Wealth Enhancement®

How to Discuss Your Estate Plan with Adult Children

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Estate planning can be a tough topic to discuss or think about - you're essentially pondering your own mortality and how to transfer multiple assets in a desired way. As challenging as the topic can be, it's essential to be prepared and up to date with your documents. A proper estate plan is the best way to communicate your wishes to heirs after you're no longer able to.

This topic came up recently when my mom called me out of the blue and said she'd like to sit down to discuss her estate plan. After the initial worry that something was wrong, our conversation went well and made me realize how valuable her proactive decision was. I now have a much better understanding of where her documents are kept and how she'd like her assets to be handled.

As someone on the receiving end of this conversation, I wanted to share a few tips to make the discussion as smooth and productive as possible when talking to your adult children:

1. Choose the right time and place

Choose a quiet, comfortable setting and a time when no one feels rushed. My mom and I chose her kitchen table when we both had an hour or two of free time.

2. Express your intentions clearly

Estate planning is not just about financial matters; it often involves conveying personal values and beliefs. Emphasize that your intention is to provide transparency and understanding. By articulating your wishes in advance, it increases the likelihood that your desires will be honored and met. It gives you the opportunity to explain the reasoning behind your decisions.

3. Share as much as you're comfortable with

To me, this is probably the most important aspect of the conversation. Forced conversations and prying for information is never a good environment for open dialogue. It's okay to keep some information private if that's most comfortable for you. As I mentioned before, this topic can be challenging for a number of reasons. At the end of the day, estate and financial plans are very

personal and it's up to you to decide and set boundaries for how much information you'd like to share.

At a minimum, I think it's important for your children to know the big-picture items like who to contact, where things are located, and how the distribution of assets will flow. Important information can be shared without a balance sheet or dollar figures attached. Full disclosure is not required as long as the conversation is thoughtfully planned and conducted.

4. Address concerns and questions

Open communication allows your loved ones to ask questions and gain clarification about specific aspects of your estate plan. By addressing concerns in advance, family members can feel more at ease. This exercise might even uncover areas of your estate plan that need updating and revisiting.

5. Consider a family meeting with us to help facilitate the flow of conversation

We have done several family meetings to help facilitate the flow of conversation and answer any questions that you, as the client, or your kids may have. Sometimes it's best to bring in a 'moderator' who understands all the moving parts. We also enjoy meeting your children and this can serve as a low-pressure way to put a face to a name.

Remember that this conversation is an ongoing process and a topic that's important to communicate ahead of time. While it can be challenging, it's a good idea to think through how you'd like to begin this conversation when you're ready.

As always, we're happy to help facilitate and approach this topic in a collaborative spirit with you and your loved ones.