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Estate Planning – The Ball Is In Your Court

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Before you get swamped with the activities of fall harvest, now is a good time to review and make adjustments to your estate plan. Yes, Congress is considering some major changes that could later require additional adjustments to your plan. However, “the dealing is not done” and there are many important reasons for estate planning other than tax minimization. So let’s review some of the basic points of estate planning to start you on the right foot.

The first and most important activity is to identify and prioritize your estate planning goals and objectives. If you are married, you should not only identify your goals but the two of you should identify and prioritize your joint goals and objectives. Additionally, consider those goals under varying scenarios. For example, identify those goals if you were to die; second, list those goals to be met if you and your spouse should die at the same time; and finally, consider the objectives to be accomplished should the entire immediate family die in a common accident or disaster. Always test your estate plan with the worst-case scenario.

Estate planning needs and merits your active participation in the design, implementation and monitoring. All three phases benefit from your developing a basic understanding of the primary estate tax regulations, planning tools, and strategies. Generally, there are a number of tools available to choose from which will accomplish any particular goal. Remember, it is your estate plan. Each tool or strategy normally has its advantages and disadvantages; you are the one who should decide which tools and strategies will best fit your situation, circumstances, and priorities.

Estate planning, business planning, and financial planning go hand in hand. The use of a team approach will help ensure that all of the important aspects of your particular situation are addressed. The time for planning is now. The young family just getting started needs a plan just as much – if not more – than the more senior couple entering into the retirement stage of their life.

Be realistic and honest as you gather information about your estate. You and your planning team will be developing strategies based on this information. After finalizing your plan, you should consider presenting your overall plan to your primary heirs. This would not be to defend or to debate but to simply inform them of your plan and to minimize confusion or debate between the heirs after you’re gone. Additionally, this meeting would be an excellent time to make known to your heirs the members of your planning team, where your body is to be placed or how your ashes are to be handled,

other special funeral arrangements desired, where you keep the keys to your safety deposit box, and the location of other important documents. A side benefit of this meeting could be that it might encourage your heirs to review their estate and financial planning needs.

As a wise man once said, the longest journey begins with a single step. Although the entire process may at first seem overwhelming, breaking any complex situation into a number of small concerns and attacking and completing these smaller issues will soon accomplish the entire project. The ball is in your court!



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