

*Staple
Here*

*Leave Behind Your
Values, Not Just Your
Valuables*

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[☆]Many of the monetary and other guidelines discussed in this booklet change frequently. Please be certain to verify their accuracy before acting based on these numbers.

What is an ethical will?

Everyone, regardless of wealth, has something to give their children, family, and other loved ones. A spiritual and emotional legacy communicates the true meaning behind your life’s endeavors, and the recipients of your personal thoughts will cherish this look into your soul. Called an ethical will, records of this type date back more than 3000 years ago to the early days of the Jewish religion (Genesis Chapter 49), as well as the New Testament (John Chapters 15-18). Not surprisingly, other faiths also find leaving more than just a financial bequest to be important.

What to include?

Your ethical will gives you the opportunity to include personal and spiritual values, hopes, experiences, love, and forgiveness. You can include your blessings to your loved ones, an explanation of your faith and values, lessons and stories from your life, and instructions regarding personal affects of emotional significance.

If you don’t lead an overtly spiritual or religious life, this is the opportunity to share your own value structure with those close to you. An ethical will is the voice of your heart, a love letter to your family.

How do I write one?

You can dictate your ethical will into a cassette tape or use a video recorder, a typewriter, or a computer. Work on your ethical will for a while, then if possible leave it for a week or so and come back to it. Also, consider the format, type of paper and ink you want to use. You may want to bind your work as a book, using archival-quality materials such as fade-resistant ink and acid-free paper.

The length, style, or type of ethical will does not matter. What matters is making sure your values, thoughts, and beliefs are preserved for future generations. Consider interviewing other family members to leave a complete picture of your family history for your survivors.

We will be happy to work with you on your ethical will as part of your elder care planning process. You may also want to hire a professional writer or videographer to help you with your project.

For more information, please visit our website, or call our office.

Benefits of an ethical will

Undertaking this process imparts a sense of control, just as preplanning a funeral, writing a will, purchasing adequate life insurance, and forming a trust does. You wouldn't leave those things to chance, so why neglect an important cornerstone to your identity and character? Identifying what you value and what you stand for -- and articulating it -- will make sure your legacy is preserved for future generations. You will live on in the hearts and minds of your loved ones. Those who have written ethical wills report a sense of completion in their lives, a feeling of having a burden lifted from their shoulders just by sharing their thoughts.

A few suggestions

If you are creative, consider including poetry and songs you've written, or perhaps write new pieces for this purpose.

One caution is to refrain from instructing your heirs on how to behave because it will likely take away from the effect you want the document to have. The goal is to show love and caring, not create anger, and it should not be a place to blame others for what you have not enjoyed about your life.

An ethical will is a good opportunity to share your family history: Stories about your grandparents and parents, their accomplishments, and their lives can also be included. You became who you are from the lessons you learned from them, so it can be important to include them as well. Did you follow their advice and learn from their mistakes? Did you use their experiences as building blocks for your own success? Do you have any regrets about your relationship with them?

How long should it be?

Your ethical will can be as short as a sentence or two, or longer and more detailed to include more family stories, more lessons, more values. “Speak with kindness, always be humble, regard every person as greater than yourself” is one example of a short, but effective, ethical will. An ethical will should express the essence of your heart, personality, and soul.

You can even consider turning your ethical will into a full-length biography or video of your life story to record your memories and beliefs for your loved ones.

Other considerations

An ethical will is just one part of your elder care planning. You will want to take a holistic look at your financial, physical and spiritual needs. You will want to consider and plan for your long-term care, as well as your funeral arrangements and the disposition of your estate. Ultimately what is at stake is not only your well-being, but that of your loved ones.

An experienced advisor, who is current on the latest changes in the law, is necessary to ensure success. High costs are involved with the poor selection of an advisor, and by the time the mistakes are found, it is far too late to correct them.

We stay up to date on the latest changes in the law by closely following the legislative session of both Florida and the United State Congress, and by regularly attending and presenting at local, state, and national elder law seminars.

For more information about these and other elder law subjects, please visit our website or call our office.

Jack M. Rosenkranz

Notes

Jack M. Rosenkranz received his law degree from the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University and his undergraduate degree from Memphis State University. In college, and again in law school, he used his skills and his knowledge of political science and public surveys to bring much-needed changes to campus policies. As a result of his efforts at college, he was awarded the John W. Burgess Award for Meritorious Achievement in Political Science.

Mr. Rosenkranz now uses his natural abilities and legal training in his Elder Law practice, which includes Medicaid and Medicare planning, estate planning, advanced directives, Veterans benefits (such as Aid and Attendance), probate, supplemental trusts, and other long-term care planning needs. He was the first to receive both the Outstanding Achievement Award for the Florida Chapter of National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys and the Member of the Year Award for the Elder Law Section of the Florida Bar in the same year.

His peers have selected him as a Leading American Attorney in Elder Law, and he has an AV rating, the highest possible, with Martindale Hubbell. He remains active in the Elder Law Section of the Florida Bar, the Florida Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, and the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, Inc. Mr. Rosenkranz mentors new elder law practitioners, sharing with them the knowledge he has obtained from attending and presenting at numerous local, state, and national seminars each year since he began his practice in 1991.

Mr. Rosenkranz has co-hosted a weekly radio program, "The Informed Elder," on 570 WHNZ. He regularly gives presentations and other informative talks about elder law to the public and to other attorneys.