

The Two Roads to Divorce

Reviewed by Donald T. Saposnek

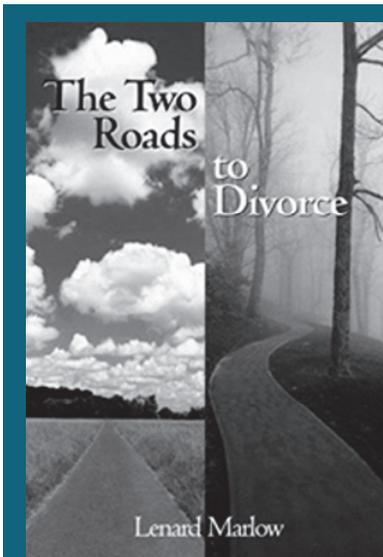
Lenard Marlow's latest book, *The Two Roads to Divorce*, is unique both in format and content. Publishing this work as a self-published book has allowed the author to format this reference-free paperback into chapters of only two to five pages each, which makes for easy, focused reading on a range of topics. The book is written for couples contemplating divorce. Marlow's message is simple: Choose the mediation road—not the adversarial road. However, his message is woven into a rich and textured tapestry. Born of almost 40 years of seasoned experience as a divorce professional, he offers sound advice, through a deeply compassionate delivery.

The first section of the book ("Starting Out") is filled with simple, common sense and accurate insights into the dynamics of marital relationships. Written with understanding, support, and clarity, each chapter leads off with an insightful gem. These include:

"People do not get divorced because they want to get divorced. They get divorced because they don't know what else to do." (p. 17)

"Husbands and wives commonly divorce one another for the very reasons that they married one another." (p.19)

"(Husbands and wives) get divorced because they are different people." (p.24)



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"Husbands and wives stay married for very different reasons than they get married." (p.31)

"The only thing worse than a bad marriage is a terrible divorce." (p.40)

"If you want a better answer, you will have to ask a better question." (p.81)

Part II ("Personal Choices") leads off with Chapter 7, titled "Staying in Control." Marlow notes how people contemplating divorce run off to libraries and bookstores to read up on divorce. He lists all the kinds of advice these books offer, then concludes, "Finally, they will seek out books that will tell them what their legal rights are, though never what their legal obligations are" (p.49). Indeed, much of the emphasis of the book is to encourage couples to not buy into divorce as a legal problem, but to see it as a personal problem for the couple to solve, just as they solved the many problems during their marriage (even those that were very difficult to solve).

Marlow encourages couples to operate more from a personal/moral context (but not one that is judgmental) than from a legal context. He encourages spouses to consider their respective obligations toward each other and their children, rather than focusing on the more traditional emphasis of their legal rights. Marlow presents no illusions about divorce mediation being wonderful. He simply makes the case for it being the lesser of two evils—the better road to take.

Chapter 8 begins with, "A marriage is about two people. A divorce is about two people as well," summing up the point that couples contemplating divorces have two

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choices: going it alone (in the traditional, adversarial way), or going it together (using divorce mediation). Marlow makes the case for couples taking charge to prevent things from getting out of hand: “There is only one way to prevent that from happening. That is to acknowledge that this is still something the two of you have to do together. In fact, that is the simple message of this book. The two of you can either go off together and work with one another, or you can each go off on your own, resort to self-help, and work against one another. That is your choice... and the rest is just talk” (p. 52). This point is made particularly well in his Chapter 18 (“Telling the Children: When, How and What”), where he emphasizes the critical importance of the couple together telling their children about the pending divorce.

In the next few chapters, he presents the qualities and mythologies of the adversarial approach to divorce, including the narrow, one-sided nature of truths, the tendency to create self-fulfilling prophecies, and the potential influences of what he calls “The Greek Chorus.” This is his version of Jan Johnston’s “tribal warfare”—that is, the process of friends and

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family taking sides, giving well-intentioned advice (e.g. “watch out for yourself”), and making adversaries of the couple through their divorce. To Marlow, succumbing to this, in essence, is taking the wrong road.

In Part III (“Finding Your Way—Avoiding the Hazards”), Marlow strongly, repeatedly, and effectively encourages the reader to maintain a cognitive, rationalistic perspective in making choices throughout the process of divorce. He encourages the reader to stay focused and maintain a constructive story or narrative about themselves.

In Part IV (“The Fork in the Road”), he describes the “little secret” in Chapter 28—the fact that

adversarial divorce proceedings “favor unhealthy (read: rigid) people.” His contrasting of the adversarial with the mediation approach to divorce leads into discussions of clients’ expectations regarding fairness, closure, legal rights, and the notion of compromise.

This will be a really helpful book for clients contemplating divorce. It is filled with compassion, understanding, and good, sound advice. It is easy reading and chock-full of psychological, emotional, and legal insights, and is quite accurate regarding the intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that lead couples down the “wrong road.” It will be of much help to couples in preparation for mediation, and will serve as a sobering deterrent to divorce wars. I strongly recommend this book for your clients. It will be a wonderful asset to both your psychotherapy and mediation practices.

Donald T. Saposnek, Ph.D. is a clinical child psychologist, family therapist, child custody mediator and trainer, and author of Mediating Child Custody Disputes: A Strategic Approach. He has been a member of the Psychology Faculty at the University of California, Santa Cruz for 25 years.