Going through each possible outcome, and then keeping the outcome that you can't even imagine that the other person comes up with. Just being ready for it all.

One more thing about the mediator, is there a piece of advice that you have for people who are looking for mediators? How can they find a good one? Do mediators have to be in the state or the region? Or is it just kind of better that they know your state? Or does it matter?

Lauren: That's a good question. So, one thing to know is, at least in California, where I am, mediation is an unregulated field. In the sense that you don't have to have any particular qualifications to call yourself a mediator. There are lots of great training programs out there, but a mediator doesn't necessarily have to go through any [inaudible] mediator. You don't have to be an attorney to be a mediator, you can come from different backgrounds, etc.

So, certainly, understanding what their qualifications are is going to be important. And are they focused on divorce mediation, or do they handle other types of matters more frequently? But what's more important to consider as well, when you are talking about different states, does it matter? I think that you need to kind of be clear on what you're expecting out of the mediation.

In terms of, do you want it to be a one-stop shop for you, in terms of facilitating the process? So, what I mean by that is, do you want the mediator to kind of create a container for you to get from the beginning to the end? In terms of corralling everybody together to get the legal process done.

There are mediators that will offer preparation of the documents that are necessary for the court, in addition to helping you resolve the disputes. And so, if you'd like that, yeah, usually, that is something where you're going to want them to be in a state that you're in. There's a lot more flexibility. A lot of mediators are offering online services, like mediation over Zoom for example.

But whenever I have a client and we're talking about the possibility of them going to mediation without an attorney in the room... And by the way, that doesn't mean you can't have an attorney, or have the benefit of legal advice. It just means, to our point earlier, we're talking about in that situation you would have an attorney consulting for you in the background. So that you go in more prepared to understand what a reasonable outcome might look like. That helps inform your negotiations.

But assuming they're going to mediation without attorneys present, it's convenient to have the mediator be able to prepare the initial documents, facilitate the exchange of the documents that are necessary, like the financial disclosures and things. And then, if you reach an agreement in mediation, help prepare the settlement agreement and the judgment paperwork.

Sometimes I find that I work with women clients who are used to being the ones that just are doing all the administrative things. Like, "I'm the one that schedules all the things. I'm the one that does financial bookkeeping, and things." And they have some concerns about their spouse participating in the process, timely, or not understanding what needs to be done, or relying on them to help them with it and stuff. And I find that if that's the case, it can be helpful, particularly, to have a mediator who can kind of help facilitate that process. Like, "Okay, everybody here's what we need to do."

Stefanie: Which can create more conflict with it.

Lauren: Yes. So, it's thinking about from the beginning, what would I like the mediator to be able to do? And finding somebody who offers that for you.

Stefanie: Isn't there also something like arbitration, too? Is that a form of mediation too? As I understand it, at the end, the mediator can, like a judge or a lawyer, makes the final decision? If they don't agree or something to that... That seems pretty final.

Lauren: Yeah, yeah. So, arbitration differs from mediation in that, in mediation, the mediator is a neutral third party, is a facilitator and they don't have any decision-making powers. So, they're there to help you work through the issues

and come up with a resolution. But it's a voluntary process, and they can't compel either party to agree to anything.

Arbitration is an alternative dispute resolution means, but there is decision-making power that the arbitrator has. So, the arbitrator gets to say, similar to a judge, "This is what's happening." But it's more of a private process that happens outside of the court.

Stefanie: I could see the pros and the cons of that. Well, you kind of already talked about what you enjoy the most about being a coach. And yeah, is that helping the people in their mindset and preparing for the divorce process, like you mentioned, or is there something else that you really enjoy most about coaching?

Lauren: Yeah, so two things that come to mind. One is, I really like being able to support someone who is in the early stages. Where they've made the decision, ideally. They know what they want to do. They just don't know beyond that. Like, "Okay, I've made the decision. But I don't know where to go from here? I don't know how to hire an attorney. There's so much conflicting information online."

Usually, they're researching a ton, but getting a lot of different information, like conflicting information. And so, I really like to help them get their ducks in a row. To make a smart exit plan. "Okay, I've decided, but now what?" And part of the reason why I like that stage so much is because it's usually when there are some really impactful conversations that happen, that can impact the trajectory of the divorce.

For example, that can be the early stages where maybe they've decided but they haven't told their spouse yet, and they need to prepare for that conversation. Because how that conversation goes can... I mean they don't have control over how the spouse is going to react, of course... but you can influence that by the way that you approach the conversation.

