

Q&A with Randall Kessler, Chair, American Bar Association Section of Family Law

CFCC's Full Court Press recently spoke with Randy Kessler, founding partner of the Atlanta family law firm of Kessler & Solomiany LLC and current Chair of the American Bar Association (ABA) Section of Family Law and the Georgia Bar Association. Mr. Kessler worked on projects with CFCC for almost a decade, including the Families Matter Initiative, a multi-year collaboration between CFCC and the ABA Section of Family Law. We discussed his career, philosophy, priorities for public service, and collaborations with CFCC.



Q: How had CFCC's work enriched your own work and philosophy? Where would you like to see CFCC's collaboration with you and the ABA Section of Family Law go in the future?

RK: I very much enjoy working with CFCC. When I was chair of the ABA Section of Family Law's Standing Committee on Substance Abuse in 2005, we co-sponsored CFCC's substance abuse conference, and I have been thrilled to work on other projects with CFCC since then, including the current Families Matter Initiative. It is rare that the ABA will keep going back to one university or institution for partnerships, but CFCC is a wonderful partner and a very unique institution. They go above and beyond what is expected and help the community and the world. They are great people and through their academic curriculum, they turn out lawyers with a social conscience – people that want to help people. Every law school should have a Barbara Babb.

In the future, I'd love to see us do more of the same – collaborate to educate people through webinars, web presentations, and more; replicate successful programs and models; spread the word about the work we are doing; and bottle and package quality programs and initiatives.

Q: You have been practicing family law for decades. What brought you into the practice of family law?

RK: I got into family law during my summer jobs in law school and have enjoyed it ever since. I really liked the practice because I felt I could be helpful to people, but not necessarily in a life-or-death way. I was more interested in helping people to live a good life.

Q: Can you describe your philosophy in practicing family law? What are your goals and priorities for clients?

RK: I'm a "silver lining" kind of guy – people come to me with their heads stuck in storm clouds, and from my perspective and experience, I can see the "light at the end of the tunnel." I want clients to understand that life can be better and I can help them, not just "win" something for them.

Q: What do you think are the greatest challenges in practicing family law? How do you handle them?

RK: Family lawyers can easily be driven by a client's anger, but that's not going to help either party have a better life after divorce. I challenge my clients to think long-term and focus on their life in 5 years, not on making their ex-spouse pay today. I am grateful that I can tell them the truth and feel confident that even if it's not what they want to hear, it is what they need to know. I hope that I can look back and feel like I helped a lot of people, just by doing my job. I take the legal profession very seriously – it's more than just a job; in essence, it's about building and re-building families.

Q: Are there any misconceptions that clients and the general public have about the family law system, their lawyers?

RK: One big misconception that I often deal with is that lawyers generally enjoy conflict and litigation. In reality, most good lawyers crave settlement, because settlement most often brings a better long-term outcome for clients and their families. Many clients have a misconception that the lawyers are to blame for the divorce. They want to avoid the feeling of rejection. Although I know it's not true, I'm not too concerned about being blamed; I'd rather they are mad at me than at their ex-spouse, because I didn't have a life or children with them.

Q: You often speak on TV and radio about divorce, including celebrity divorces. What is the role of media in the family justice system?

RK: I feel strongly that the media is an ally, and as lawyers we have a duty to help them get the law and facts right. In fact, I recently gave a [web presentation](#) for ABA members on the usefulness of media for lawyers. Of course, it's easy to blame the media when they get things wrong– in the same way that it's easy to blame government or blame the system – but in reality

they are just people who want to educate the public and get the story right. Attorneys should help them do that, instead of just complaining when they don't.

Q: What are your priorities as chair of the ABA Section of Family Law?

RK: In general, my priority is to make family law understandable and accessible through projects like "Families Matter", a multi-year collaboration between CFCC and the ABA Section of Family Law created three years ago by then-Chair Mitch Karpf to lessen the destructive impact of the family justice system in families. We need to put more resources into family courts to make them accessible to the general public, and we need to make it work for families. With the limited resources available to our courts, it's about working smarter, not harder. For example, Unified Family Courts, which are a major focus of CFCC's mission and also one of the main takeaways from our Families Matter Symposium, can increase quality while saving money. Another great example is mediation – it was originally a hard sell, but is now very widely viewed as a more therapeutic and efficient way to resolve contests.

Q: What led you to become so involved in public service? How do you think public service complements the practice of family law?

RK: A mentor once told me that you get back more than you give with public service, and I have found that to be completely true. The advantage of public service work is that it allows you to help a lot of people at a time, instead of just helping the limited number of clients you have at any given time. I've always thought of it as a fringe benefit of being an attorney – I get to be a part of a community of helpful, giving people that can make an impact.