

Estate Planning Tip #1: Make a complete list of assets and how they are owned

With increasing memory loss, there is a heightened risk of having assets “disappear.” This problem can arise even in the early stages of Alzheimer’s. Assets often become unclaimed because the owner simply forgot about them. This problem of assets disappearing is especially acute in the digital age, with banking and brokerage accounts increasingly being managed, and more and more people storing their information online.

Banks and brokerages encourage people to go “paperless” but where the only record of asset ownership is a contrail in the digital cloud, significant value can disappear. You also should obtain income tax returns for the past three years.

You need to have access to all online user-names and passwords and know the rules that apply to various financial institutions. Do they accept powers of attorney? If so, do they insist on their own forms or specific language? You also need to find out whether assets are owned by the individual, in joint names with any other person or are in an IRA, 401(k) plan or other retirement vehicle.

Estate Planning Tip #2: Review all estate planning documents

It is important to review all estate planning documents, including wills, trust agreements and beneficiary forms early while the person can engage in dialogue with his or her advisors. Here are some of the issues to consider in estate planning reviews:

- Can we simplify the documents because the person may no longer need estate tax planning?
- Conversely, should he or she do estate tax planning and, if so, is there enough time to implement tax saving techniques?
- Examine all beneficiary designations for life insurance and retirement plans. This is especially important if he or she has been divorced.
- Are there any changes in his or her family, such as divorce, death, marriage, birth or adoption of a child or grandchild?
- Are his or her children mature and responsible enough to receive their inheritances outright or do they need the protection of a trust?
- Is it likely that the decedent’s assets will end up in the hands of his or her in-laws or their families?

Estate Planning Tip #3: Put recurring bills on auto pay and designate third party recipient

All recurring bills should be put on “auto payment” with the bank. A spouse or other family member should be designated to receive copies of life and health insurance premium notices so you can ensure that premiums don’t lapse and insurance policies are canceled.

These are just a few of the important tips to know. Our firm helps parents and children to get all of the planning pieces organized and updated.