



**Featuring:
Cherie Morris**

#21: Women On The Move: Dear Divorce Coach...

Transcript

Heike: Welcome to the Pursue Your Spark Podcast. I am so excited, guys. I have my good friend, Cherie Morris here today from Dear Divorce Coach. She says she's a lawyer and a mother by training. She's in mid-life and has experienced divorce herself. She is now, taking care of five children, four of her own, plus an additional one from her partner. Her passion and her professions have become writing and teaching, coaching people through divorces. I want to welcome Cherie. Tell us more about yourself.

Cherie: I would love to, Heike. First of all, thanks for having me. I know we've known each other for a long time. I think when we thought about it, it was actually, since about 2001. I know both of us have seen lots of changes in our lives since then.

My kids are growing up. I still have two at home, and my partner's daughter as well. Also, I transitioned what was the practice of law, not in the family law arena, to a full-time writing position with a writing partner. We wrote a novel called *Desperate in DC*, that was really about our lives in this town. After that time, I knew I wanted to have the experience of working with people based on my own divorce. I started exploring how I could do that. It was really the experience that I think many people, in particular, I know you support a lot of women, so I'm happy to kind of address how I work with women.

I found that although I had a good lawyer, an excellent legal professional, a good therapist, even a good realtor, and financial planner, what I was missing was that very practical side of things in divorce. How do I communicate with my soon-to-be-ex? If you have a partner that doesn't make that easy, doesn't make co-parenting easy, what's the right approach? What's the right strategy for dealing with your kids and how to share the news of divorce, and parenting them at each of their different stages? I found a training for divorce coaching, and because I was already a lawyer, I brought my analytical framework to the process and started working with people, coaching them at every stage of divorce. I'm also a parent coordinator. I will help parents come up with custody solutions. How does it look? Who spends time with which parent when? What's in the best interest of the children? How do they resolve some of those parenting disputes? I now full-time support people in both of those critical jobs.

Heike: Now, Dear Divorce Coach, it's such an endearing title. How did you come up with naming your new venture in business, Dear Divorce Coach?

Cherie: Because I spent a lot of time writing in my prior profession, actually more as an author than as a lawyer, I always loved the idea of being an advice seeker and an advice giver. I think that as we enter mid-life, mainly as women, but also men, we look to people that we trust, to people that we know, to people that have more experience doing things than we do. It was an intriguing title, in the sense that you're just reaching out to someone who might know a little bit more in this area than you, Dear Divorce Coach. And let me tell you what my situation is and what can you advise me to do.

Heike: You shared with me that you already have other published books on Amazon.

Cherie: Yes. In fact, I had written this novel with a friend Penelope Bell. She was a neighbor. Our children grew up really, together. We had written this novel called Desperate in DC.

Heike: A very juicy book about Washington, DC.

Cherie: It's still on Amazon so that people can read it. Moreover, the idea was to make what can be difficult situations, kind of funny, and a little salacious. It's a great beach read. So yes, so thank you for mentioning it.

Heike: But you mentioned you had another book that ties in directly with Dear Divorce Coach, also on Amazon.

Cherie: That's right. My experience, I think, writing the novel indeed informed my ability and knowledge of how I could contribute to other types of writing. When I started my company, Dear Divorce Coach, I understood that people sometimes need a real practical guide. What should I do if I want to get divorced? What should I do if I've been served with a divorce complaint?

So, I wrote this book called: Should I Stay or Should I Go? It addresses with some specificity each category of contemplation in divorce. The thing I love about it, I work with clients on a daily basis, many of whom know little to nothing about divorce, some of whom know a great deal. However, each one of them has, in turn, came back to me and said, "Gosh, I didn't think about health insurance. I'm so glad you mentioned that in the book. I didn't think about the custody schedule for my kids, that it would be important perhaps, to consider having consistent days of the week for my schedule, for their schedule. I didn't think about the emotional repercussions of divorce. I had looked at the business side." Or conversely, "I only looked at the business side." I think for women, in particular, the idea that you need to understand your finances before you divorce is extraordinarily essential.

Heike: It's so funny that you mentioned that because we both have gone through a divorce. One of my stories is when I divorced; I did not think about it. I just walked into my then husband's office, and I said, "I want a divorce." I had not contemplated what would happen afterward. I ended up with \$300 a month to pay the rent, pay the food, cloths the kids and I have two kids. I had not thought about the financial consequences that a divorce may bring.

