



Family Law Attorney Jillian Gross: “5 Things You Need to Know to Survive and Thrive After A Divorce”



An interview with Ilyssa Panitz

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Attorney Jillian Gross says, when you are going through a divorce use your voice! Don't be afraid to ask your lawyer questions and learn what is going on. You are entitled to know!

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someone tells you what happened in their own divorce, they are leaving out half of the story. Don't get me wrong, leaning on friends is important for support, but not for legal advice. People also get caught up in small issues, dividing of personal property, do you take Martin Luther King or President's Weekend this year? If you can see the bigger picture and try to think five years down the road about how you will feel about these smaller things, it will help.

Divorces are like snowflakes. Every single one is different and unique in their own way. Depending on where you reside, it will always snow at some point in the year and sadly, there will always be couples who want to get divorced. That is where [Jillian Gross](#) comes in. Since 2003, this legal eagle has been practicing law in The Big Apple. Beginning in 2006, Gross joined the midtown firm [Aronson, Mayefsky & Sloan, LLP](#), where she currently works as a Partner. Gross has extensive experience with not only matrimonial and family law, but she also helps clients with pre and post-nuptial agreements, custody and access, divorce negotiation, litigation, equitable distribution, as well as spousal and child support issues. Although Gross sees the good, the bad and the ugly that can come with unraveling a marriage she also adds, "I enjoy what I do because I learn something new from every case. Whether it is about people, the law, or something they own that I had no prior experience with it is always interesting."

Ilyssa Panitz: Let's begin with the story of you. Tell me a bit about yourself?

Jillian Gross: I grew up in Manhattan. I went to school at Ramaz on The Upper East Side from nursery through 12th grade and then to Brandeis for college. I then went to Brooklyn Law School. As I kid, my main interest was playing Barbie and sports.

Ilyssa Panitz: What got you interested in becoming a lawyer?

Jillian Gross: My father is an attorney so I always thought that was a path I would take. In college I had a Women's Studies professor who just amazed me in how she thought and how she presented ideas, etc. After taking her class I was her teaching assistant and learned that she had gone to law school before getting her teaching degree and that law school had shaped the way she thought and approached things. That sort of sealed the deal for me in terms of deciding to apply to law school.

Ilyssa Panitz: Why family law?

Jillian Gross: Right out of law school I was an Assistant District Attorney in the Bronx. I did appellate work which gave me a lot of writing, research, and oral argument experience. I enjoyed my three years there, but it was also not a long term-plan for me for many reasons. I honestly was not sure what kind of law I wanted to practice but the more I looked into Family Law and spoke with friends and others who were already in the field, I realized it was an interesting area of practice because it touches on many different aspects of life. While you get to deal with clients during what can be a hard time in their lives, you also get experience valuing different types of businesses, learning about real estate, understanding financial matters as well as emotional and psychological issues.

Ilyssa Panitz: When did you get married?

Jillian Gross: I was married for the first time in 2003.

Ilyssa Panitz: When did you finalize your divorce?

Jillian Gross: I was divorced in 2010.

Ilyssa Panitz: First time?

Jillian Gross: I got remarried in 2011.

Ilyssa Panitz: Congratulations! Aside from representing people going through a divorce, you yourself went through one. What was it like being on the other side?

Jillian Gross: My divorce was quite unlike the ones I deal with on a daily basis as an attorney. I was very young, we had no children, and very little divide. I certainly had some understanding of the process and how it works.

Ilyssa Panitz: How would you describe the process?

Jillian Gross: The process for a divorce in New York is different based on whether, or not the court is involved. Either way, it can be frustratingly slow for the parties involved and usually that is out of anyone's control. There are assets that need to be valued, which takes time and there are decisions to be made about custody which often-times people do not see eye to eye on, at least at the beginning. I always tell my clients that the process is dependent on how each party behaves and on who they each hire to represent them.

Ilyssa Panitz: Did you see your job differently and how you represent clients given what you went through?

Jillian Gross: I try not to personalize my job too much. I do find that I have certain perspective as someone who has been divorced but each divorce is different just like each family is different so I try very hard not to make it about my situation and only to offer personal advice when it is relevant and on point. Some clients find it very helpful to hear that I have been through something similar, to them but again, that would be a young

couple, first marriage and no kids. In other words, someone I can relate my experience to.

