

Those Magic Dates Aren't So Magic

I am old enough to remember life before the internet, and I can honestly say that the internet is an amazing thing. Not only is it the basis of email, the now preferred means of business communication, but it allows us to access a seemingly infinite amount of knowledge. Maybe, however, the better term is “facts” as opposed to “knowledge.”

In my practice, I have noticed clients often question me about something they read on the internet. Most of the questions center on a piece of information discovered online but needs some interpretation or explanation by a family lawyer. To me, that is the difference between a fact and knowledge. A client can find a fact online, but without an explanation, the fact is misleading.

For instance, most people are familiar with a Pennsylvania no-fault divorce decree issued 90 days after the divorce complaint is served, and all parties agree. Similarly, over the years, I have had scores of clients tell me they have been separated for over a year, so they are now automatically divorced. Both scenarios are related to a first-time client meeting and them telling me, “This will be easy; we both want to get divorced.”

While both the 90 day and one-year facts are correct, neither the 90 days nor the one-year are magic dates, after which something automatically happens. They are dates after which something *can* happen. In any Pennsylvania divorce involving economic claims, those financial claims need to be resolved before a court will issue a decree of divorce. It is the same scenario for a client looking for an “easy” divorce. Both parties want to get divorced, however, resolving the economic issues, like who gets what, called equitable distribution, may take an extended period to resolve.

The moral to our story is this, while the facts on the internet can give anyone background information, the information likely needs more explanation. In the case of divorce, the information may not even apply to Pennsylvania or your case. It is in your best interest to take what you find on the internet on Pennsylvania divorce and sit down with an experienced family law practitioner in your area to ask intelligent questions so the attorney can assist in navigating you through the divorce process.

All three of us in the Weber Gallagher family law practice know to explain those facts on the internet and put them into the context of your specific situation.