And so, how you approach that can either escalate conflict, or it can be designed to try and manage it and help the family get on a path to a cooperative resolution. That doesn't mean everything is going to be easier, but everybody can agree, right? Because oftentimes they have a misconception like, "Oh, well,

we're not going to agree on stuff.” There are, usually, disagreements. That doesn't mean you can't go through a process that can help you resolve the issues with the assistance of professionals, right?

Also, the initial conversation with the children. How are we telling the children this is what's going to happen? And how do we do that in a way that minimizes the impact on them? Because it's going to have an impact. It's a critical conversation that they will remember, forever, probably. And so, to be really well prepared for that is super important. You want to do the best job that you can for your kids in delivering that information.

And so, I just feel like I can have so much impact at that stage to help clients really approach those things strategically, to help them reach the outcome that they want from those conversations, to handle them as best they can.

And the other piece is when a client wants to go through mediation, I just love preparing them to successfully do that. Because they're committed to working through the difficult issues in a way that allows them to maintain a lot of control over the outcome, and puts an emphasis on managing conflict. But even though a lot of people are interested in mediation, now I think there's more of a tide turning toward that, you have to be prepared for it.

Stefanie: I didn't have a clue going into mediation what I was... I was just like, “What? Where am I going?”

Lauren: You're not supposed to know, right? It isn't something you do every day. Of course you don't know. And that's the thing. These people are committed to working through these issues. I love that, and I want to support them by making the most of that effort. You're going to mediation, you're spending the money, you're spending your emotional resources, your time, everything. We want to set you up to have the best chance of success with that as possible.

So, I have a four-step process for that. And that's helping them really understand the mediation process, and what everyone's role is and not... Because I think that there's a misunderstanding oftentimes as to what the spouse's role is in the mediation. They kind of think, “Oh, I'm going to go to mediation. The mediator is going to tell me exactly what to do, what's good for

me, what's good for him," or whatever. That's really not what their role is. You have a responsibility really to show up prepared for what you want.

Stefanie: Know your values, and your non-negotiables and negotiables, and kind of tease those out.

Lauren: Ahead of time. Gathering financial data. Analyzing, how do I want to create a settlement offer from this? What do I want in terms of a parenting plan? So, developing settlement proposals in advance. Then looking at, what is my communication strategy for this? How am I going to make my proposal hearable? Because we know he's not going to like the proposal, right? So, how do I negotiate for myself in the mediation room?

And those aren't skills that most people just automatically have. Or if they have them to some degree, it's different when it's someone that you're in such a critical personal relationship with, that has broken down right?

Stefanie: Well, this is exactly what I say in my co-parenting course. "I'm going to teach you how to communicate co-parenting with an ex, as opposed to working with someone, and communicating with somebody that you're trying to stay together with." I think there's a completely different communication style when you're in couples counseling and you're trying to repair the relationship and staying together.

That looks maybe more like, "I want you to... I need you to..." That repairing communication. Well, there's no repairing that marriage anymore. So, now you have to learn how to communicate separately. Where you're not trying to come together, you're just respecting each other separately. And I find that's a completely different communication style.

It's no longer about 'I want, I need', it's about the business of the kids, and how do you approach a conversation keeping the focus on the kids, or the third party or something else, and not trying to get your wants and needs filled by the other person like if you are in a marriage type situation.

Lauren: Exactly. It's the same type of thing. Like when we were talking about negotiating for yourself in the mediation room. There are going to be times that

you want to say something that is not conducive to getting what you want. We've got to think about strategic communication. How do we make these couples hearable? How do I react when he says no to this? How do you adjust on the fly?

Also, whenever you're going to get triggered by whatever the thing is that he's going to say. Or like we were talking about earlier, what's your normal response to conflict when it happens? How do we manage emotions long enough? How do we increase our distress tolerance? To be able to sit here at the mediation table. Whether you're in the same room or you're no, it's still stressful. I think you can probably attest to that. It is a stressful experience.

So, how do we get through this to the extent that this makes the most sense for us?

Stefanie: I love that. Alright, so of these three that you do, do you have a kind of favorite? Maybe nobody has their favorite kid, but if you had your ideal situation, which one of these would you be doing all the time? I'm sure they all kind of meld together. Is it the coaching?

Lauren: That's funny, my daughter the other day was trying to trap me into this, who is your favorite?"

Stefanie: Well, I'm very lucky that I have one of each. So, I just say, "Well, you're my favorite girl."

Lauren: I think actually, it's a combination of two of them. I like combining the lawyer role with the coach role, and I will only do that in the right circumstance. I don't ever litigate, and then also be in a traditional coach role. I just don't think it's the best combination. I think that for people in litigation, it's helpful to have a separate coach.