Ilyssa Panitz: Divorces can be highly emotional and sometimes people feel like their heads are in a fog, especially when it comes time to making decisions or going to court. Did you have this experience when you were going through your divorce?

Jillian Gross: Mine was emotional but not because of the divorce process.

Ilyssa Panitz: How were you able to balance and separate your work while navigating your own divorce? Did you turn to someone for support?

Jillian Gross: I was very good at compartmentalizing my two worlds. My managing partner represented me, and he was an amazing friend and ally during the process. I relied heavily on my family and friends as well.

Ilyssa Panitz: Being that you were on the other side of the table, what about the divorce process was the most surprising thing you saw/learned?

Jillian Gross: I learned patience. There are two people involved and both people are not necessarily at the same point emotionally at each step.

Ilyssa Panitz: Why is getting a divorce so time consuming?

Jillian Gross: It really depends what there is to distribute or agree on. From a financial standpoint, it is time consuming because you must spend a lot of time figuring out what is to be divided, the values, and how to separate. You then must spend time determining support amounts, which really vary on a case by case basis. Of course, if there are custody issues that can be the most time-consuming part of the process.

Ilyssa Panitz: Do you find one side (the woman or the man) is at a disadvantage when it comes to getting a divorce?

Jillian Gross: Not at all. I think that the spouse who is not in charge of the finances, including paying bills, certainly has more of a learning curve when it comes to what the family has, etc. But in most cases, it is not impossible to catch up or become educated as the process moves forward. In each divorce, both spouses take on new roles in their new lives that they may not have had to do in their married life. That includes paying bills, going to work outside the home, making dinner for the kids, scheduling play dates and the like. I always tell my clients that the reaction to feel “stupid” because they don’t know what they spend on something or understand how the mortgage works, is something they have to put out of their heads. That may not have been their “job” in the marriage and now they will learn the new job.

Ilyssa Panitz: When a couple is going through a divorce, are the expectations more demanding on a woman than a man especially if the pair have minor children?

Jillian Gross: I try to think that the world at least in New York is moving away from gender roles. But the reality is that in many cases, the woman is still doing a lot of the parenting work even if they are also working full time. That being said, each has a responsibility to be involved in the case and to continue their “regular job” of working outside the home and caring for the children so the demands are felt on both sides for different reasons

Ilyssa Panitz: What if I gave you a magic wand and said you can use the powers to change something in the system to make it better for people going through a divorce. What would you do?

Jillian Gross: I would get the judges more help so that matters can move forward more efficiently. Right now, the courts are very back logged, even before Covid-19 and especially now. If there were more court personnel, each case could get more attention from the courts. Maybe cases in litigation could then move to conclusion faster or the judges and their staff could be more available to help with settlement. They for sure do the best they can, don't get me wrong.

Ilyssa Panitz: Did you feel you were better prepared to go through your divorce given your professional background?

Jillian Gross: Not really. Obviously, I had the legal support, but nothing really prepares you for the emotional toll of a divorce. You should never underestimate the emotional side of divorce even if the process is quick and the divorce moves quickly. It is still an extremely emotional journey and the end of something that at one point in your life you thought would be forever.

Ilyssa Panitz: How did you go about finding the right attorney to represent you and for others who are looking for legal counsel, how do they go about finding a lawyer?

Jillian Gross: For me, it was easy, my firm helped me. When looking for an attorney it is crucial to find someone you feel you can speak to and you are comfortable speaking with. While your attorney is not your friend, you should be able to have a relationship where you can be open and honest with them and get from them or their associate the attention you need and deserve. It is important to find someone you can afford and more expensive does not always mean better. You want someone who you don't have to think twice about calling, in other words, should I not ask the question because I cannot afford to pay for the answer? That is a bad situation, and you want someone who will be responsive to your questions and take the time to explain things to you in a way you can understand.

Ilyssa Panitz: What questions should someone ask during the consultation?

