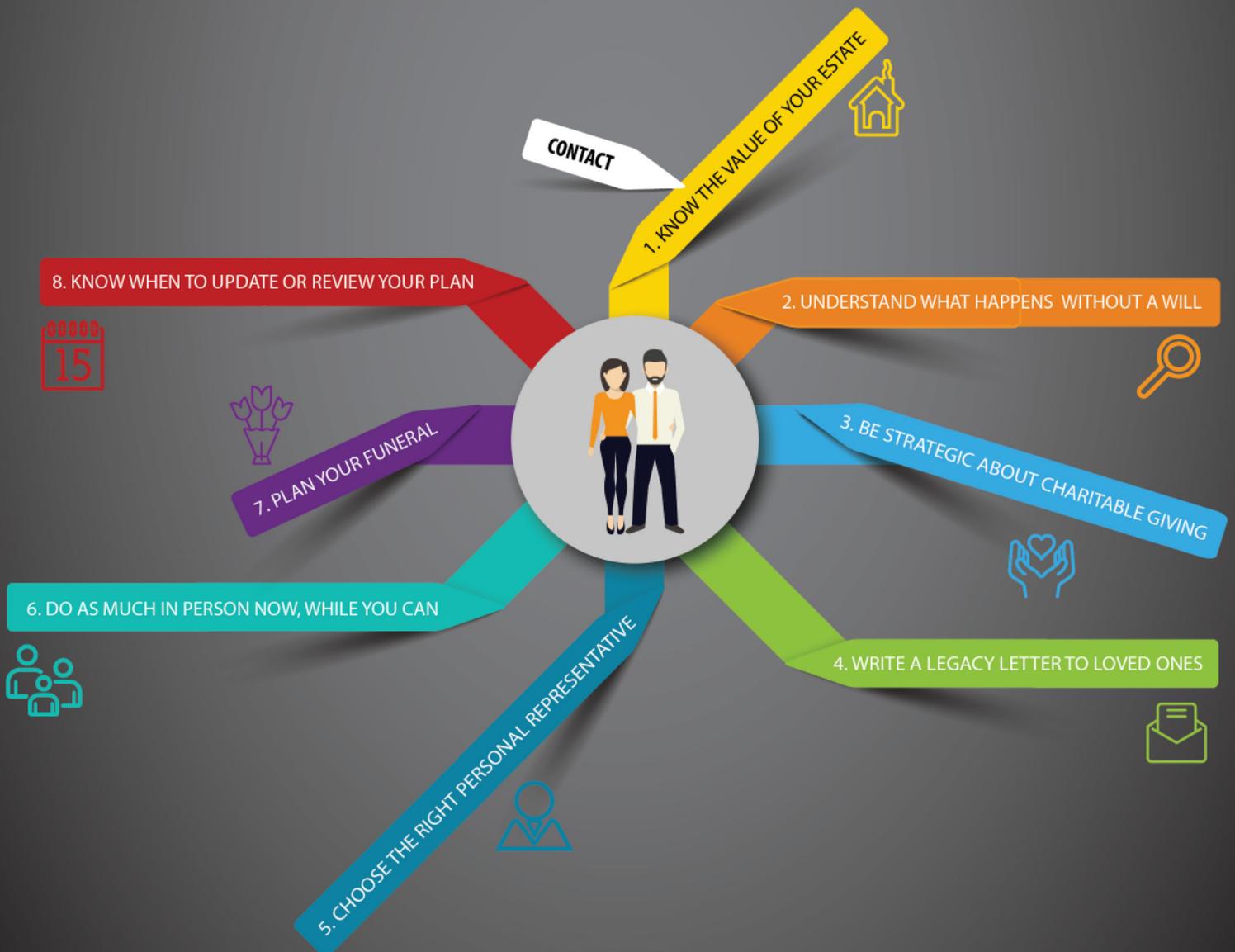




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ESTATE PLANNING 8 TIPS FOR LEAVING A LEGACY



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8 TIPS FOR LEAVING A LEGACY

December 2016

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Many people desire to leave a legacy after they pass away. They wish to be remembered for their contributions in life and hope they made an impact. In many ways, leaving a legacy is about where your assets go after your death—family, friends, charities, paying off debts. When you've worked hard during your lifetime to build assets and benefit your loved ones, you deserve to determine where those assets go after you pass. Below are eight tips to help ensure you leave the kind of legacy you've always wanted.

step
01

KNOW THE VALUE OF YOUR ESTATE



Many people may not realize which assets are included in the value of their estate, and they may be surprised at how much their assets are worth when added together. Below is a list of common items people have that can make up their estate (this list is not all-inclusive):

- Certificates of Deposit, Money Market Accounts, and Other Cash
- Stocks, Bonds, and Mutual Funds
- Mortgages and Other Debts Owed to You
- Other Investments
- Employer-sponsored Retirement Plan Benefits
- Individual Retirement Accounts
- Personal Residence
- Vacation Home/Time Share
- Other Real Estate
- Business or Partnership Interest
- Jointly-Owned Property
- Life Insurance Proceeds
- Automobiles and Recreational Vehicles
- Jewelry
- Collectibles
- Other (furniture, personal belongings, etc.)