It was an impulsive move. I've told this story before, but my girlfriend invited us over for dinner to feed us because I could not afford food for the kids. Money is such a non-spoken issue when it comes to divorce. Do you want to share some thoughts on that?

Cherie: I sure can. First, I want to thank you for sharing your personal experience of divorce. Because I think money is still like sex, a taboo topic, right? Nobody wants to acknowledge it openly. One of the things I believe to be so important is acknowledging both of those things. So I really, no subject for me 's taboo. I think knowing you long enough, Heike, that's the case, as well. And I love that about you. I think if we can't be explicit about these things, then we are not well served in divorce.

For example, on the money side, I ask my clients very specifically whether they even understand or know, men and women, the universe of assets in the marriage, the budgets they follow. Do they manage the money? Do they know what the money is? It's not to embarrass, or humiliate, or shame anyone. It's so that they can gain an understanding. Sometimes the right time to divorce is not the day you walk through the office and talk to me. Sometimes you need to plan, plan for your finances. Plan for the children. Plan for your job. All of these categories are important.

Yes, you're so right, emotion drives divorce. Sometimes it's not even, "I decided I'm angry with my husband or wife today, and I'm going to divorce." But it's a slow drip over time. Then there's the straw that breaks the camel's back. So you think, "Well, I've thought about this for ten years, or five years, or five minutes." But really, that doesn't mean you've planned for it. So my push is to get people to prepare. They don't always have the luxury if they've been served with a complaint for divorce. But certainly, I can point out the information they should seek right away.

Heike: What do most women come to you first, when they are in the transition of a separation or divorce?

Cherie: I see more women now who are contemplating, and I'd like to think that's because the word is getting out, and not just about Dear Divorce Coach, although that would be lovely. But really about the idea that we need to be informed, as women in particular. We often manage the children in the primary sense. We usually manage the home in the fundamental sense. But still, even in this day and age, sometimes we aren't handling the money. So they come and say, "What do I need to know?" Then we can talk about that.

I also see women who are reeling from the divorce. They are in a state of emotional chaos, shock, and frankly sometimes, Heike, denial. Because as we peel that onion and the layers are revealed, we find out that maybe, they haven't had any physical intimacy, no sex in their marriage, in five years. Certainly, no other kind of intimacy, either. But they thought this was status quo. They are raising their children. They were friends, or friendly, or sometimes not even that. But they never thought they would get divorced.

So, we have a lot of work to do, especially in those cases, people who are surprised by divorce, that in some ways maybe shouldn't be shocked. But I have to understand where they're coming from, and their personality, and then begin to start working and walking that journey with them to coach them best, to give them the best practical advice.

Heike: You said your yoga practice ties in also with your practice as a divorce coach. How do you tie that all in?

Cherie: In 2011, I became a certified yoga instructor, as well. I love the physical practice of yoga myself. But really, yoga is, and I'm sure you know this, Heike, better than most. It's more about the mind.

Everything leads back to mindfulness. So the way I use yoga sometimes is a physical expression. Sometimes I literally, do yoga poses with clients. However, the goal is to get them to a place where they can be mindful, whatever we are working on. So we do a lot of breath work. We do some work around mantras if they need one. I try to help them set aside even a few minutes a couple of times a day to spend time meditating. It comes down to whatever tools they need to calm the chaos and overwhelm, and I try to help them access.

Heike: Are they usually open to your suggestions?

Cherie: That's another good question. It's funny, I meet lots of people in this practice, and I don't always approach it as, "This is a yoga thing," or, "This is a mindful thing," or that, "This is a coaching thing." I give them support. So, it depends on the person. Some people are very resistant to particular forms of either physical or mental activity. So usually, we talk generally, about what they would need. Once they see something work, right, the proof is in the doing. Then they will happily continue to practice mindfulness, whether they call it meditation or something else.

Heike: Because one of the things that I hear a lot in my Pursue Your Spark groups is, "Now I'm getting older. I'm getting out of shape. I'm not looking like I used to. I don't see myself anymore when I look in the mirror." But it's, "Now my husband's finding a younger woman." It's the younger woman. She's much younger. She's sexier. She's in better shape than I am. We'll go through peri-meno or menopause, and we do get a little chunkier and not quite as juicy, as we get older. I hate to say, that they blame the husband for choosing a younger, more spunkier woman over them. What is your experience in your practice?