Jillian Gross: Ask about billing rates, ask about how cases get staffed. Ask questions to understand the law and what you may or may not be entitled to. Also understand that the attorney is hearing your version of the story only and cannot give full advice about your case at the initial meeting. A good attorney will not sell you a bill of goods at the first meeting or tell you that you will absolutely get X or Y without seeing the details of your financial life or

personal life if related to custody, there is no possibility of making such promises on day one. Be wary of an attorney who makes promises like that.

Ilyssa Panitz: How should the client budget their finances, given how expensive divorces can be?

Jillian Gross: This is a hard question to answer because it is so case specific. In New York, there is a presumption in the statute that the more “monied” party will pay counsel fees for both sides. That, however, does not always mean that one party will pay all fees. What each party will receive by way of assets in the divorce will be an ultimate factor in how fees get paid as will how each party behaves in the process. Sometimes marital assets are used to pay both sets of attorneys.

Ilyssa Panitz: What is the biggest obstacle that slows down the divorce process? Is it couples fighting over money, deciding custody, dividing assets?

Jillian Gross: Yes, it can be any one of those things because as I said before, these matters take time to decide and work out.

Ilyssa Panitz: What are the most important aspects you advise your clients when negotiating a divorce (with kids and without kids)?

Jillian Gross: To try not to sweat the small stuff. Not every issue is the biggest issue. It is not about winning, no one is a winner in this process and treat your spouse how you would want to be treated especially if you have children and hope to parent the children for many more years after a divorce.

Ilyssa Panitz: Why should they retain an accountant during a divorce?

Jillian Gross: Usually the lawyers will advise if an accountant is necessary for the specific issues in the case.

Ilyssa Panitz: What are the most common mistakes people going through a divorce make and given both your professional and personal experience, how can they avoid making them?

Jillian Gross: People too often compare their case to someone else’s case. “my friend told me...” “my friend said she got...” Those are the most dangerous ways to start a sentence. No two divorces are alike and more often than not, when someone tells you what happened in their own divorce, they are leaving out half of the story. Don’t get me wrong, leaning on friends is important for support, but not for legal advice. People also get caught up in small issues, dividing of personal property, do you take Martin Luther King or President’s Weekend this year? If you can see the bigger picture and try to think five years down the road about how you will feel about these smaller things, it will help.

Ilyssa Panitz: These errors can be costly and reflect on their invoice. What do you advise them to keep the bills down?

Jillian Gross: People typically figure that out after the first month or two if money is a concern. They stop calling the lawyers as much and turn to their therapists for advice on certain issues.

Ilyssa Panitz: Divorce is a great time to find yourself again and begin a whole new life. Did you give yourself a makeover and, also, what do you advise others do to start over?

Jillian Gross: I certainly learned a lot about myself and life, but I would not say I gave myself a makeover. My view is that starting over is hard enough, do not put too much pressure on yourself to start over with a bang or make any huge changes. As you get farther away from the divorce and begin life on your own again, you will find the change that suits you if that change is necessary. Not everyone learns about themselves in a divorce, unfortunately because not everyone is ready to learn about themselves. But hopefully as time goes by and perhaps a new relationship comes up, you start to realize what is important, what is not, and what about yourself is good or bad or could use improvement.

Ilyssa Panitz: I always look at the pros and cons of every situation. What would you say the pros and cons are for getting a divorce?

Jillian Gross: Divorce does not have to be a sad time. Sometimes people just are not meant to be married. Some find they are better friends than lovers and are better parents to their children apart than they were together. The pro is getting out of a stale or bad relationship and starting fresh, even if it means being without a partner. The cons are also starting over and experiencing things that might take you out of your comfort zone and be hard at the beginning. The con can easily change into a pro though!

Ilyssa Panitz: What is the number one take away you are proud of after finalizing your divorce?

Jillian Gross: We were both respectful of the other and kept our issues to ourselves as opposed to broadcasting it to all, of our friends and acquaintances. At the end of the day, acting like a lady or a gentleman is a very good feeling.

Ilyssa Panitz: What 5 things do people need to know to thrive and survive during and after a divorce?

Jillian Gross: One: Hire a good attorney.

Two: Trust that attorney.

Three: Be your own advocate and ask questions and stay educated about the process and do not put your head in the sand.

Four: Act well and treat others the way you would want to be treated.

Five: It is not about winning. It is about getting to the end with the least number of scars and making the best deal possible for yourself and your children.