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# FREUD, SOCRATES *and* GLASS LLP

DAVID GLASS IS A WHOLE NEW KIND OF FAMILY LAWYER

by ROSE NISKER

**C**an dealing with drug addicts and mentally ill patients help someone to be a better family lawyer? David Glass, who is a pioneer in a new discipline combining psychological and legal training, offers a resounding “yes.”

It’s immediately clear on meeting him that Glass is not your garden variety divorce attorney. The first clue is in his answer to an interviewer’s question “what do you love about your job?” “The opportunity to facilitate personal growth,” he replies. The next clue might be his tendency, in his initial interview with a potential client, to ask more about emotions than assets. And there is Glass’ belief that the legal process can provide a positive and even therapeutic experience for a family in conflict. While the Arnie Becker types might be scratching their heads, Glass’ credentials substantiate his approach. The forward-thinking attorney earned a law degree and a doctorate in clinical psychology simultaneously in a joint-degree program offered through Villanova University School of Law and Drexel University (formerly Hahnemann/Medical College of Pennsylvania).

Glass practiced with the matrimonial boutique firms of Kolodny & Anteau and the Law Offices of Alexandra Leichter before setting up his own practice in the heart of Los Angeles divorce country—Beverly Hills. “Around here you can’t throw a rock and not hit one of

us,” he jokes. Glass’ bright, unassuming office looks out over countless upscale boutiques and sits next door to famed shoe designer Jimmy Choo’s store. It could provide the perfect location for some mid-divorce retail therapy, but if Glass’ methods prove successful, that fix might not be necessary.

He grew up in a Jewish household in New Jersey, the son of an anesthesiologist and clinical social worker. His knack for psychology started young. “I was the guy friends would come to if they had a problem,” he says. It’s not hard to imagine Glass in the role of confidante; his presence is warm and calm while the remnants of his New Jersey accent highlight an unmistakably East Coast brand of straightforwardness—the kind that detects and dismisses artifice almost immediately.

Glass studied psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and intended to continue in the field, earn his doctorate and pursue an academic career. But before he graduated, a mentor suggested to Glass that he “find a niche.” The niche Glass found came in the form of the Villanova-Drexel University program and its mix of law and psychology.

When Glass entered the program in 1990, the idea of combining the two disciplines was still in its infancy. But over the last two decades, the law-psychology intersection has become increasingly popular. Attendance at conferences jointly sponsored by the American Bar Association and the American Psychological Association has increased

considerably. But the Villanova-Drexel University program is still one of only a handful of its kind.

During the six-year joint-degree program, Glass typically completed three psychology classes and three law classes each year. “Rather than learning to think as a lawyer and a psychologist separately,” Glass explains, “the aim of the program is to learn to think both ways at the same time.” This, he says, was no easy feat. “As I would drive from a law class on one campus to a psychology class at another, I would try to switch gears,” he explains. “In the law class I’d be dealing with Socratic Method, being hammered, and having to stand my ground. Then I’d walk into a psychology seminar where we’d be sitting around in a circle with 10 people. Someone would start to bring up an emotion and I would say, ‘What? Are you kidding me?’” Glass laughs recalling the surprised reaction of his classmates. He continues, “I’d have to remind myself that we’re working collaboratively here rather than ‘me against the world.’”

The program allowed six summers worth of internships and assistantships split between legal work and psychological work. Glass’ experiences ran the gamut from working at a cocaine treatment center to dealing with criminal cases in the Defender Association of Philadelphia’s mental health division. During his last summer, Glass got a job in family law at the Philadelphia firm of Schnader, Harrison, Segal & Lewis. At that point, he says, “it just clicked” for him.

By then, Glass had worked enough in the field of psychology to know his inclinations were better suited to law. “The type of therapy that I was doing was very directive, more moving people through rather than letting them come along.” But even so, Glass says, “I was still frustrated by my lack of ability to let it develop itself rather than pushing too much. Choosing law allowed me to be much more pushy,” he says with a laugh.

At the end of the summer, the firm offered him a full-time position. While Glass loved family law, he deferred the job in lieu of what he describes as “a year of full immersion as a psychologist, just to make sure.” Immersion is no understatement. Glass spent the year working nights in a psychiatric emergency room sharpening his on-the-spot diagnostic skills, and spent days doing therapy with patients suffering from depression and anxiety.

A year later, Glass took the job at Schnader, Harrison, Segal & Lewis. The firm was already familiar with the value of a joint psychology-law degree; it had just a few years earlier hired Stephen Anderer (now Glass’ frequent collaborator), another graduate from the Villanova-Drexel University program.

