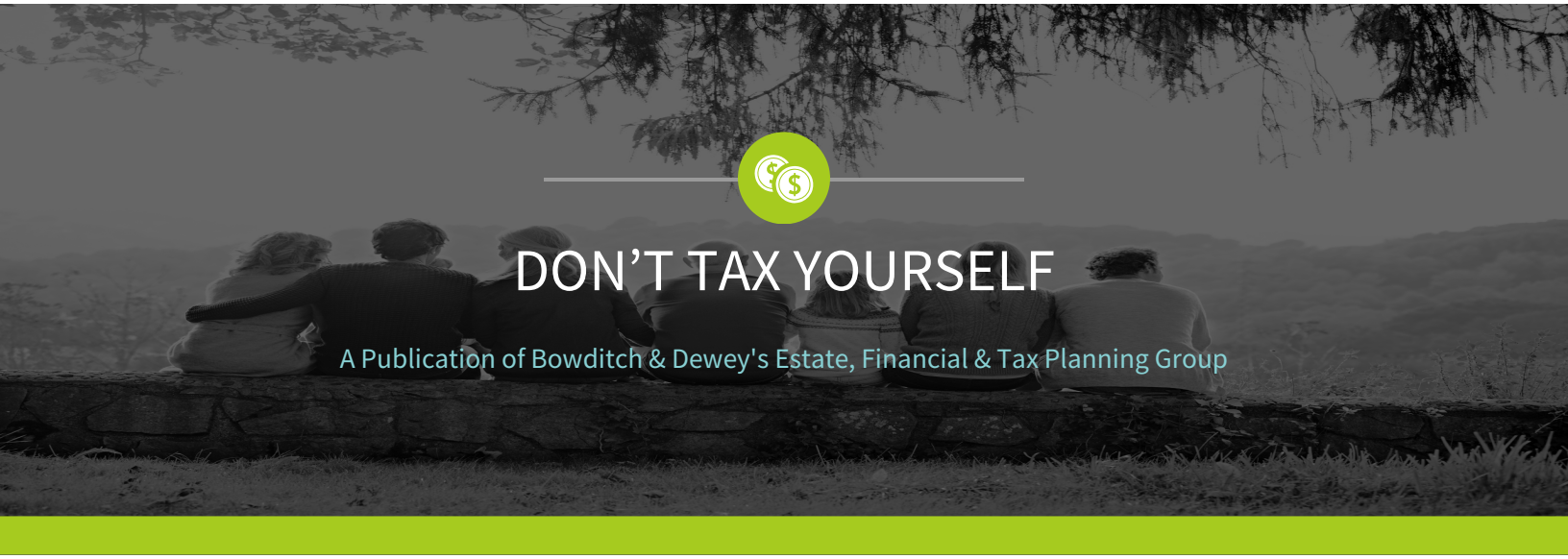

DON’T TAX YOURSELF

A Publication of Bowditch & Dewey's Estate, Financial & Tax Planning Group

Creating an Ethical Will to Pass Down Your Knowledge, Values and Memories

BY BOWDITCH & DEWEY • AUGUST 11, 2026

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 knowledge, values and memories. This can be done through a non-legal document called an Ethical Will, which can be one of the most important gifts you leave your family or friends and is an opportunity to share your values with future generations.

An Ethical Will, also called a Legacy Letter, is a personal document that communicates your values, experiences, special memories, hopes for the future, gratitude, life lessons and sometimes forgiveness. An Ethical Will can also be used to complement your traditional estate plan by clarifying decisions made in your Will or trust. 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 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 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?

©2026 Bowditch & Dewey LLP. All Rights Reserved.

- 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?
- Are there favorite memories of your children, grandchildren or other family members that you would like to share?
- 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?
- Are there stories from your parents or grandparents that resonate with you today?
- 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?
- Was there a historical event that changed your life/perspective?

You can share your Ethical Will with your estate planning attorney despite your attorney not being involved in the creation of the Ethical Will. This can be useful if a reason for creating your Ethical Will is to explain decisions made in your other estate planning documents. It can also be useful to share in advance of creating or updating your estate plan, so your attorney understands what is important to you.

©2026 Bowditch & Dewey LLP. All Rights Reserved.