

Wealth Reflections

Insights on building, preserving and passing wealth
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Choosing and Coaching Trustees

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One of the most daunting tasks when writing a Will is choosing the Trustees who will look after capital left to future beneficiaries - those trusted individuals who will act as careful decision makers and future chaperons of the family wealth.

Once we come to terms that there are no carbon copies of ourselves out there, and that those we choose as Trustees will quite likely govern the wealth carefully but potentially differently from ourselves, we are better able to objectively look for smart, wise family members, friends or colleagues to take on this important role. But should the task of naming Trustees simply begin and end after the conversation with these chosen individuals, their acceptance and the completion of the Wills? This is normally the case and is understandable. We are not a culture that enthusiastically embraces planning around our death and the future transition of assets.

If there is complete confidence present with Trustees, then maybe a thoughtful **Letter of Wishes to the Trustees** that outlines our thinking surrounding investing, governance and distribution may be all that is needed. When this is paired with a more personal **Letter of Wishes to our Beneficiaries** to help them understand the “why” behind our gifts and distribution pattern, we are adding a helpful level of communication for all. Remember, if we don’t write our story, others write it for us. Explaining why we have done what we have done is helpful to many.

If the wealth is substantial or you find yourself worried about how all will carry on after you are gone, perhaps there is a further step to take today. Consider coaching your Trustees in either an informal or formal manner. If you have chosen 2 or 3 people to assist your family in the future, would it not make sense to initiate the team relationship now and have the opportunity to mentor and ensure skills are present for the road ahead? The added benefit of creating this type of **Advisory Council** is that as we age we may find that thinking and making decisions alongside others is a better practice than making them

solely on our own. Maybe a new way of thinking is needed about the potential role of Trustees. Perhaps our Trustees, who generally “come to life” after we are gone, can have a more active role during our own lifetime.

What might this informal or formal coaching look like?

Informally you may wish to gather your Trustees together for a lunch or dinner once a year and update your thinking and share as much of your overall situation as you are comfortable to share during your lifetime. Because a verbal message can be interpreted in different ways, and the goal is to have a cohesive Trustee Team (Advisory Council), consider putting your thoughts on paper to be available now and as part of your future estate papers for the Trustees.

A more formal coaching program might take the form of quarterly lunches or meetings where there is a strong intent to mentor your Trustees for their future role. This version of coaching will also lend itself well to sharing your current planning and ideas and seeking the group’s input. As you begin to see cohesiveness and wisdom building within the group, original concerns of how all will manage when you are gone will lessen and an interesting future resource for both you and your family will be created.

As with so many areas of planning, success lies in preparation and effective communication. As we contemplate our future Trustees who will stand in our shoes and communicate and implement our wishes, maybe we need to take on a more active role to ensure our Trustees are well prepared. The benefits of doing so are numerous; confident and knowledgeable Trustees to guide the family, the development of trusted advisors to help during our own lifetime as we age and “greater peace of mind” that the family and the estate has both experienced people and governance with substance in place.

If you have any questions about this, please give us a call.