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InterviewPlatform

DROR BIHEL
NYC
CELEBRITY
DIVORCE
LAWYER

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SELLERS**

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THE MEMORANDUM

JUSTIN WILLIAMS
CRUDE, SLICK & DEADLY
- BIG OIL

DAVID KANI
SMART
WHISTLEBLOWER'S
PLAYBOOK

New York Celebrity Divorce Lawyer **Dror Bikel**

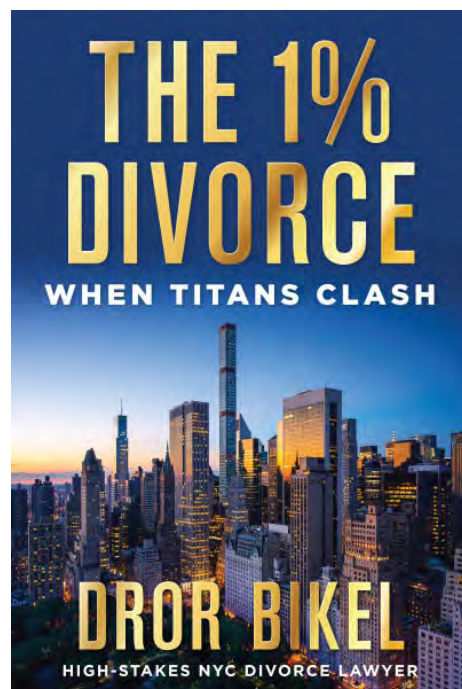
Considered by many to be New York's best divorce trial lawyer, Dror Bikel is a legal commentator, four-time author, and founder of the divorce law firm Bikel & Schanfield. Focusing on high-conflict cases, he's one of the few celebrity divorce lawyers in New York that public figures, CEOs, socialites, and Wall Street billionaires trust when their separations get complicated.

Dror spoke to Interview Platform about his latest book, his thoughts on recent celebrity divorces, and his advice for people going through a separation, whether rich and famous or not.

Q Congratulations on your book, *The 1% Divorce: When Titans Clash*, reaching #1 on Amazon. It certainly cements your place as New York's best divorce lawyer. Why did you want to write this book?

I thought it would be interesting for readers to learn about the divorce process and how people with high net worth deal with a divorce. At the end of the day, other than having more assets to fight about, they basically face the same issues. The legal issues are the same, no matter how much money you have or don't have. The difference is that celebrity divorce lawyers in New York are used to dealing with complex assets. I thought it would be a nice guidebook for people to read,

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and it would give insight into the divorces of the rich and famous.

Q You're one of the top celebrity divorce lawyers in New York, but you represent a range of high-power

professionals in different industries. Who are you hoping will read *The 1% Divorce*, and what do you hope they'll get out of it?

I recommend that anyone who thinks they're going to go through a divorce reads it because it takes you through the process and some of the issues that come up. Hopefully, they'll learn what to do and what not to do: what to do in terms of orders of protection, custody, and disparagement of your spouse, and things you really shouldn't do during this process. What happens during the divorce process matters. Courts and judges look at how people behave, and even a great divorce lawyer can't save you if you're misbehaving.

Q One of the book's themes is that couples who remain civil during a divorce get a better outcome. What are your tips for ensuring a smooth divorce?

First of all, there's no perfect outcome in a divorce. The dissolution of a family is messy, and the outcome is not going to be clean. You're not going to see your children as much because they'll

be spending time in two households. You'll have less money because you're sharing it with your spouse. People need to understand that and not hope for a perfect outcome. Children don't belong to one parent; you need to share. All the money doesn't belong to you; you need to share. Also, try to be kind to your spouse. Try your best to be as kind as possible, because that's what makes for an easy divorce.

Q The book includes a whole chapter on Donald Trump's divorces. What are some of the things he did right, and what are some of the things he did wrong?

His first divorce was very public, and that's always a problem because of the press. He was estranged from his older son for a period of time. I think they've reconciled, but when children read about parents in the press, it's not great. One of the things he did wrong in his first marriage was that their divorce was in the newspapers. They were both talking to the media and trying to get it on their side.

In his second divorce with Marla Maples, he had a pre-

marital agreement. That makes it easier because the financial aspects of the divorce are decided in the pre-marital agreement, for the most part. Also, he didn't fight with her about custody of their daughter, Tiffany. That was smart in his second marriage.

Q Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie have drawn a lot of attention for their custody battle. Do you find that custody battles become more intense when wealth and publicity are involved?

No. There are non-wealthy couples who fight like cats and dogs over custody. It appears that Brad Pitt had some alcohol dependency and mental health issues, which complicated the divorce because Angelina just couldn't deal with it anymore. When they separated, she had control of the children, and he had to regain the trust of the court system. He had to show that he's sober and a responsible parent to increase his parenting time. I think he did that and he's in a better place now. But from her perspective, it doesn't take away the pain she went through dealing with

the divorce and his alcohol dependency. It affected the children, and that hurts. Now, Brad is this recovery hero, which good for him and good for the children, but it's bittersweet for her.

Q Jeff Bezos made headlines because he didn't have a prenup with his wife, MacKenzie Bezos. If a wealthy person gets married without a prenup, is there anything they can do later to protect their assets?

I don't think he did anything. I think he's lucky that his now ex-wife behaved maturely. There's so much money there. It's stupid to fight over it. What's the difference if you have \$75 billion or \$50 billion or \$25 billion? I think she decided not to fight despite his antics. To her credit, most of their wealth is tied up in Amazon stock.

