

# Divorce in the Workplace

*“The experience of divorce and separation is traumatic. Prior to the shock of the news of my husband of ten years having an affair and wanting to leave, I was a confident, effective and generally happy person. I held a senior, executive position at a prestigious school and was on the clear path to a successful, productive and professional future. It is difficult to articulate clearly the profound impact that my marital disintegration had on me and my professional identity and work life: work was no longer a priority for me. I was there but absent – and I am sure my behaviour and attitude had a negative impact on all my colleagues. Because I had little support at work, I eventually resigned. I wish I had the great support at SDA sooner.”*

Mother of Two, Executive, Education



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Divorce has rightly been recognised as the second most stressful life event after the death of a child or spouse. What is often overlooked, however, is how divorce and separation dramatically impacts on a person's working life, their business colleagues and subsequently their workplace. With more than one third of marriages – and even more de-facto relationships – in Australia ending each year, divorce has now been highlighted as a hidden cost of business that many organisations are ill-equipped to deal with.

Recent research has found that the average employee misses 168 hours of work in the year that he or she goes through a separation.<sup>1</sup>

The average 'presenteeism' during divorce (whereby an employee is present but not actively working because of their anxiety and stress) has been estimated as being equivalent to that employee missing 4.5 weeks of work.

Significant also for employers is that 50% of employees leave their employment following divorce due to increased stress, new demands and financial needs.

In our view, such research does not paint a full picture of the pervasive nature of divorce on individual employees. In particular, the impact of divorce on an employee's work relationships is hard to estimate, with colleagues and team members having to deal with a person who is distracted and often very emotional.

With more than one third of marriages (not including de facto relationships) ending in Australia each year, divorce has now been highlighted as a hidden cost of

business that many organisations are ill equipped to deal with.<sup>2</sup>

A recent survey of employees in Britain found that only 10% of employees believed their employer offered appropriate support for divorcing employees.<sup>3</sup>

Fifty percent of those surveyed who were separated believed that the employers need to offer more support and informed assistance to divorcing employees.

*"Divorce meant that my ability to be a good manager – to manage others - became almost impossible. It was hard to support others and also be productive - and creative - when my world was in turmoil. A supportive workplace is critical!! Jacquie was always there to help me deal with all my divorce legal and parenting issues which allowed me to have more energy and focus at work".*

Mother of Two, Director and Executive

***Most companies now see the commercial and ethical value in supporting employees through divorce.***

Many companies are now understanding that the key to their employee's sustainable productivity is to meet their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs.<sup>4</sup> By supporting their people, they free them up so that they can bring greater and more positive energy to their work.

Assisting and supporting your employees through the divorce process not only helps your business because of increased



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productivity, BUT, we believe that your employee's appreciation of your support during this life-changing time will inevitably lead to them becoming more engaged and loyal. Your support will assist your employee from a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual perspective.

## SDA - Separation and Divorce Specialists

*Our overarching goal is for our clients to resolve their separation and divorce issues with their former partner in an efficient, empathetic and supported way that will help them both move forward with integrity and fewer regrets.*

Separation and Divorce Advisors provide specialised divorce strategy, advice and support to assist clients navigate the legal, financial, parental and emotional aspects of their separation and divorce. Our aim is to help our clients make good and well informed decisions about their divorce in a supportive and empathetic environment. In particular, we help our clients to:

- formulate a divorce plan which includes their parental and financial goals;
- understand the divorce process from a legal perspective;
- prepare a negotiation strategy, for mediation and other communications with their former partner;
- obtain any relevant family law or financial advice – and to assist our clients manage such relationships during the divorce process; and
- support them in their parenting and the more practical day to day issues that arise during divorce.

*"SD Advisors are an essential service for all employers who have staff going through a separation and/or divorce! I am in an executive position in a very large public company. My role directly impacts upon the safety of my organisation's customers and fellow employees. During my divorce I found myself in positions of extreme stress. The problem is that you don't know where to turn. My productivity fell and sometimes I just couldn't go to work. All I needed was some direction in an area I knew nothing about. What made it possible for me not only to function but to do my job was advice and direction from SDA. When you have the experienced advice of someone who is an expert and can guide you, resolve the issue, give you a plan and/or calm you down, you feel reassured and more confident. Their advice enabled me to do my job. As a man, I had never needed or felt like I needed counselling, financial or other advice. Now I needed them all – and SDA were able to point me in the right direction. My employer was fantastic about my absenteeism but Jacquie and her referrals kept me employed during the most stressful period of my life"*

Father of Three, Executive, Major Australian Public Company

## Help when your employees need it.

*We believe that one of the most effective ways that stress can be reduced during the divorce process is by having an advisor readily available to support them who can help them formulate an individual divorce plan.*

Unlike psychologists and lawyers, we do much of our work on the phone and are then more readily available to our clients (we can respond to urgency). We are committed to providing valuable, supportive and cost-effective advice in a prompt manner, always responding to our clients within 24 hours. This is because we understand how important it is for our clients to know that their advisor is available to them at all times – sometimes all that is needed is a quick call



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for our clients to recalibrate and be able to refocus.

We offer ongoing, regular support or merely occasional guidance – whatever suits our client’s particular needs.

Our Advisers have backgrounds in psychology and/or law. We are based in Sydney, Melbourne and the Central Coast NSW although support is offered Australia-wide.

Our current hourly rates are \$185 per hour plus GST.

*“Going through separation and divorce was easily the most difficult challenge I have experienced. It had a profound impact on my life – including all areas of my work. There I found it very difficult to focus, make objective and efficient decisions as I needed to as CEO - and generally lacked enthusiasm. I didn’t want to go to work as I felt I had little support there.*

*After engaging a specialist advisor, I was able to find ongoing and readily available support and advice. This absolutely helped me to become more effective whilst also managing the emotional and financial challenges that divorce brings.”*

CEO of large organisation, Father of three

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis, John, “The Business of Love: Work/Life Balance Research” 2014.  
<sup>2</sup> Kourlis, R. “It is just Good Business: The Case for Supporting Reform in Divorce Court” Family Court Review 50(4) Oct 2012, p551-552.  
<sup>3</sup> Resolution, Survey of Divorce (ComRes), 2014.  
<sup>4</sup> The Energy Project and Harvard Business Review “The Human Era @ Work”, 2014.

## Dealing with Separation and Divorce in the Workplace – some key tips

*(An extract from our more comprehensive article entitled “Dealing with Separation and Divorce in the Workplace”.)*

### For Managers

DO have compassion, show empathy and be supportive. You want to create an environment in which employees can feel safe enough to confide in you.

DO refer your employees to the relevant EAP in your company.

DO create boundaries. Oversharing on your own experiences may lead to an expectation of personal ongoing support from you. Keep advice to a minimum.

### For Employees

DO understand that though you understand why you may not be as productive or distracted, your co-workers and your boss may not. Let your boss know the situation and reassure them that you will do all you can to limit time missed at work.

DO be grateful for the distraction that work can give and try not to overburden your work colleagues with your emotions and disclosures.



**Separation and Divorce Advisors**

**Phone 0413 318 309**

**Email: [info@sdadvisors.com.au](mailto:info@sdadvisors.com.au)**