Albert Momjian, the firm’s family law department head and a veteran with decades of experience in the field, says, “Compared with other recent law school grads, the joint degree gives new associates a better ability to judge credibility and examine witnesses on the stand.” Momjian believes it’s a particularly valuable tool in the highly charged emotional world of family law. “Family law takes someone who doesn’t crush under the pressure of people screaming at them, and at each other,” he says.

At Schnader Harrison, Glass discovered that as “the guy with the psych background” he was handed the clients deemed “difficult” or “highly emotional.” Even today, a portion of his referrals come from attorneys who aren’t interested in dealing with an emotional client. “People often come to a divorce attorney incredibly anxious, or they’re sad and can’t seem to move on, or angry and vengeful,” he says. “I’m fine with all those emotions.” According to Glass, that’s just the nature of the family law beast. “If clients could figure it out themselves, they wouldn’t need me in the first place,” he shrugs matter-of-factly. “I can’t hold it against them that they’re so emotional.”

Comparing his chosen path to that of criminal law, Glass says, “Criminal attorneys often tell me, ‘I could never deal with that sensitive emotional stuff all day.’ But I feel the same about their work. For me, family law is often good people who are at their worst, whereas criminal law is often bad people who are trying to look their best.”

Glass has seen his fair share of people near their worst. He worked on a case where a particularly vengeful divorcing couple could not find a way to separate their belongings. Finally, an exasperated judge set up an auction-type situation, where each party had a certain number of points and could choose items from a list. Glass says, “If one of them wanted a cooking pot, the other one would claim the lid to that pot, just so their [former spouse] couldn’t use it.”

And while pots and pans can be difficult, nothing compares to the emotional havoc wrought by child custody issues. It’s not an area many attorneys enjoy, but Glass has made it his specialty; it makes up almost 80 percent of his work. “Child custody is definitely a tightrope,” Glass says, “because as a divorce attorney, technically you’re not representing the child; you’re representing your client and what they want.” But at the same time, he stresses, the child’s best interest is a huge part of the equation. “It’s all about ‘creative problem solving,’” he says.

When he’s not helping his own clients with custody issues, Glass explores how his two areas of expertise might intersect to improve the practice of family law. For both law and psychology publications he’s written numerous articles in which he outlines ways to “use what we know about how people behave to make the legal system better.” “It can be as simple as a shift in language,” he says. On the East Coast, for example, he found that in family law negotiations the terms most often used are “primary custody” and “visitation,” a term that Glass says sounds like “you’re a second-class citizen, like you’ll only get to see your child through a thick glass window,” he says. In California, Glass notices a more frequent use of alternative terms such as “co-parenting schedule” or “parenting plan.” Even if the actual arrangement is the same, varying the language can change a parent’s perception of the situation.

Glass is well aware that many attorneys think his ideas about family law are unusual. “The approach that I describe in articles,” he says, “is better received among divorce lawyers who’ve moved themselves into collaborative law and mediation. Do litigators like it? Not so much.” He prefers mediation, but isn’t particularly averse to litigation; sometimes the situation necessitates it. “Also, there are times when people just need that proverbial day in court,” he says.

Even after witnessing the break-up of so many marriages, he remains surprisingly positive. Wearing his therapist’s hat, he explains assuringly, “Children of divorce are not necessarily messed up or doomed to a life of failed relationships.” In fact, Glass can even find a few possible beneficial effects. “Clearly, it’s not an optimal situation,” he begins, “but once you have that set of circumstances, there are positives to be found.” He says he’s seen women who “haven’t trusted their ability to stand on their own ultimately come through the divorce process stronger in life skills, more independent and self-assured.” And for the other half of the divorce equation? “I’ve seen dads step up and play a bigger role in their kids’ lives,” he explains. “I’ve been heartened to find them changing their schedules to spend more time with their kids and becoming better attuned to the emotional needs of their kids.”

Ultimately, Glass hopes that couples can avoid divorce by exploring certain big issues before walking down the aisle. As the happily married father of two young daughters, he may someday advise his own children on how to make relationships work. Most important? “Learn how to argue effectively,” he says. Appropriate advice from either an attorney or a therapist. ✨

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David J. Glass is a uniquely qualified family law litigator who holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in addition to his law degree. Glass has practiced Family Law exclusively for over nine years. His experience as a former therapist and evaluator, in addition to his accomplishments as an attorney, make him an especially talented family law practitioner. In child custody cases, the psychological issues frequently overshadow the legal issues. Glass has a unique ability to understand and address both concerns. Although concentrating on child custody and relocation litigation, Glass Family Law handles the full range of family law matters, including divorce, division of property, child and spousal support, and paternity.

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