But where I think those two roles go together very well is in that mediation context. Because so much of the preparation for that lends itself to the coaching side of things. In developing the settlement proposals, one of the things I have clients focus on is where are their movable pieces in this? And we look at

coming up with tiered proposals. We kind of look at what's our ideal resolution here? What can I live with? What's the bottom line look like?

And your bottom line is best informed by understanding what the law says about this issue, and what you would get if you went to court. The idea isn't to try to change the trajectory of this and send it to court, it's for you to be able to negotiate smartly in the mediation room. To understand, okay, maybe my bottom line should be this, because I'm not likely to get a better resolution if I go to court.

Stefanie: That's a hard one for people to understand, right? It's like you're taking a risk by going to court. Who knows where you're going to end up? So, yeah, is the bottom line doable or is it not?

Lauren: Yeah. I think the legal advice is critical for really forming a smart bottom line, because if you don't know what that bottom line is, as informed by practical, straightforward legal advice, then you're likely to say, "Okay, I'm not getting what I want on this issue. So, I'm just going to go to court." Without really understanding, possibly, that you might not get a better resolution in court for that issue.

Or maybe you might, but you've got to have an understanding of what the likelihood of success is on something better than what's on the table. Otherwise, you might be potentially leaving a good offer on the table, and going down a path that ultimately doesn't lead where you thought it would.

Stefanie: It costs a lot more money and time.

Lauren: Yeah, so in those situations I'm a consulting lawyer in the background, and coaching them. It's a combination of those skills, to prepare them to engage in the mediation.

Stefanie: It sounds like you kind of prefer to work more one on one than in the mediation where you're working with both people. I assume you don't do coaching with both husband and wife, if that's the situation, or both parties in the couple. You only coach just one of the parties.

Lauren: When I coach, it's only with one party. I do aligned work, where you're working with one, but with an overall goal of helping them to resolve the dispute. That's why I like that combination of things. But in a mediation role, I think coaching skills can be utilized. It's just a different role, right? Your purpose there is different. But the coaching skills are super helpful, because you want both parties focused on what's most important for them, and to help them understand why certain things are important to them.

Because you want to try and move away as much as you can from position to the interests that are underneath them. What I mean by that is not just okay, I want \$5,000/month in spousal support. That's a position. But the interest underneath that is, okay, so why? What would that enable you to do? Why is that important to you? And that helps open up other options for a resolution. But to be able to move away from positions and into interest.

And so, coaching skills are helpful. The ability to ask powerful questions to help people open up other options, I think, is something that translates over into mediation. But it's really important for there to be a lot of clarity around what exactly is the role that I'm playing? And does that match up with what the client?

Stefanie: Gosh, great. That's awesome. I love it. And I got that kind of answer to the next question that I had, which was, what is it like to work with someone who has all three? So, it sounds like sometimes you keep them separated, sometimes you kind of combine them, and it just kind of depends on the situation?

Lauren: Yeah, if I'm a mediator, I'm just strictly a mediator. If I'm in a coaching role, then I'm in a coaching role. Unless the client specifically says, "I want legal advice," and we have a contract for that. And that's usually only in the mediation context. Where I'm doing that combined hybrid service that I think is just really beneficial for the client.

But if I were in a litigation type role as an attorney, that would be something that I would be doing exclusively. So, I really find, I guess to your point, it's mostly consulting legal services mixed with the coaching. I find that's the best kind of combination, if we're trying to combine things.

Stefanie: I like that. What, in your experience with all of this, do you think is something that divorcing working moms struggle with the most? And do you have any advice for that?

Lauren: Yeah, it's tough. I think there are so many things that they struggle with. But one that stands out to me is co-parenting conflict. And what flavor of that could vary, depending on the situation. But they're getting divorced for a reason, right? And usually, there's some combination of communication issues, conflict patterns that maybe are not the healthiest, maybe value differences. There are these things that tend to kind of swirl together and create, oftentimes, at least part of the basis for the breakdown in the marriage. And those things don't magically change because you're getting divorce.

Stefanie: Sometimes they can magnify it. Because while you're in two different houses, a lot of times, there's that element of control that I think a lot of working moms... We have our hands in everything, managing everything, and then all of a sudden, part of that goes away into a whole other household. It's very scary, and it's very unsettling. And how do you deal with those unsettling feelings that you're having now?

And then, at the same time, you're hoping that things will get better in your own household too. Because that's why you're getting divorced, you want it to get better. So I agree. I think co-parenting was the biggest struggle that I had. That's where coaching helped me the most, and really why I became a divorce coach. Because of the mindset of dealing with a high conflict, co-parenting situation; I had to control my own brain first. That's where I saw the most impact as well. So. I agree.

