Initial Client Phone Calls

The initial call to the office is an important part of the divorce process. The initial call is often the first step taken by a potential client. Each phone call to the office is different and needs to be handled differently. There can be a wide range of emotions to be sensitive to depending on what stage of the divorce process that the caller is in. Some callers are direct and calm about what their needs are and others may be confused, emotional and often scared to make the initial call. Listening to an emotional caller's story or concerns is critical. It is important to let the caller know that they are heard, have taken a positive step and there are options available to them. Most callers begin by telling me their name and identifying the purpose for their call. Below are examples of different types of calls and how the call can be addressed.

There are typically three types of calls that I receive:

1. A referral (team professional, mental health professional of client, minister, friend, past client, etc).

2. A potential client that found our office on our Web site or our local Practice Group website

3. A legal matter that is out of our scope

Here are how the three are handled:

1. A referral usually begins by identifying who referred them and they will ask to set up a consultation with us. Most referrals are already informed about the Collaborative Process, Mediation or out of court settlement. Previous clients or other Collaborative Professionals such as Health Care Professionals, Financial Neutrals, Mediators or Attorneys typically refer these potential clients.

   a. If the caller is already informed, I begin by asking the basic information such as their name, phone, e-mail, mailing address, spouse's name, children's names and ages and how they learned about our office if they have not already. I also make a note of the referral, any information that they provide regarding their situation and any issues that concern them.
   b. If the caller is not informed about our office but was referred, and does not understand all that we offer, I begin by explaining our main focus. Our office focuses on all out-of-court settlement.

After I gather the information, I let them know that we offers a free one-hour consultation and ask if they would like to schedule an appointment. If their spouse has not already retained a Collaborative Attorney, I offer for their spouse to join them at the consultation if willing. I stress how the consultation will focus on their process options, rather than substantive matters so that they can make a mutually informed decision about how the will move forward. I provide further information about Collaborative and other out-of-court options if they push for more information in the call. Most people want to make an appointment. Sometimes they make an appointment for themselves and then call back later to let me know their spouse will join them.

I listen and empathize without joining in their story and feeding their narrative. I talk about reaching an agreement that works for both of them. Focus on the family and children if they have kids. Stress co-parenting.

2. Potential clients that find us on the Website or local Practice Group Website usually begin by telling me that they are considering a divorce and would like to set up a consultation to discuss their options.

Since the caller did not mention a referral, I begin by asking them if they were referred to us or if they found our office on our website or Internet. The next step is to inform them that we typically settle our cases out of court either through the Collaborative Process or Mediation. If they are not familiar with the Collaborative Process or Mediation, I briefly explain the different out of court options available to them and ask if they think the out of court process will work for them and their spouse.

If they respond that they are interested, I offer to set up a free initial consultation, gather the basic information and schedule a time for the consultation. I also invite their spouse to join them in the meeting if willing.

3. A call regarding a legal matter that is out of our scope usually begin with the potential client asking to talk to an attorney and they often provide a lot of information about their legal issue. These calls are always different and can take up my time if not redirected.

After a minute or so, I can determine if the potential client is calling regarding a divorce or a different legal matter. If the call is out of our scope or a contested matter, I politely inform them that we practice Collaborative Divorce, Mediation and out of court settlement. I will then suggest that they contact an attorney that specializes in the area of law that addresses their particular issue.