

***PUBLISHED ARTICLE:***  
***The Inheritance Conversation***

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In December I became a grandfather for the first time.

This has been a profound experience for me. Shortly after my grandson Caleb's birth, I decided it was time for the inheritance conversation. I sat down with my wife and our three grown children around the dining room table to discuss the estate details should, heaven forbid, my wife and I die at the same time. This conversation wasn't comfortable. However, it was necessary and less awkward than I expected.

The inheritance conversation is not just for the ultra-affluent and it's not just about the money. It can preserve the relationships between your children. That is my greatest desire – to do as much as I can to foster good relationships between my children.

Second, consider the various assets/properties you've accumulated over the years, not to mention the relationships you've built with people to maintain and possibly care for said assets. Also, think through taxes involved or other issues (maybe even with neighbors) that beneficiaries should be aware of. Then there are all the "other" assets ... like the coffee cans buried in the backyard.

Start with the simple stuff (no attorney would ever say that) such as the power of attorney form. The first question you might ask your children could be, "Who wants to act on my (or your mother's) behalf if we cannot?" What that means is which of your children would be willing or able to take care of any business or legal items if, for any reason, you're incapable?

Next, naming a power of attorney for health care is another great place to start. The biggest surprise for me was when our oldest son, Andy (he works in health care), asked that all three siblings serve in this capacity as he didn't want to serve alone. He explained that the responsibility is just too great, and the decision is too grave to handle alone.

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Surprise for us? Yes. At the same time, it's practical and heartening to hear them talk about that one factor. Another issue the kids brought up, which surprised us, was decision-making. They made it known that they alone (i.e., without input from their spouses) want to make the critical decisions.

Ultimately, you want to avoid a will contest. Many attorneys say this is the worst part of their practice. Some attorneys have personally mentioned the will contest as being a no-win situation on every level.

So what are some of the major benefits of discussing your estate with your children sooner rather than later?

- 1) An increasing knowledge for your children of the issues.
- 2) The importance of financial planning for themselves. Your children will have the chance to see how you have planned your own situation and see the benefits and drawbacks.
- 3) Conversations of your personal wishes – what you hope they will carry on and understanding more clearly your thinking can only benefit.
- 4) Hearing you (as parents) say why you've done what you have. This is a critical component, especially if you intend to treat your children or your grandchildren differently.
- 5) Last, the hopes and dreams you share with your children may change your relationship significantly for the better and positively impact them and your grandchildren far longer than your lifetime. Encourage your children to speak to you after to alleviate any misconceptions they may have as a part of the process.

This may well prove to be one of many very gratifying conversations you have.

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