

The Larsons

Chloe and Evan Larson have been married for two years. Both would admit that their marriage is not perfect, but both also think they have a good marriage. It is a second marriage for both. They realize that statistically there is a good chance that this marriage too will end in divorce as the divorce rate for second marriages is actually higher than for first marriages. Both Chloe and Evan brought problems from their first marriage into their second marriage. Evan has a son Nelson, now age 7, from his first marriage. Evan continues to have issues with his ex that is related to Nelson. Chloe and her first husband started a very successful upscale restaurant. They were equal partners in the business and the arrangement continued after the divorce. So, Chloe has a continuing business relationship with her ex, Tyler. Chloe is trying to sell her half of the business but has been unsuccessful, at least in part because Tyler has the right to veto the sale if the potential new business partner is unacceptable to him. Tyler has vetoed at least one possible sale of Chloe's interest in the business.

The most recent tiff between Evan and his ex, Maria, concerned the treatment of Nelson's medical condition. Nelson has scoliosis which is an abnormal curvature of the back. They have seen several orthopedists and specialists, which are divided. Some think that Nelson will need corrective surgery. Others are not sure and think that the growth of his scoliosis will slow as Nelson gets older and therefore he won't need surgery. Maria wants him to have the surgery and Evan does not. Evan is very confrontational in his communication with Maria. He has told her that he wanted to wait and see if Nelson's scoliosis would slow down and even stop when he gets into his teen years. If he still needed surgery he would still be young and they could have it done in his mid to late teens. Maria wants it done now. But she has learned that once Evan has spoken his mind there is no point in continuing the discussion because if you press him he just withdraws from the situation and gives the "silent treatment." Maria has adopted another tactic she uses when Evan clams up and won't discuss the issue. Maria has remained on good terms with Evan's parents (Nelson's grandparents) and she uses them to exercise leverage on Evan.

Maria has maintained good relations with the grandparents because she has convinced her former in-laws that Evan is sometimes an irresponsible father. So, the grandparents and Maria have formed sort of a coalition to look after Nelson's well-being—that is the basis for their continuing relationship. Maria's strategy is now to talk to her ex in-laws and see if they will pressure Nelson to give his approval to the surgery. Evan talked this situation over with Chloe: he told her it would just be a matter of time before his parents called to pressure him to agree to Nelson's surgery. He wanted some advice on how to handle the situation.

Evan: "I just don't know what to do. I know my parents will call in a day or two and lay this guilt on me about how I am not doing the right thing for Nelson and so on. They always side with Maria on things like this. I'm their son, why don't they take my side. I just don't get it."

Chloe: "I think Maria uses Nelson to manipulate them. He is their only grandchild and they just love him to pieces. All Maria has to do is just him-haw around a little bit and say 'Well I don't know if I can bring Nelson by this weekend, we're pretty busy...' and then she has 'em hooked, just like puppets on a string. Just be firm with them like you are with Maria. Just say no."

Evan: "Oh yeah, that has worked so well in the past."

Chloe: "Well look, you've already given up before you have even tried."

Evan: "I have tried being firm with them on issues related to Nelson before and it just doesn't work with them. They just get mad at me and it just reinforces in their mind that I am a bad parent. They agree with Maria on everything. They will never listen to me."

Chloe: “Well I agree, it’s probably just a good idea to give up now and not even try.”

Evan: “Hey, I don’t need any sarcasm thank you. One of the reasons that Maria and I got divorced is that I got sick and tired of the three of them trying to run my life. They hounded me into taking that job at UPS which I hated when I was perfectly happy working as a gate agent at American Airlines. I took that job at UPS, I made good money, but some days I was 12 hours in that stupid truck making deliveries. Then they hassled me that I was gone too much. Well hell, you can’t have it both ways.”

Chloe: “OK, I’m sorry. I won’t give you anymore advice. Please forgive me.”

Evan: “Oh, cut the crap.”

Chloe: “Oh, come on, I was just teasing.”

Evan: “I don’t care. I really hate your sarcasm.”

Chloe: “Really, I hate the fact that you won’t stand up to your parents and ex-wife who more or less run your life, or at least parts of it anyway.”

Evan: “That is such total B.S. and you know it.”

Chloe: “Hey, you know, we have never agreed on how you should deal with Maria. I really don’t want to fight with you over this. The best thing is for me to just stay out of this. Maybe we should agree that we won’t even discuss things between you, your parents, and Maria. What do you think?”

Evan: “OK, you’re right. I won’t bring it up again.”

Chloe: “Thanks, and I love you.”

Evan: “I love you too.”

Meanwhile, Chloe had her own problems. Since her divorce from Tyler three years previous, she been unsuccessful in her efforts to sell her interest in the business she co-owned with her ex. Chloe had managed to maintain an effective working relationship with her ex in part because their marriage had produced no children and also in part because the decision to divorce was a mutual one. But Chloe suspected that Tyler was extracting an ounce of revenge by undermining her efforts to sell her part of the business. Two likely buyers had slipped away and Chloe blamed Tyler. The first buyer backed out after being interviewed by Tyler. Chloe heard later that the buyer backed out because Tyler came across as a “big jerk” in the interview. Tyler vetoed sale to the second prospect outright and offered little justification other than “not the kind of person I want for a business partner.” Chloe was ready to move on personally and professionally. In her mind she had done the first through remarriage and now she wanted to sell her interest in the business so she could start her own business in which she was the sole owner.

Chloe: “One of the reasons Tyler and I split was because he just could not accept the fact I could be successful without him. That was just too big a shock to his ego. He is still trying to hold me back.”

Evan: “Why don’t you try to meet him halfway? Let him buy you out. You have built a very successful business. He could easily get a bank loan to finance a buy-out.”

Chloe: “Tyler and I have discussed that. He has offered me about half of what my interest is worth. I am not desperate enough to just give it away. I worked very hard to build up equity in that business and I’ll be damned if I am going to give it away. That is not going to happen. You, know I could put him out of business. He knows the marketing and creative side of the restaurant. I know the financial and human resources side. If he doesn’t let me sell out I could just bleed that business to death financially.”

Evan: “Oh, that’s smart. Instead of giving it away you’ll just trash it.”

-5- Chloe: “But I would have the satisfaction of having the last laugh.”

Evan: “How much is the last laugh worth?”

Chloe: "So what do you suggest I do?"

Evan: "Meet him halfway—half a loaf is better than none."

Chloe: "Not always."

Evan: "Why are you so competitive?"

Chloe: "I'm not."

Evan: "Yes you are."

Chloe: "No, I'm not."

Evan: "Yes you are, you always have to have the last word."

Chloe: "No."

Evan: "See, you couldn't just let it go, you had to respond."

Chloe: "Oh, who's being competitive now."