



DON'T TAX YOURSELF

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Creating an Ethical Will to Pass Down Your Values and Memories

BY BOWDITCH & DEWEY • OCTOBER 7, 2024

While having an estate plan in place to provide for your possible incapacity and death is important, many people also look for a way to pass down their values. This can be done through a document called an Ethical Will, which can be one of the most important gifts you leave your family or friends.

An Ethical Will, also called a Legacy Letter, is a personal document that communicates your values, experiences, special memories, hopes for the future, gratitude and life lessons. It can be a written document or letter, or it can be a conversation that you record on video. Some people prefer to share it with their family or loved ones now, and others prefer to leave it with their Will and other documents for their loved ones to read after they are gone. It can be as simple or detailed as you like and need not be overwhelming.

If you are interested in how to get started in preparing an Ethical Will, try writing a letter to your family or loved ones. Here are a few questions that might help you get started. This list is not exhaustive, and you certainly do not need to answer every question. The goal is for this to serve as a springboard for you.

- What was most important in your life?
- Who were the people in your life who most influenced you?
- What have been some of your proudest accomplishments?
- What values do you want to pass down?
- What is your heritage and your upbringing?
- What memories or milestones are important to you?
- If you were in the military service, what experiences were important?
- What was the best or worst piece of advice given to you?

- What advice have you given to family members or friends? How did they respond?
- How have your experiences of happiness, sadness, losses or failures affected you?
- What are you most grateful for?
- What are your visions for the future, for you and for your family or friends?
- Are there traditions you want your family members to continue?
- Have you been involved with charities? What did you see or learn?
- What are your favorite charities?
- Why did you choose your profession or career, or if you decided to not work outside of the home, why did you choose that?
- What is the most important thing you learned from your parents or grandparents?
- If you had significant wealth, what would you do?
- If you found out you were dying in the near future, what would your biggest regret be?