After totaling up the value of your estate, you can better assess which type of plan works for you with the help of professionals including an estate planning attorney, a tax professional, and/or a financial advisor. Whether a simple will or a more complex estate plan is right for you, it is important to seek the help of professionals who are knowledgeable in the area and can steer you in the right direction to accomplish your goals.

step
02

UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT A WILL



Without a will, once you pass away, all decisions about your estate (who inherits what and when) are made according to state law. Your assets may not get distributed in the way you would have wanted; it can also be costly to your beneficiaries and cause friction in the family if some feel they were unfairly disinherited by your lack of estate plan. Being proactive with your estate planning will ultimately help your family through difficult times and allow you to leave the kind of legacy you desire.

8 TIPS FOR LEAVING A LEGACY

step
03

BE STRATEGIC ABOUT YOUR CHARITABLE GIVING



Often, leaving a legacy includes giving to specific charities you care about. It's important to know that your estate can claim an estate-tax deduction for the value of a charitable gift made in your will. However, it's also worth noting that making a charitable gift before your death may provide income-tax, gift-tax, and estate-tax savings by making a lifetime gift to qualified charities. It may also benefit those charities more to have the money now, rather than years from now when you pass away.

step
04

WRITE A LEGACY LETTER TO YOUR LOVED ONES



For many, the hope of being remembered fondly by their loved ones is part of leaving a legacy. It may be worth considering writing a letter to your family and friends, in which you can share stories about yourself, your memories with them, and what they mean to you. It also provides an opportunity to communicate your values, beliefs, and life lessons. Passing down these anecdotes and words of wisdom may help your friends and family members deal with your passing in a positive light. It may also be beneficial to include a family history, so you and your ancestors can be remembered from generation to generation.

step
05

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE



When creating a will, many people choose one of their family members or friends to serve as their personal representative (or executor). This person administers your estate and distributes your assets to your beneficiaries, as you've directed in your will. While you can choose almost any adult who is legally capable to serve as your personal representative, it is wise to think carefully before making the final decision. The responsibilities of an executor can be overwhelming and stressful, especially for someone who has never served in this position before. Therefore, it may be a good idea to speak with the person you wish to appoint to this role and help them understand what your wishes are and the responsibilities they will be assuming.

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step
06

DO AS MUCH IN PERSON NOW, WHILE YOU CAN



While it may seem obvious that a will determines who receives your assets once you pass away, you may want to consider divvying up your belongings now and giving away certain items to specific loved ones before you die. This allows you to share in the joy of those friends and family members receiving your prized possessions; you can talk to them in person about why you wanted them to have those items and share memories they may not already know. It may also be a good idea to share your estate plan with your family before your death, so they are not surprised by your decisions after your death when they may be emotional and in mourning.

step
07

PLAN YOUR FUNERAL



One very effective way to leave a positive legacy is through your own memorial. Think about how you want people to remember you while celebrating your life. Consider leaving your family with photos, music, and personal belongings that reflect your interests and values, and ask them to incorporate them into the service. You may also decide that you want to have the service at a place that's meaningful to you rather than a funeral home. Remember to let your family members know your ideas and wishes ahead of time, rather than only stating them as a part of your estate plan, as it may be too late to carry out your wishes if the estate plan documents aren't received in a timely manner after your death. It's also important to consider whether you want to be buried or cremated. Learn about the advantages and disadvantages of both before making your final decision.

step
08

KNOW WHEN TO UPDATE OR REVIEW YOUR WILL OR ESTATE PLAN



Creating a will or estate plan may feel overwhelming during the process, but very rewarding once the documents are complete. However, you will need to review the documents and may need to update them from time to time, depending on your circumstances and changes in your life. Once your will or estate plan is created, remember to review it annually and seek professional help to make any necessary changes if any of the following occur in your life:

- Family changes such as births, adoptions, deaths, marriages, or divorces
- Geographic moves
- Changes in estate composition
- Changes in how you wish to divide your estate among beneficiaries
- Business changes
- Tax law changes
- New health-related conditions