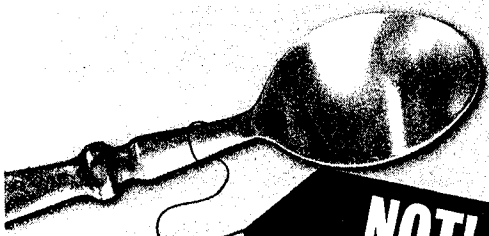


# YOUR MONEY



HOW TO MAKE IT... HOW TO SAVE IT... HOW TO SPEND IT

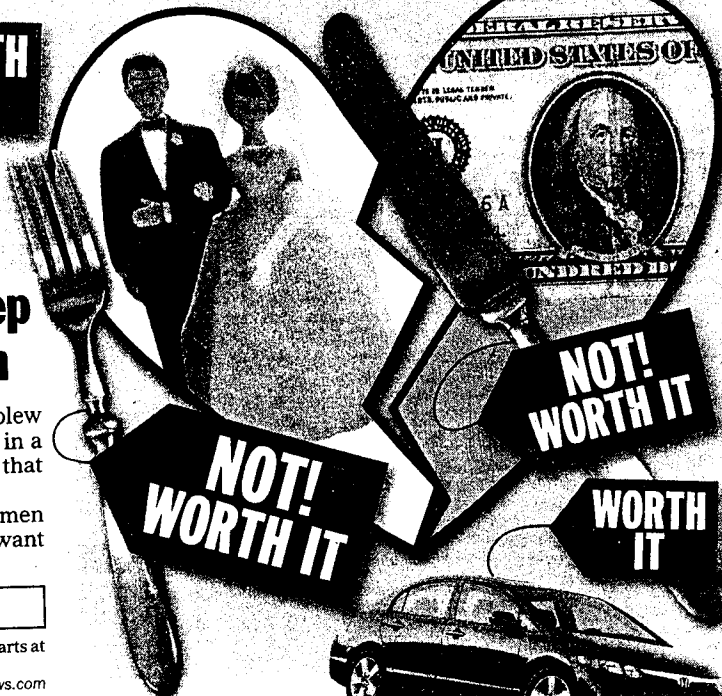


NOT!  
WORTH IT

# Don't sweat small stuff



WORTH IT



NOT!  
WORTH IT

WORTH IT

## Conquer your feelings and keep the cost of splitting up down

**D**EMENTED DOC NICHOLAS BARTHA allegedly blew up his \$9 million townhouse rather than give it up in a divorce. But in many breakups it's the small stuff that people fixate on.

They fight over the wedding silverware: "The men don't even care about it, but they know the women want it," said Manhattan matrimonial lawyer Amy Reiss.

They fight over who gets the tax exemption for the children: "They equate it with winning the kids," said matrimonial attorney Arlene Dubin of Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal in Manhattan.

One of Alton Abramowitz's clients fought over an antique pewter bedpan.

"I convinced my client to give up on it," said Abramowitz, the chairman of the New York City Bar Association's matrimonial law committee.

In one divorce Abramowitz handled, the husband got the beach house and the wife got the golden retriever. She wouldn't settle until he agreed to take the dog with him when he went to the house — because the pooch liked the place.

"People are dealing with anger, disappointment and vengefulness; they truly are not thinking clearly," Dubin said.

The Census Bureau has reported that about half of first marriages in the U.S. will end in divorce. Anyone who hopes to get through one in decent financial shape must resist the urge to battle for stuff with more sentimental value than dollar value, the attorneys said.

It's wasteful to run up your lawyers' meter for petty stuff — they charge \$250 to \$600 per hour in the city, and bill for as little as one-tenth of an hour's work.

If you don't go to court, legal fees for a divorce run from \$2,500 to \$100,000 —

BY LORE CROGHAN  
DAILY NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

for each spouse. If you do, the cost starts at \$50,000 — and could be way more.

[yourmoney@nydailynews.com](mailto:yourmoney@nydailynews.com)

## DEALING WITH THE DIVORCE PROCESS

■ **Before you hire a lawyer**, collect all the info you can about your financial situation.

Make copies of tax returns, bank statements, credit card bills and property deeds. If you applied for a mortgage in recent years, the paperwork contains lots of useful information.

"You should be able to walk into your lawyer's with a balance sheet of assets and liabilities," said attorney Alton Abramowitz.

■ **Communicate with your lawyer only when you need to.**

"Remember — every e-mail and phone call to your lawyer costs you money," said attorney Amy Reiss.

And be careful with the computer correspondence if you're still living with your future ex. "Assume your spouse is reading

your e-mails," she said.

■ **Get your own lawyer.** It's not kosher for one attorney to represent both you and your spouse. Hire one who specializes in matrimonial law.

The New York City Bar Association has a referral service at (212) 626-7373, or 626-7374 for those who speak Spanish.

■ **Don't try to hide anything about your finances.** Abramowitz said.

Sooner or later, the truth will out. If you keep financial secrets from your spouse, you'll poison your chances for settling out of court. If you keep secrets from a judge, you'll be penalized.

■ **If your spouse's conduct makes you fear for your safety**, tell your lawyer, Abramowitz said. The court can give

you an order of protection.

But never falsely accuse your spouse of physical violence. You could lose custody of your children if your lie is found out, he said.

■ **To save time and money**, you and your spouse should consider agreeing not to litigate.

Your attorneys must be qualified mediators who have been trained in collaborative law, attorney Arlene Dubin said.

■ **If you think you want to go to court**, ask your lawyer what's the likely upside, the likely downside, how long the case would take and how much it would cost, Reiss said.

The potential payoff probably isn't worth it. "Reason needs to step ahead of emotions, as hard as that is," Dubin said. "Get your best settlement — and get on with your life."