Cherie: Maybe our goal as women in midlife, we should always be juicy. So I love that, first of all. But yes, you're right, I think that, in my coaching opinion, in my professional experience, men and women are not going necessarily, for a more physically attractive partner. I suspect this is going to be very controversial.

So, I would say they might be going for a partner with whom they can connect. So, if you have not maintained that connection, and by the way, I'm not blaming women or men, I'm saying if you in your relationship haven't continued that connection, it's natural, it's the human tendency, the human condition, to seek that. Sometimes that happens. Is it the best way to enter midlife? Probably not. But the challenge is to back it up a little bit, figure out what's missing from your relationship soon enough so that you don't have the prospect of dealing with a third party.

If you can catch it early enough, and when I hear you say, "We have these challenges as women in midlife," and I know you coach people all the time who do, I think it's really less about, in my opinion, the size you are and more about what you're putting out there in the universe, right?

It's, "Do you have energy? Do you have vitality? Are you interested in things?" Isn't that what everyone wants from his or her partner? I guarantee the men I talked to in divorce, if they have a woman who loves them, they may have had a preference for skinny blondes at one time, but they're just happy to have a woman who's loving on them. It's the same for women. I think that we aren't hung up so much on that physical body as we are with the connection to the other, especially midlife. Haven't we learned something, right, in all that time?

Heike: I wouldn't want to be 20 anymore, and roll around and do what we were doing back then. I'm so happy with the experiences I've had, the kids I've raised. I am, "Okay, so what if there's a little belly fat, or the butt is not as perky? It's just the way life goes". But the other thing too is like you said, inspiration. If I sit at home and, let's use knitting again, another controversial thing, but I couldn't think of anything. I sit at home and knit, and I'm not interesting in any way that's mentally stimulating to my partner what do I expect might happen?

Cherie: I think that's it, it's where do you have the fit? Again, it doesn't mean any relationship is easy, and just because I obviously divorced in midlife, and some people probably watch this and say, "Well, of course, your relationship is still relatively young." But every relationship is a challenge. Blending families is a challenge. But I think the challenge is to be interested in your partner and to keep them engaged with you. So, I don't think there's a perfect process, but I do believe each of us has a responsibility to hold up our end.

Heike: Yeah, because we do get complacent in relationships, especially, I can see it with my clients who've been with their partners for 50, 60 years. I am sure there's some boredom and complacency. Hopefully, many women listen to this interview and scratch their head, and say, "Hey, you know what, there is some truth to that. Maybe I can pick myself up and get Cherie's book," and get some insights of what I could do better.

Cherie: Yes, and it's not that I have all the answers for clients. But I do try to frame the coaching support I give them on their values. So once I understand who they are, and who they want to be, then I will help them become more productive in whatever ways they want to. And that's the beauty of the divorce journey, and you have the opportunity to reinvent what maybe you weren't doing in your marriage for a good reason, or not so good reasons. You now have the chance to start again, to begin again and support your children at the same time, if you have them.

So, it's an opportunity for your children to renew their sense of you as a role model, and to see, I mean if we teach our kids to be resilient, is there anything better in life? We certainly can't guarantee them that anything will always work out, right? They go to the best schools and have the best jobs. Then sometimes maybe they don't. So really, what do we want for them? It's to learn to cope when things aren't all right. And so, if we can role model that for them as we go through a life transition, I think that is probably more important than making sure they get into the right college, which seems to be the new hot trend in DC.

However, it's their journey. I talk to clients about that all the time, because one of the things I see, and I know you're interested in this as well, is that if we focus on our children to the exclusion of our partner, that can take a toll on the marriage. So sometimes I think we need to step back and recognize the reasons we might be doing what we are doing, and evaluate it, and make some change.

Heike: Do you coach any groups here in DC, support groups, Cherie?

Cherie: I do, but it's occasional and sporadic. I love to put together dynamic support groups. What I mean by support is not a place to sit around and complain. We do that a little bit, but we try to keep it light, and we try to keep it fun. We can all have jokes about marriage, about middle-age, about kids. When it comes down to it; we are there to have tools to move forward.

