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# < 'No One Meant To Be In My Office': A Divorce Lawyer's Tips On Staying Together

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LULU GARCIA-NAVARRO, HOST:

And now a word about marriage from who else but a divorce lawyer.

JAMES SEXTON: There are very few behaviors that end so badly so frequently that we would just sign up for with such reckless abandon.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: That's James Sexton, Esq. He spent his career helping people out of marriages. And it inspired him to write a how-to book, how to stay together that is. It's called "If You're In My Office, It's Already Too Late." I asked him, what does a divorce lawyer who's seen the worst kind of behaviors in human relationships know about how to do it right?

SEXTON: You know what? It actually happened very much by accident. You tend to bring your attention always as a divorce lawyer to these crazy stories, these knockdown, drag-out stories of ugly public divorces. And I found myself thinking that, you know, over these years I've seen so much of what people do wrong, that you could probably reverse engineer that into talking about what they might have done differently and could have done right to stay out of the office. And, really, that's how came about.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: OK. But I've got to bring up the nanny...

SEXTON: OK.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: ...Cause, of course, you know, I'm married. I've got a kid. And so you give this advice - you should vow never, under any circumstances, to hire an attractive babysitter. It's just going to make everyone sad.

SEXTON: Yes.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: You have a lot of nanny fascination stories, as you call them.

SEXTON: I do. You know, and they're not my personal nanny fascination stories.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: (Laughter).

SEXTON: I don't want to give that impression. But yeah. I mean, the nanny thing is a thing. And it's amazing to me because, again, I learn about this sitting at the other end of the desk from people that have gone through it. And I don't - I'm not speculating. I'm doing ethnographic research. You know, I'm like the Margaret Mead of divorce here.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: (Laughter).

SEXTON: I'm sitting there with my nose in it. People are cheating with the nanny. People are running off with the nanny. Husbands and wives are running off with the nanny, as I talk about in the book.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah. You've got a woman ending up with the nanny. That was an amazing story.

SEXTON: And that was only one of several. You know, a lot didn't make the cutting-room floor on this thing.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Wow.

SEXTON: So there really is a nanny thing. And I explain in the book why I think that is. But I think that a lot of it has to do with the fact that the nanny has a life outside of the family.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: And what I try to talk about is how spouses, how wives in particular could leverage that nanny fascination into improving their own daily life and to having time for themselves. When people get divorced, one of the things that happens right away, if they have children, is they have time with their children that's very defined. And they have time without their children that's very defined. And I have to tell you I don't know why divorced people should have all the fun.

SEXTON: I don't know why an intact couple that cares about each other and wants each other to be happy couldn't say to each other, you know what? Wednesday night - it's your night with the kids every week. Or this is my weekend without the kids - and really taking time to yourself to develop who you are. And in the process, it actually makes you more attractive to your spouse.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah. I guess it boils down to, don't wait around until you are divorced to get what you want. Reinvent yourself with your partner.

SEXTON: Right. And do it sooner rather than later. Everyone who gets married wants it to last. No one can pretend in this curated world we live in, where everyone puts everything on social media, and it's always the best version of what they're doing. Divorce is refreshing in the sense that you can't pretend you meant to be in my office. No one meant to be in my office.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I'm glad you mentioned social media because Facebook is mentioned in this book. Another reason to hate Facebook.

SEXTON: You know, I feel like I've piled on here because...

GARCIA-NAVARRO: (Laughter).

SEXTON: ...When I wrote the book, you know, all this stuff hadn't broken. And I feel like Mark Zuckerberg is down, and I'm kicking him. So I feel a little guilty.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah. You wrote this chapter. It's called If You Were Designing An Infidelity-Generating Machine, It Would Be Facebook.

SEXTON: Facebook is amazing. I really owe Mark Zuckerberg a holiday card or something because Facebook invites infidelity. It's a perfect breeding ground. You know, there's all these benign reasons you could be looking at Facebook. You know, I'm checking out the restaurant that just opened down the street, or I'm looking at pictures of my sister's kids. But in reality, you can be looking at how your high school girlfriend looks in a bikini on her vacation photos. You know, and by the way, she's only going to post the best possible pictures of her. So with Facebook, we have so much to compete with. Anywhere you are, whatever you're doing, you can be cruising for new romantic connections if you want to.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: So let's get back to the advice part. Other than leaving Facebook, not sleeping with the nanny, what can you do to preserve a union?

SEXTON: I think the core answer isn't that sexy. What it really is is just stay connected to your spouse. Just communicate with your spouse. Remember that you fell in love with a person who had unique traits. And I encourage people to just step back from their marriage, to take a very clear inventory of it and to really pay attention.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Some of these stories are so poignant. And I remember the one specifically about the woman who realized her marriage was over because, all of a sudden, her husband didn't buy her favorite granola anymore.

SEXTON: Yeah. That story actually still really kind of hits me. We were sitting outside of the courtroom, and we had some time to kill in between sessions. And we were just chatting the way that you sometimes do with your clients when you've gotten to know them really well. And I asked her a question I ask most of my clients at some point, which is, was there a moment, you know, where you knew your marriage was over? And she said to me there was this kind of granola that she liked that was only sold in one particular health food store.

And her husband used to just always notice when she was running low, and he would buy it for her. And it made her feel special. It made her feel like, oh, you know, he notices, and he just wants me to be happy. You know, and those are the things that really show someone that we care about them. And she told me this very painful story about one morning realizing that the granola was empty. So she left it out on the

counter and waited for him to do something like buy new granola. He just never did. And she said there was something in her heart in that moment that just went, OK, this is over. He's checked out now.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I want to ask you this because you end the book with the advice you give to clients when they're sitting in your office for the first time. And so should any of us ever be that unlucky, what is that advice?

SEXTON: You know, I just tell people that they should try to see the best version of themselves in whatever choice they make. It's really hard to stay together. And it's really hard to split up. My advice to everyone is stay out of my office if you can. But if you need to come to my office, I hope I see the most compassionate, thoughtful version of you. I hope I see a version of you that focuses on your kids and that focuses on ending your relationship with dignity.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: James Sexton - his book is "If You're In My Office, It's Already Too Late." Thank you so much.

SEXTON: Thanks so much.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "LOVE AND MARRIAGE")

FRANK SINATRA: (Singing) Love and marriage. Love and marriage.

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