

Why Estate Planning Matters More Than You Think

Most people put off estate planning because it feels like a task for the distant future. They assume it only matters for the wealthy or the elderly. But the truth is, anyone with assets, children, or strong opinions about their medical care needs a plan. I have seen families torn apart not by grief, but by the confusion and conflict that follows an unprepared death. That is why I want to talk about what estate planning really means, and why you should start thinking about it now, not later.

Estate planning is not just about writing a will. It is a process that covers who gets your property, who makes decisions for you if you become incapacitated, and how your debts and taxes are handled after you die. It also includes instructions for your medical care if you cannot speak for yourself. Without a plan, the state steps in with default rules that may not match your wishes at all. That can mean long delays, unnecessary legal fees, and outcomes that leave your loved ones frustrated and hurt.

What Happens Without a Plan

Imagine you die without a will. Your state's intestacy laws determine who inherits your assets. In many states, that means your spouse gets a portion, and your children split the rest. But what if you have a blended family? What if you want to leave something to a close friend or a charity? Without a will, those people get nothing. The court appoints an administrator to handle your estate, and that person may not be someone you would have chosen.

Even worse is the situation where you become incapacitated. If you have a stroke or a serious accident, your family might have to go to court to get guardianship or conservatorship just to pay your bills or make medical decisions. That process is expensive, public, and slow. A simple power of attorney and a healthcare directive can avoid it entirely. Yet many people skip these documents because they think they are only for the old or the sick.

[View the location on Google Maps](#)

The Core Documents You Need

A solid [estate planning](#) package usually includes several key documents. Each serves a different purpose, and together they cover most scenarios. Here is what I recommend to anyone who asks:

- A will: It spells out who gets your property and who is in charge of your estate. It also names a guardian for minor children.

- A durable power of attorney: This lets someone manage your finances if you cannot. It can be effective immediately or only upon incapacity.
- A healthcare directive: Also called an advance directive, it states your wishes for medical treatment and names someone to make decisions for you.
- A living trust: This is optional but useful for avoiding probate, especially if you own real estate in multiple states or want privacy.

Each of these documents requires careful thought. For example, who should be your agent under a power of attorney? It should be someone trustworthy, organized, and willing to act. I have seen people name a spouse without thinking about what happens if the marriage is strained or if the spouse is not good with money. Naming a backup agent is also wise in case your first choice cannot serve.

Common Mistakes People Make

Even people who create an estate plan often make errors that undermine its effectiveness. One common mistake is forgetting to update the plan after major life changes. A divorce, a new child, a move to a different state, or a significant change in assets should trigger a review. I once worked with a woman whose will still named her ex-husband as beneficiary, years after the divorce. The court honored the will because she never changed it, and her current partner got nothing.

Another mistake is failing to fund a living trust. If you create a trust but do not transfer your assets into it, the trust is essentially an empty box. Your assets still go through probate. People also forget to name contingent beneficiaries. If your primary beneficiary dies before you and you have no backup, the assets may end up in probate regardless of what your will says.

Taxes are another area where planning matters. Federal estate tax exemptions are high, but some states have their own estate or inheritance taxes. Proper planning can minimize those taxes, but it requires more than a simple will. Trusts, gifting strategies, and life insurance can all play a role. That is where professional advice becomes valuable.

When to Start and How to Choose Help

There is no perfect age to start estate planning. If you have minor children, you need a will to name a guardian. If you own a home or have retirement accounts, you need to designate beneficiaries and consider probate. If you have strong feelings about end-of-life care, you need a healthcare directive. The best time is before you need it, which is now.

Choosing a professional to help with estate planning is a personal decision. Some people use online forms, but those can be risky if your situation is not straightforward. A local attorney

who understands your state's laws is usually the safest bet. You can also work with a financial planner or a trust company. The key is to find someone who listens to your goals and explains things clearly. Do not be afraid to ask questions. If the professional brushes off your concerns, find someone else.

Estate Planning Is an Ongoing Process

Many people treat estate planning as a one-time event. They sign the documents, file them away, and forget about them. But life changes, and your plan should change with it. I recommend reviewing your plan every three to five years, or after any major life event. Check that your beneficiaries are current, your agents are still willing to serve, and your documents comply with any changes in the law.

One area that often gets overlooked is digital assets. Your online accounts, social media profiles, digital photos, and cryptocurrencies are part of your estate. If you do not leave instructions for how to access them, your family may have a hard time. Some states have laws that give executors access to digital accounts, but it is better to include a list of accounts and passwords in a secure place, along with instructions in your will or a separate document.

Why It Is Worth the Effort

The real value of estate planning is not about avoiding taxes or probate, though those are nice benefits. It is about giving your family clarity and peace of mind during a hard time. When I helped my own parents set up their plan, we had conversations I had been avoiding. We talked about what they wanted if they could not speak for themselves. It was uncomfortable, but it brought us closer. Now I know exactly what they want, and I can act without second-guessing.

That is the kind of gift you give your own family. You spare them the guesswork, the court battles, and the regret. You make sure your money and property go where you intend. And you ensure that your values and wishes are respected, even after you are gone. Estate planning is one of the most caring things you can do for the people you love.

If you are ready to start or want to review an existing plan, you can contact Jeremy Eveland at 17 N State St, Lindon, UT 84042, or call (801) 613-1472 for guidance.