So, what can we do to be our best selves in the world? We have each other. So if we have a terrible day, we can say, "I tried this, it didn't work, and it sucked, because I put myself out there." Somebody else can say, "Hey, Sue, I'm happy you did that. I'm so proud of you, and I know what an effort it was because I've been there and I've done it." So I do see the value of a group of like-minded people supporting each other. I'm very intentional that people not just complain, and not take action. So yes, I do have a bias for support groups that are action-oriented.

Heike: Which brings me to, I'm so excited! Cherie's five tips to protect your marriage.

Cherie: Well, I'm certainly happy to share them, and I'd like to preface it with a short story because I didn't give you much of my journey of divorce, but I feel close enough to you too, you and your five million viewers, to do that. One of the things my ex-husband occasionally says to me is, "You help people divorce all over America." I said, "No, my goodness, no. All over the world. Don't limit me." But my point is that if I'm a divorce expert, how can I possibly be a marriage expert, right? After all, I'm divorced. What do I know? However, the truth is, I have learned a little bit in this journey. I've learned a lot from my clients. I've learned a lot from my own experience, plus I do a lot of reading.

So, I don't say this lightly. I don't mean it without study and thought. So, I want people to understand that I'm not considering myself the be all and end all when I talk about tips to protect your marriage. But I hear again and again from people getting a divorce what wasn't present. So, if this can serve anyone, I'm happy to have it. I'd love to hear from people, too, about did it make a difference to them? Because that's what I'm all about, is inspiring people to take action.

Heike: Tell us more about your training and qualification.

Cherie: The training I did was very specific to divorce and coaching people in divorce. So, it's a coaching certification, and it had a parent coordination path. Communication might be the most critical factor, as you go through separation and divorce, is knowing what to communicate when, and when to keep your mouth shut. If all of us could figure that out, we'd be well served. However, yes, so I do have, and I also certainly use my legal training. I'm not acting as anyone's lawyer, but I come at this from an analytical framework. That informs what I do because it keeps people organized. It allows them to plan their lives, and create the experiences they want post-divorce.

Heike: So without further ado, here are the five tips to protect your marriage.

Cherie: I think the number one most protective measure in marriage, and I say this a little bit more to women than to men, and I'm just going to put that out there because I've had friends that I say this too. You have to have sex with your husband. You have to have sex with your wife. But, I think if there's one thing I can put out in the universe, it's women, if you don't have sex in your marriage, it's a big problem. You can justify it, you can explain it, and you may end up divorced. Doesn't mean you will, because maybe your husband's happy with that. Perhaps you're happy with it. But I see again and again, where that exists. Nobody talks about it, and then somebody steps out, right?

I think that sex is, again, like many, we don't want to talk about it, but you have to. And yes, it can become routine. It can become mundane. It can be one of the things that you think about not at all. But if you're not talking about it, or even if you're not doing it, there's real trouble. So have the conversation. There are lots of great support if you are having physical, emotional issues around sex.

Heike: Many women in menopause, we are dealing with the dryness and the pain during the intercourse. I haven't spoken about that, that openly either. But when you talk to your OBGYN about what help you can get, and what there is, and it doesn't always have to be intercourse. The intimacy can be, just like when you were a teenager, you're playing with your significant other. Once that falls by the wayside, it becomes such, just a partnership of raising the kids, or living next to one another. So I think that's a huge point to consider.

Cherie: That's my number one, and a close number two is, know your finances and participate in them. And I say that, and it sounds like, "Well, gosh, that's just gonna stir up trouble in my marriage," but in fact, most people don't want the burden of it all. And if they do have the weight of it all, and they are dissatisfied, they may have more options than you do. So they control. And control should be shared when it comes to money. So even if you're not the primary breadwinner, and even if you are, you should participate in the money decisions.

You should know where your money is, how it's spent, what your expenses are. It shouldn't be that one person is known as the saver and one person is known as the spender, and one person's always trying to keep the other from spending, for example. That's an unhealthy dynamic that can then create other issues in the marriage. So, I think it's essential that you know your finances, and that you participate in the process of understanding, and even of paying the bills.

Heike: So, that's number two, money onto number three.

Cherie: Number three's an interesting one because I do think you have a zone of privacy in marriage, right? Everybody can have some privacy. If you don't, it can feel like you don't have boundaries in any way. We all need those boundaries. But I do think it's essential that you not keep secrets. That's a personal opinion, but I do believe that sometimes you need to have one person in your life with whom you will share anything. So even if you had a best friend that said, "I have this intimate thing. Can you not share with your husband?" You might say, "Look, I'm not gonna go out of my way to tell him, but we don't keep secrets. So if for some reason he were to ask me, he's the one person I would tell." Alternatively, conversely, husband to wife.

