COST DEFLATORS:
HOW TO AVOID COSTLY PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION

Failing to do *any* of the recommendations below, significantly increases the need for intervention by divorce professionals, and therefore *increases both your divorce costs, regardless of your divorce process!*

OUTLINE:

1. Prioritize taking extra care of your personal health, physically, mentally and emotionally.
2. Use the right professional for the right task.
3. Use **BIFF GUIDELINES** below for any texts, emails and telephone conversations. Communicate civilly and respectfully.
4. Take notes during any meetings/sessions (type on laptop if it's faster for you) because you *will forget, given your stress levels.* Practice and hone skills learned with your Divorce Specialist, in and outside of meetings.
5. Become masterful at having "necessary and difficult conversations."
6. Parent by placing your child(ren)'s needs in the foreground: Shield them from conflict, adult concerns and related emotions, behave respectfully in front of them, and *speak well of your co-parent*.
7. Be Prepared, Trustworthy and Reliable.
8. Be clear about what you want, without being attached to a particular outcome. Trust your litigation, collaborative or "mediation-friendly" consulting attorney (during a mediation) to help you understand what's reasonable under the law, and what's realistic given the specifics of your case.

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1. **Prioritize taking care of your personal health physically, mentally and emotionally!** Divorce/custody challenges are typically traumatic and stressful, so you will need to take *active steps* to reduce stress and related symptoms (Exercise is the single best stress-reducer). Get individual therapy (not from your divorce-related clinician/consultant) to help you express, release and effectively regulate your emotions when they are overwhelming. Biologically, you *literally can't think clearly* unless you're emotionally regulated. Therapy with someone who will help you build these skills will also help you think things through that may be too overwhelming to process in a team/professional meeting, when your professionals are focused on moving you forward. It's very costly to try to "process deeply" when you are paying a team of professionals. Make a note and save this issue for therapy.

   The work of a licensed Mental Health Professional (MHP) who is serving as an experienced Divorce Consultant, Communication Coach (in collaborative divorces), Child Specialist or parenting plan mediator is to get you to the finish line, and help you get clear and calm on your way there. Know when to use your MHP for effective communication, instead of your attorney, who will often be charging close to double the price of your Coach. Avoid actively abusing substances or engaging in other self-destructive behavior during your divorce or during meetings. Get help to stay sober, or you'll be handicapped, and lose credibility - both will significantly increase your costs.
2. **Use the right divorce professional for the right task.** While you want *all* your professionals to be respectful and kind, for your own wellbeing, you also *need* them all to say the hard things clearly and directly, in their specific realms of expertise. Use your licensed mental health professional, not your attorney for compassion/skills-building or respectful emails. Use your divorce bookkeeper, not your forensic CPA for bookkeeping. Use your attorney for legal matters/strategic questions. Avoid paying the wrong professional for matters that require another's expertise. Keep running lists of requests from your different professionals, so you don't pay them to hunt you down for what they need from you.
3. **Use BIFF GUIDELINES (Bill Eddy) for emails and telephone conversations** to keep them brief, business-like and "professional," with your partner/spouse *and* your professional team. **B**rief, **I**nformative, **F**riendly, **F**irm (i.e. avoids cost of lengthy phone conversations and long email streams). Contempt, criticism, defensiveness,

stonewalling, blaming, judgmental and provocative styles of communication *will* require *much* more professional intervention; Instead, ask respectfully for *the specific behavior you want*.

4. Take Notes, Practice and Hone Skills Taught during Coaching/Clinical Session(s) in between meetings. Use collaborative techniques *outside* of team meetings (e.g. make respectful requests instead of blaming; use "I-statements;" speak for yourself not your spouse/partner; avoid long-winded explanations that don't move the process forward; listen more than you talk (!!); eliminate the words "fair" and "should" from your vocabulary and understand why these are ineffective *for you;* pick your battles wisely - don't waste $1000's arguing over the Zappa cd; Learn the ways you're inclined to speak "disrespectfully" under pressure and learn/practice immediate remedies. Disrespect and an adversarial tone will provoke interpersonal messes that require more costly professional help and increase your costs *significantly*; Respect your spouse/partner's boundaries and limits. Badgering or arguing a point will escalate discord and require more professional intervention to move forward; Cultivate a "benign curiosity" about the other's view, rather than opposing it or being invested in "being right."
5. Become Masterful at Having Necessary & Difficult Conversations – Get help, craft and prepare for these, as needed with your licensed mental health divorce specialist. You will save money in the long run, and avoid acting out or otherwise being ineffective and requiring costly professional help to clean up messes. This prepares you
6. Parent by placing your child(ren)'s needs in the foreground. i.e. Use your consultant, clinician and your child specialist to help you learn to acknowledge and validate *your child(ren)'s experience* - it is usually *very* different from your own. Learn to recognize all the subtle and obvious ways you may put your child(ren) in the middle, and avoid these. Typically each parent will have to accept more limited access to a child/children; Learn the distinct differences between your sources of grief and loss with the divorce, and your *child(ren)'s* experience of loss/views of your spouse. They don't need to feel *your* pain – they already have their own.
7. Be Prepared, Trustworthy and Reliable. Understand that scheduling your professionals at times that also suit you is no easy task. Realistically assess the time it takes you to be ***fully prepared*** for such meetings when you schedule them. Bring your calendar to each meeting. *It significantly increases your stress and cost when professionals have to call or email to reschedule meetings that work for everyone involved*. Avoid rescheduling meetings. Failing to bring/submit needed documents for meetings has you pay professionals for unproductive time. Complete tasks by agreed-to deadline dates *prior to meetings*. Follow through on your agreements scrupulously. Ensure you understand your financial report and are equipped to be realistic about your budget/cash flow. Share ALL pertinent information in mediation/collaborative processes – withholding undermines your trustworthiness and blocks progress. Specifically *ask* to do as much "homework" as possible on your own – anything you can do that your professionals don't have to do saves you money, when this is possible.

   When you have concerns, summarize these as succinctly and factually as possible on paper prior to meeting with your professionals. Rambling, lengthy explanations and storytelling require more costly, unproductive professional time. Take time *yourself* to consider what's really important to you, and how to present it in the clearest, simplest and most concise way possible. Also consider using short bullet points and sharing a copy with your professional, to help keep you on point. Divorce/custody challenges are typically very difficult emotionally. The more time you take to think through your concerns and type these up *in advance*, in bulleted form, without judgmental language, the more focused and on-point you'll be during meetings. Keep a running list of concerns and questions you need answered. You are *not* likely to be able to recall these during meetings, especially when you are stressed. Prepare.

   Work collaboratively with your professionals – acting in a one-sided way provokes reactivity and requires more costly professional intervention. Have the courage and wisdom to ask for help when you are confused or "shut down." Mean "yes" when you say "yes," and "no" when you say "no" – if you have trouble doing this under pressure LET YOUR DIVORCE PROFESSIONALS KNOW so they can be sure to help you by checking in. *You become trustworthy by knowing where you're NOT trustworthy, building skills and getting support from your professionals*.
8. Be clear about what you want, without being attached to a particular outcome. You are likely to get more of what you want if you can be creative, flexible and help your professionals consider *win-win solutions* that help ensure your spouse/partner gets what s/he needs/wants *as well* (versus what you "think" s/he "should" have). Locking into a position, refusing to budge, and/or becoming attached to a particular outcome are tactics that will stall or destroy the process, require significant costly intervention, and limit your overall effectiveness. Ask and then trust your collaborative, mediation or litigation attorney to help you understand what's reasonable under the law, and what's realistic given the specifics of your case.