

Infusing the Principles of Etiquette into Your Estate Plan

May is National Etiquette Month, and the goal is to encourage all people to act with consideration, respect, and honesty in their interactions with others and in their everyday lives.

Etiquette can also play a role in estate planning. A well-crafted estate plan ensures that your wishes are respected and that your loved ones are taken care of. Estate planning can also address what happens when you become ill and are unable to make decisions for yourself prior to death. Good manners and decorum can help minimize potential conflicts and disputes that may arise among family members during the planning process. As such, it is important to observe proper etiquette when planning and executing your estate plan to ensure a smooth and peaceful transition of your money and property to your loved ones. This involves communicating openly and honestly with family members about your plan and considering their feelings and opinions. Showing respect and sensitivity to family members can prevent future potential legal challenges that could arise from disagreements.

The following are some ways that you can bolster your estate plan by incorporating the key elements of etiquette.

Consideration. An estate plan can create a sense of stability and calm in times of loss or uncertainty. No matter what level of wealth you currently enjoy, if you do not leave detailed instructions for the type of medical care you want, you will be putting those you love most in the position of being mind readers. They will have to do their best to figure out what you would have wanted and then deal with the consequences, such as unhappy family members who disagree with them. A well-crafted estate plan shows consideration for your loved ones by preventing confusion about what to do and helping them avoid the pressure to make rushed choices.

Additionally, a carefully prepared estate plan can allow you to customize a plan that provides for your loved ones in a unique way that takes into consideration your loved one's personal circumstances. They can find solace in the love and consideration you showed them by ensuring that your estate plan was not just a one-size-fits-all document.

Another way you can demonstrate consideration in an estate plan is by carefully considering who you are choosing as your trusted decision makers. Each role in an estate plan is important and is best handled by individuals with the right skills. When you are choosing a decision maker, it is important that you pick the right person for the job and that the person you are choosing can handle the responsibilities. In some instances, the person may not be able—not for a lack of skill, but because their plate is already full. Choosing an already overcommitted loved one could leave them feeling burdened and resentful during a time when they need to be grieving.

Respect. Estate planning makes it easier for your loved ones to respect your wishes because they know exactly what you want. Trust-based estate plans can respect your and your loved ones' right to privacy by keeping private matters out of the public eye. Without a comprehensive trust-based estate plan, your estate may need to go through court in a proceeding called probate. This means that your choices become visible to the public, as does any information that needs to be filed with the court (like a list of everything you owned).

Honesty. An estate plan can bring a family together. News stories are rife with examples of beneficiaries arguing over a deceased loved one's money and property or instances of a person's care and end-of-life wishes being ignored. But an estate plan can avoid those types of emotionally draining situations. You should communicate your wishes for end-of-life care to your loved ones. While creating an advance directive document like a healthcare power of attorney is important, it is equally essential to have open and honest conversations with your loved ones about your wishes. These conversations can be difficult, but they can provide clarity and peace of mind for everyone involved. And these discussions can provide a wonderful opportunity for you to show those same people how much you care for them and appreciate them while strengthening the bonds of family love. Many people also take the opportunity to write something personal to their family members – passing along hopes, dreams, stories, and wisdom.

By crafting an estate plan that is considerate of one's loved ones, respectful of privacy, and honest about wishes for care and end-of-life decisions, you can ensure that your wishes are carried out in the most respectful and dignified manner possible. If you are interested in learning more about our estate planning process, or to update your existing plan, please schedule a meeting with us.