She's a major stock owner, and she could have caused trouble for him by exercising her voting rights. I think she said to herself, "I own stock in this company, my soon-to-be ex-husband is a pretty good CEO, and if I want to do well, I might as well let him continue to do what he's been doing because he's

pretty good at it." She made the decision to give him her voting rights, and that was smart because he's good at it. And then she turned around and gave most of her wealth to charity anyway. I don't think she cares if she has a billion or \$100 billion.

Q How does the length of the marriage factor into the divorce? I'm thinking of Kim Kardashian's infamous 72-day marriage...

Usually, it should be as easy as peeling off a Band-Aid. Without children, there's not much to split because there's not a lot of assets acquired during the marriage. However, short marriages with children, especially if the parties are young, tend to fight like cats and dogs. If they have children, oftentimes they fight because the kid is young and they have a lot of years of future parenting together. The parties themselves are also usually young and a little immature, so they often fight, even if they shouldn't.

Q Numerous high-profile marriages have fallen apart because of cheating scandals: Tiger Woods and Elin Nordegren, Ben Affleck

and Jennifer Garner, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Maria Shriver. How does infidelity affect the divorce process?

It really shouldn't, unless you're spending a load of money on your paramour. The money you spend outside of the marriage, you have to give half of it back to your spouse. So, if you're buying expensive jewelry, staying in hotel rooms, flying around the world, and paying for it, your spouse will get a credit for half the amount you're spending outside of the marriage. Introducing your boyfriend or girlfriend to your children too early could be a problem, too. Other than those two issues, it doesn't matter. The courts don't care.

Q What makes high-net-worth divorces different from an average breakup? What are the things that a celebrity or business mogul needs to worry about that a regular person doesn't?

There's more to fight over. If you have more buildings or businesses to value, if you have to value private equity business, real estate, cash, and retirement, you have to figure that all that out. You have more of these types of

assets that you have to value and distribute, so it gets more complicated, and there's more to fight over. The issues are the same otherwise.

Q How does divorce impact a public figure's brand?

It depends on your brand. Kristin Cavallari is getting divorced from the football player, Jay Cutler, and she has a "clean" clothing and wellness brand. Somebody like that, do they want to be tarnished by a messy divorce? It soils her image and her brand, and with a celebrity like her, it's hard to separate the two.

If people view her as greedy or a bad parent, fairly or unfairly, that may affect their willingness to purchase her products. If you have a bad-boy brand, then who cares? If you're trying to project a clean public image, you have to be careful about engaging in a high-conflict divorce. If you do, there's a lot for people to dislike, fairly or unfairly, and that can be a brand problem.

Q In your ebook *New York Art Collector's Guide to Divorce*, you mention the challenges that people in the art world

face when getting divorced. What should art collectors and gallerists be aware of?

The art market is one of those things that goes up and down. You can value things pre-pandemic and have an agreement or a court valuation. Now, post-pandemic, the art market is frozen, and the values are reduced. It's a different ballgame.

Some people own a lot of pieces, even thousands of pieces, and it's expensive and time-consuming to value it all. Plus, it can all be contested. There's discretion with the valuator. I won't get into the methodology of art valuation, but it's more art than science, and people fight about the valuation. It's complicated, and people have personal attachments. That's why Harry and Linda Macklowe's divorce was dragged out over their billion-dollar art collection, and why Libbie and David Mugarbi are going through a nasty public divorce right now.

Q Wall Street tycoons are also in a unique situation because they're often married to a less wealthy partner. You

talk about this in your ebook, *Wall Street Divorce: Secrets of Big Money Splits*.

These divorces can get complicated because financially savvy people usually enter marriages with the mindset that they have to protect their assets. In contrast, the other spouse might have no idea what's going on with their finances. I've had people come into my office, and they don't know exactly what their spouse does for a living, where the tax returns are, where the bank accounts are. Whether you're independently wealthy or not, you need to know your marital assets and where your money is going. Otherwise, your divorce will likely get dragged out, and you probably won't get everything you're entitled to.

The other thing is that some people are so intent on keeping as much as possible that they try to hide and lie about their assets. Don't do that. You have to disclose your assets, and your lawyer has an ethical obligation to tell the court if you're hiding anything. Your lawyer will help you make decisions that are in your best financial interest, but they

shouldn't help you withhold information and flub the rules.

Q When a couple has multiple residences in different states, is it possible to file for divorce in a state that offers more advantages?

Maybe. It depends where the children are. It's better to file where the children go to school and predominantly live. If that's not an issue, then you can look at the different states where you live to see where you get a better deal. Although, frankly, if it's a long-term marriage, it's always going to be a 50/50 division.

Q How do you advise clients to respond to media attention?

Don't. Stay away. Run for the hills. If it's in the media, your kids are going to read it, and the kids will be damaged forever. It's something you can't take back. I have a friend who got mad at me when I got into matrimonial law because his parents went through a 10-year public divorce. He was severely traumatized by it. And, judges will hate it if you use the press. They'll think you're a complete idiot.

Q You're known as one of New York's only divorce trial lawyers. Why is it important to hire a divorce lawyer who specializes in trials?

It's good to have a trial lawyer for a couple of reasons.

Number one, we know the benchmarks for what the judges are going to do. It's one thing to read the law in the book. It's another thing to be in the courts hearing the judges make rulings and decisions. You have much more experience when you know how the judges come out on these trials, and give better advice to your clients because you're in the war, you're in the courts.

The other thing is leverage. You want your case to settle, but if it doesn't settle and you go to trial, you want to make sure your lawyer knows what he or she is doing, and they're experienced at trial practice, which is a whole specialty. It has to do with witnesses and opening statements and closing statements and all that stuff. It's always good to hire lawyers with trial experience. ■