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Never ending estate planning action items!

Congratulations! You have completed your estate plan. However, the completion of the plan is one step, and as life is ever changing, the estate planning process is ongoing. The following items are actions you should consider taking.

1. Organize your documents

First, decide on one place where you will keep your important papers. A fireproof lock box in your home is a good place, or filing cabinet, or at the very least a specific drawer in a desk.

Second, gather together all of the important documents you have. You may want to organize them by category for easy access (Legal, Tax and Investment, Insurance).

Third, make a master list of what you have and the physical location. Provide a copy of this list to the people who may need access to these documents, such as the person or persons you have selected as your executor, trustee, guardians for your children, the holder of your power of attorney, your investment advisor, your accountant and your attorney.

Lastly, promise yourself to file any changes, such as sale of assets, new loans, changes to beneficiary designations as they occur.

Important Documents

- Birth certificates
- Marriage licenses
- Divorce papers
- Adoption papers
- A copy of your passport
- Estate Plan documents – wills, trusts, living will, appointment of health care representative, power of attorney, beneficiary designations for retirement plans and life insurance
- Deeds to real estate
- Title to automobiles, boats, etc.
- Mortgages; and other loan documents
- Leases
- Tax and Investment documents: End of year statements for retirement plans, mutual funds, brokerage, and bank accounts
- Income tax returns with supporting documentation
- Statements showing purchase price for any investments and receipts for expenditures made for investments such as improvements (for use to determine capital gains at time of sale)
- Life insurance policies

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- Homeowner's and/or Renter's Insurances policies
- Health Insurance information
- Auto Insurance
- Long-term Care Insurance
- Copy of back page of car registration (when using to designate successor auto owner)
- List of Passwords
- Directions to guardians for children
- Directions for Health Care Representative
- Funeral Plans

2. **Car Registration**

If you are the sole owner of your automobile, you can designate the successor owner on the back of the registration for that automobile. You will need a witness who can not be the person designated as the successor owner. Each time you receive an updated registration you will have to fill out the back of the registration form. However this can save the successor owner immeasurable time and money when transferring the automobile. Keep a copy with your important documents.

3. **List of Passwords**

This can seem a daunting task, but keeping a list of your accounts with passwords can be invaluable to your friends and family. Keep this list with your important documents.

4. **Directions for Guardians**

If you have children under the age of 18 you need to appoint a guardian who would care for your children if you were unable. Even if you do not appoint someone, your probate court will appoint someone. It is important that you formulate a plan for the guardian. Providing a letter to whoever is appointed as guardian can not only help your guardian and children know your thoughts, wishes and expectations, it can be a useful tool for your own parenting. Issues to be addressed in the letter could be:

- Keeping children together or not
- Maintain contacts with friends and family
- Keeping children in the family home or not
- Religious activities or not
- Importance of education, choice of schools
- Important values to impart to your children
- Important information you want to impart to your children such as family stories, stories of their young lives.

Keep a copy with your important documents.

5. **Directions for Health Care Representative**

The person you appoint as your Health Care Representative will be able to communicate your wishes to health care professionals if you are unable to communicate on your own behalf, whether your health issues are life threatening or not. The types of information include

accepting or refusing treatments, services or procedures used to diagnose or treat physical or mental conditions including the decision to apply or withdraw life support systems. You should prepare a letter for your health care representative detailing your wishes and make sure he or she has a copy. Keep a copy with your important papers. Items to be addressed in the letter could be:

- Do you want the health care representative to consult with any other persons?
- Do you want the health care representative to rely on his or her own instincts or follow your specified directions and advocate for you per your directions?
- What factors do you want considered in making health care decisions:
 - Feelings about current health
 - How important is independence and self-sufficiency to you?
 - How do imagine handling illness, disability, dying and death?
 - How might personal relationships affect medical decision making?
 - What role should health care professionals play in medical decisions?
 - What kind of living environment is important to you if you become seriously ill or disabled?
 - How important is it to you that you stay in your home?
 - How much should the cost of health care for your family be a part of the decision making process?
 - What role do religious beliefs play in decisions about your health care?
 - What are your thoughts about life in general in its final stages hopes, fears, enjoyment and sorrow?

6. Funeral Plans

Providing a funeral plan can reduce the normal stresses of a death. You can attach your wishes to your Disposition of Remains and Appointment of Agent form, or you can prepare a letter to the person you have appointed as your agent. Keep a copy with your important papers. Either way, the issues you may want to consider are:

- Preferred church
- Preferred funeral home
- Have you filed a plan with the church and or funeral home?
- Do you want a wake, funeral service and or memorial service?
- For a wake – when and where; open or closed casket?
- For a funeral and or memorial service – Music; eulogies; flowers; religious readings.
- Disposition of Remains –
 - Organ donations – all or specific?
 - Burial – where; headstone?
 - Cremation – Storage or disbursement of Cremains?
 - Medical studies – where and any limitations?
- Donations in memoriam
- Obituary; notice to social media such as facebook legacy page
- People to be notified