Heike: This is such a good one. Many women go, "Can you keep a secret?" Why would I keep a secret? If you're telling me, then you should feel free to tell everybody. Not everybody, but the people that are involved with this.

Cherie: That's it. I think it's a way to keep people ashamed, and scared, and not empowered. So I feel like if you want to keep your marriage as rich as you can, in intimacy and love, it's vital that you have an understanding that if something significant happens, they're going to share it. Because, if that starts not to happen, resentment builds, right? Fear builds anxiety, all those things that come when we don't have that connection.

Heike: That was a good one. On to number four.

Cherie: Number four is prioritizing your spouse. I know you've got those clients out there that have been married 50 years that are, "Oh, tell me. I've been doing this forever." It doesn't mean that every day you wake up with a breakfast tray in bed, although, just in case my partner's watching, I would like that, please.

What I mean is, take some time every day if you can, and weekly if you can't, to make sure they know that you think they're important, so that you figure out how they know you think they are important. So, even if you're doing all the grocery shopping, and all their laundry, and all the cooking, but you're just quietly resentful about that, that's not going to build that priority that we're talking about. The priority is making them know that you take care and that in fact, there are things that you don't resent doing for them, right?

Heike: Oh, I love that. Because frequently, you hear that, too. It's, "Oh, God, I always have to do the dishes."

Cherie: That's it. So, instead of, "I always have to," you might even make that something that you talk about and say, "I feel like I'm always doing the dishes, and I want you to know if that's important to you I'm happy to do that. I want to feel valued a little bit for that." Simple conversation. In my experience, men are more straightforward that way than women. They like to be told, and they are not as good, like with our girlfriends, we can have these subtle cues, and hand signals, and facial expressions. But with men, get out there and tell them and they will listen. Then if they decide not to do those things, you can have a second conversation, right? But usually, I find that in most marriages, if we talk about it, people are responsive.

Heike: I agree, and now we are onto number 5.

Cherie: So, my last one is really about how you create the zones with your spouse. I know you're so good at this, with your husband. You guys have so many shared sporting interests. You're great at following his passions, and he, yours. But you probably also do things separately. I find that's important, too. Because you're not going to love everything the other person does. They should feel still, the opportunity to pursue it exists.

Heike: I also find that if you do everything together, you have nothing to talk about.

Cherie: That's an excellent point. That's right.

Heike: If you see the same shows, if you do the same activities, you know what happened because you are always together.

Cherie: That's right. I find, keeping a little mystery alive is not such a bad thing.

Heike: Yeah, definitely, mystery is good. So, there you have it. Cherie's five tips. Aren't they juicy? I find them juicy. So, let me ask you, we are starting to wrap up. What are your plans with Dear Divorce Coach?

Cherie: I will continue to see clients. So, I've had an office in Northwest DC, in Georgetown DC, and I see clients here, and I love it. I coach people. I coach couples, I coach individuals, and I also do parent coordination work and help parents resolve their disputes. I have recently collaborated with Kentlands Psychotherapy in Gaithersburg, Maryland. I'm seeing clients there one afternoon and evening a week. So, I will continue that. It opens up my demographic, all new people, all new issues. And so fun for me to diversify.

Cherie: I love serving people online, as well, so they can always find me at my website, which is deardivorcecoach.com. They can email me. I'm happy to talk to people for about 20 minutes, to figure out if what they need from me is something I'm able to give them. And then, we'll take it from there. I do find this is a passion as much as a profession, so I will continue writing and speaking, taking the opportunities to learn and grow, myself, as I continue the coaching and parent coordination.

Heike: I'll put all these links that you just mentioned about your books, and where the people can reach you in the show notes, so they can link directly to you and find you. You're also on Facebook, as Dear Divorce Coach?

Cherie: That's right, I am. **Dear Divorce Coach**, same on Twitter, Instagram

Heike: So, that's super-easy to find. You can find Cherie through all those links that I've put into the show notes. And I want to thank Cherie so much for being here today and sharing her five juicy, tips, among other things, with us in the show today. So thank you so much for being here, and we'll talk soon.

Cherie: Sounds good. Thank you, Heike. It was a real privilege and pleasure to talk to you.

Heike: Thank you, bye.

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