



Check the Pulse Before Pulling the Plug

There was an episode on a TV medical drama where a patient was awaiting delivery of a liver from an organ donor. An intern assigned to the donor patient removed the airway and the patient stirred. The intern was taken aback; the donor was not yet brain dead as had been previously diagnosed. Not to worry said another physician, “By the time we get the patient to the operating room, she’ll be dead.” Needless-to-say, this did not sit well with the intern who immediately paged another physician... and the drama unfolded.

Some pending divorces look like that medical drama. The parties have their lawyers; the family has long since taken sides; the dispute is underway; there appears an inevitability to the divorce, yet the marriage may not yet be dead.

Typical of marital discord, one party is more dissatisfied than the other and has contemplated separation long before the other. As such, that party is further down the road in terms of emotional adjustment. The initiating party may have talked with family, friends and colleagues, who on the basis of the one-sided account are likely to reinforce their position. As time goes on and given the complaints of the initiating party, he or she finally confronts their spouse with the news and demands a divorce. With time, the spouse catches up emotionally, admits defeat and succumbs to the divorce process of the initiating party.

Perhaps this couple hasn’t been to marital therapy, or if they did, maybe it was an inexperienced or unhelpful therapist. In any event, like a train running downhill on the strength of its own momentum, the separation and divorce moves along.

With children involved, the couple may attend for mediation or an assessment to determine the ongoing care of the children, post separation/divorce. Again, the process moves along.

Somewhere along the way though, couples are advised to take a second and sometimes a third look at the marriage. The question must be asked, “Is this marriage really dead?”

There can be many factors leading to divorce, none of which have to do with a bad marriage.

Parties can be thrown off-track by poor advice given by otherwise well-intentioned friends, family, colleagues and even therapists. Wrong notions can be reinforced. Sometimes just the embarrassment of returning to a relationship when having complained about it can cause some folks to chug on to divorce.

If a marriage is unsatisfactory, it behooves the parties to consider and seek marital counseling - together. Address matters with your spouse forthrightly and seek a resolution, particularly before taking matters to family, friends, colleagues or lawyers.

Divorce does not have to be an inevitability to marital discord. In fact, most marriages will experience turmoil at some time or another. The degree to which people can ride through, adapt, change or accommodate, marriage can provide an even greater sense of satisfaction. Before pronouncing your marriage dead, reconsider if this is the direction you truly want to take or whether the marriage deserves another chance at life. Check the pulse because momentum is hardly a good excuse for divorce.

If you are the family, friend or colleague to whom people turn, consider only one piece of advice... see a marital therapist. Certainly think twice yourself before adding your weight to the momentum of someone else’s divorce.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.