

your estate matters

Retirement Isn't the Time to Slow Down Start Planning Now for Your Retirement

The ability to retire is clearly important, as is having an estate plan in place, but your estate plan and financial plan are only part of the story. Have you taken the time to consider what you will do with all that hard-earned free time? A great retirement plan also includes where you want to live, the places you want to visit, and the passions you wish to explore. Retirement should mark the end of one stage of your life and the beginning of another exciting phase.

Start by thinking about where you would like to live. Proximity to family and friends, affordability, climate, access to excellent healthcare, activities and lifestyle, etc. are all important considerations. Need help? Conduct an online search using terms like "best cities to retire" to see detailed analysis of dozens of cities and geographic regions.

Of course, where you would like to live depends in part on what you would like to do. Many people plan their retirement activities based on things they don't have time to do while working, but a steady diet of golf, gardening, and visiting friends likely won't fill your days. Also consider what will give your life purpose. What will make you excited to tackle the day? What will leave you feeling fulfilled at the end of the day?

Those can be hard questions to answer, so create a list of things you would like to try: Travel, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, classes... be prepared to explore new things. Some you may only like and some you may actually love.

When you plan for not only how to stop working, but how you will fill your days when you retire, you'll be more likely to love your retirement years.

8 Reasons to Focus on Estate Planning Now

An old Chinese proverb says "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now." That's also true for estate planning. Why? Because your estate plan:

1. Ensures your assets will go to whom you want, when you want, in the manner you want.
2. Can protect your assets from depletion by nursing home costs.
3. Can minimize income and estate taxes, leaving more money for you and your heirs.
4. Can protect your children's assets from lawsuits, creditors, and future ex-spouses.
5. Can protect your assets for your children if your surviving spouse gets remarried.
6. Can protect your financial and healthcare interests if you become disabled.
7. Can protect your privacy.
8. Gives you peace of mind knowing your loved ones will be taken care of long after you are gone.

Now really is the best time to focus on estate planning. Contact our office to update or create an estate plan tailored specifically for your family's needs.

4 Things You Need to Live a Happy Life

And None of Them Involve Money

Lou Holtz was a legendary football coach and is a highly-regarded college football analyst. You may be surprised to discover he's also a philosopher of sorts: In his book *Wins, Losses, and Lessons*, Holtz lists four things necessary for a happy life (three of them appear to be borrowed from Immanuel Kant, but why reinvent a wheel when a perfectly good wheel already exists?).

Something to do. Several studies show that keeping busy mentally actually makes you happier than lying around on the beach. Having goals or duties to accomplish actually makes you happier overall. In contrast, prisoners serving life sentences tend to sleep for 12 to 14 hours a day because they have nothing to do or anything to compel them to get out of bed.

Someone to love. We are put on earth to love other people. A Harvard study that analyzed data for 75 years found that loving relationships are crucial to a happy, fulfilling life.

Something to believe in. While Holtz believes in God, he feels everyone should have something to believe in: a cause like en-

vironmentalism, conservationism, or the search for peace. To feel overjoyed with life, you must believe in something greater than yourself.

Something to look forward to. Work on making future plans that you will enjoy and focus on cultivating a sense of anticipation. In fact, a healthy sense of anticipation can often help energize our lives, and even help us get through tough times. Make plans with friends and family, make a reservation at your favorite restaurant, or just look for little pleasures in your day to day life that you can look forward to regularly.

Note that Holtz never mentions money, fame, job titles, or possessions. He describes a life of purpose, of meaning, of friendship, of caring... and of hope.

Do you feel your life is missing one of these keys to a happy life? If so, find a way to bring love, faith (however you define faith), meaningful work, and plans for the future into your life.

You'll be happier for it.

Estate Planning for Blended Families

The Things You Really Need to Know

42% of adults in the United States, or over 95 million people, have some kind of "step-" relationship. That fact makes estate planning for the millions of divorced, widowed, and remarried people especially complicated. Ensuring assets are distributed to a current spouse and not an ex-spouse, ensuring children and stepchildren are treated according to your intentions, and understanding the pitfalls to make the necessary decisions can be difficult.

For example, consider inheritance timing. What happens to inheritances for the children of the first spouse to pass away? Do they wait for the surviving spouse to die? They may, unless you set up a Trust that stipulates your intentions. Plus, if you predecease a new spouse and own assets jointly, you may unintentionally disinherit your children from a prior marriage because your new spouse would have final say over who would inherit those assets which had been jointly owned.

One way to avoid that situation is to create a Revocable Living Trust. Say a husband dies before his wife: Rather than leaving certain assets outright to the surviving spouse, they can be left in Trust for her use during her lifetime and then passed on to the husband's children from a previous marriage upon the surviving spouse's death. A Trust can also provide remarriage protection. If your spouse gets remarried after your death, assets can become

commingled and a Trust can protect any assets you wish to pass to your children from a previous marriage.

Your state's laws can also impact estate planning for blended families. In a community property state, whatever you bring to the marriage or receive individually remains yours, but anything earned or acquired during the marriage is jointly owned. In a common law state, ownership is controlled by titles, registrations, or ownership documents. We can help you develop an appropriate estate plan for our state, and if you own property out-of-state, help you plan, if necessary, for both forms of ownership.

You can also determine how, and under what conditions, certain assets are passed on. If, for example, you have a child with special needs, a Special Needs Trust can provide for his or her care. Or perhaps one of your children doesn't manage money well; when the surviving spouse dies, assets can go into a Trust that provides creditor protection as well as oversight into how those assets are distributed.

Creating an estate plan for a blended family can be extremely complicated. We can help you plan for and avoid unforeseen complications and unfortunate outcomes. And, if you created your estate plan prior to your second marriage, we'll help you revise that plan with your new family in mind.

Can You Guess this Legacy?

He was famous for making deals: Offering contestants the chance to trade a prize for an even better prize—or possibly a worse one. But, he did much more than co-create and host a popular game show for over 40 years. At age seven he suffered severe burns from a pot of boiling water and endured a lengthy period of recovery; that, and his family's financial circumstances, sparked a desire to help others.

As an adult he spent approximately 200 days a year on philanthropy and fundraising efforts. His daughter es-

timates he raised over \$1 billion for charities over the course of his lifetime. For his efforts he received multiple awards, including the Order of Canada, and a number of hospital wards are named in his honor.

Monty Hall may be best known for “Let’s Make a Deal,” but his true legacy lies in the thousands of lives he made better by his philanthropy.

What will your legacy be?

The Best Way to Learn Anything

Continuous learning is important, but it is how you learn that makes all the difference. Want to learn more in less time? Try the Feynman Technique, a simple methodology developed by Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman.

- 1. Study a topic.** Write down everything you learn about it.
- 2. Pretend you’ll teach a child.** Break it down into the simplest terms and concepts.
- 3. Fill your gaps.** What isn’t clear? What can you not explain well? Revisit those areas until you can describe the topic fully.

If you’re trying to learn something yourself, you can stop here. But what if you want to teach, say, a grandchild?

- 4. Simplify even more.** Find analogies that help explain concepts. Find ways to use simple terms and clear examples. The best way to know you’ve really learned something is to be able to convey it to another person—especially a child.

Breaking a complex subject, topic, or concept down into easily understandable concepts automatically increases your depth of knowledge. So does teaching other people. Look at a subject from the learner’s perspective and you will often learn more than your “students.”

That’s why the Feynman Technique works so well: It’s the perfect way to study for a test, to better understand an existing idea, or to simply learn something you’ve always wanted to learn.

And don’t we all have plenty of things we still want to learn?