Lauren: That's great that you are utilizing that experience to help other people.

Stefanie: It's something it doesn't go away. You're always going to be co-parenting with that person. And whether that co-parent is present or absent, you are still dealing with the effects of them, either in the children's lives or not in the children's lives. So, it's really up to you to figure out how you're going to manage yourself.

Lauren: Exactly. Oftentimes, the problematic behavior that you're dealing with, your co-parent doesn't see as a problem. So, if they don't see it as a problem, they're unlikely to change it. So then, if that's where you're left, then how do you really protect yourself and your peace as much as possible? How can you impact that conflict, and the dynamic of it? By how you choose to interact with it.

Stefanie: Exactly. Exactly. Awesome. Okay. Well, moving on. We're almost done with the questions. Do you have a favorite mantra or quote or thought that you like to use or to share with your clients to kind of help them get through a divorce?

Lauren: I don't have one that I utilize with every client. What I've tried to do is to help them figure out what is going to be that thing for them. Because what might work for me doesn't necessarily create that same kind of feeling for them. And so, I try to help them on an individual level to figure out, where is it that they need that reinforcement, that support? And help them develop whatever that kind of thought is that's going to help them feel better equipped to weather that storm.

Stefanie: Well, you're speaking my terms, because my business name is Figure Life Out, and figure divorce out. Because my mantra is, "Whatever it is, I'll figure it out." And that's what I want my clients, and that's why I want divorce moms to know going through it. Everything will be okay, because you're going to figure out how to make it. Yeah, it may take a lot of trial and error, but you will figure out what works for you.

Lauren: So, I agree. I love that because you never know exactly what's coming. And that sometimes is what creates a lot of the overwhelm for the clients, right? But for them to be able to really focus on, regardless of what that is, I know that I'm going to figure it out. I can figure it out.

Stefanie: Whatever the other co-parent decides to do, bring it. I got it. I'll figure it out. I can handle it. Do you have a favorite book or resource... and I know, we haven't mentioned this yet... But you do have a podcast that is an incredible resource that I want people to check out. It's *The Sensible Split* with Lauren Fair. So, that is definitely a resource.

I do send people to that very often. It just came out, but there's already a bunch of great episodes there for people to start getting through already. Do you have a favorite book or resource that you offer people?

Lauren: On the note of co-parenting that we were just talking about, I would say a good one is *Parenting Apart* by Christina McGhee.

Stefanie: Okay, we're going to write that down. And that's a book?

Lauren: Yeah.

Stefanie: What do you like about that?

Lauren: I think that it helps parents start to really understand their role as co-parents; the impact that the way that they handle that role, and their interactions with their former spouse, the impact that that has on children. It helps them focus on making it a child-centered divorce instead of putting children in the middle, right?

Stefanie: Great. Finally, how does somebody work with you in all these different ways? How can they find you? How can they work with you, if they want to, in any one of those respects?

Lauren: As a lawyer, like I said, I have a law firm. We're based in San Diego. We handle matters only in California, and primarily in San Diego County. You can find me in that capacity at www.faircadora.com. My law firm's called Fair Cadore, APC. Same thing for mediation, by the way. And for coaching, I have a separate entity through which I do coaching, called Lauren Fair Coaching, LLC. You can just find me simply LaurenFairCoaching.com. And also *The Sensible Split* on Apple Podcasts.

Stefanie: Yes, make sure to download that and follow it, because it is really great. Do you have any last words that you'd like to share? I mean, I think we covered the gamut. It was awesome. I mean, there was a lot to cover there. So, any last words?

Lauren: I think the only thing I would say about the co-parenting conflict we were talking about is even if it feels helpless to you, just remember, you actually can

impact that conflict dynamic. Even if you are the only one making the effort, you just have to be the one who goes first.

Stefanie: I totally agree with you. And that's what I like to say too. I changed my co-parenting situation on my own. He didn't even know I was doing things. He didn't know I was parallel parenting. He didn't know that I was getting life coaching. They don't even have to be aware, they will change. When you start to show up differently, they will start to show up differently. It's like magic. It does happen.

I also like to think of it as, whereas before, you were hoping to both work to solve this marriage. Well, now you get to be in control of the amount of work that you do, and get to see the results from the work that you do on your own. And you don't have to worry about someone else putting in their work or not. So, I love that. Thank you for sharing that. And thank you for being here. I really appreciate it. I learned so much, and I'm sure it'll be very helpful to others listening as well. So, thank you so much.

Lauren: Thank you, Stefanie. It was fun chatting with you.

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