

What I know about ... Divorce

Who: Karen Stewart

Age: 48

Experience: As an entrepreneur, Stewart has started more than half a dozen finance-based businesses, including an insurance company and a wealth advisory stock-management firm; she has her MBA and is a Certified Divorce Financial Analyst; in 2006, after her own bitter divorce took five years to settle and

cost her \$500,000 in legal bills, Stewart started Fairway Divorce Solutions, which keeps divorce mediation out of the court system, making the process quicker, less expensive and, she says, more practical; Fairway Divorce Solutions has 39 franchises, and counting, across North America; you can read her side of her own divorce story in her book, *Clean Break: How to divorce with dignity and move on with your life*; she still believes in love and marriage.

■ “Every minute of my divorce was hell and it just did not need to be that way. If I knew then what I was getting into, all of the nasty back and forth through the court system, I’m not sure I would have gone down that path. I would have at least considered a different strategy.”

■ “We are pain avoiders and pleasure seekers. People divorce when the pain of staying is more than the pain of leaving.”

■ “One of the most challenging things for anyone going through a divorce is dealing with their emotions. The best way for people who are divorcing to feel empowered is to take ownership of the ending. Unfortunately, many get caught up in the no-win blaming mode, which costs time and money.”

■ “You don’t have to be amicable to divorce — most couples aren’t — but the traditional system

makes it even more difficult because it pits one person against the other, with both competing to get the upper hand.”

■ “You can move through divorce two ways. You can be proactive, or you can be a victim. If you are proactive, you reduce chaos, save most of the assets you have gathered and, most importantly, reduce the impact on your children.”

■ “It is normal to feel afraid of what might happen in the process of getting divorced. If you can understand the process and know where you are going, then you can feel more confident about the outcome. We use a unique step-by-step model that takes a couple through all of the decisions that need to be made. In this way, we create empowered decision makers who have much less fear and make better decisions.”

■ “Divorce comes down to two things: money and kids. If you deal with the money first and address the issues around this very sensitive topic, by the time you start deciding parenting issues, the waters have usually calmed and the kids won’t be used as pawns. Never deal with money and kids at the same time.”

■ “Parenting plans that split time with children based on percentages is limiting and not always practical. It is much better to focus on what works for all of the parties and put together a schedule that works for everyone. The best people to do that are the parents and certainly not the courts.”

■ “When you are evaluating assets, even costs that seem like they should be fixed can become quite fluid. There is a natural tendency to inflate what one party will get. There can be great disparity and argument with regard to, for example, house