



**Andrea L. Jakob, PA**

*Legal knowledge, human wisdom:  
Helping you plan today, so you can  
sleep better tonight.*

## **Seven Estate Planning Traps Most People Miss**

Think back to your life seven years ago.

Were the same people in your life? Did you own the same things? Did you have the same accounts, passwords, family situation, and priorities?

Probably not. Life changes. But your estate plan does not change unless you update it.

That is where problems can sneak in. A will, trust, or power of attorney you signed years ago may still be valid, but that does not always mean it still fits your life today.

Here are seven common estate planning traps that are easy to miss — and worth checking before they cause problems for your family.

### **1. Old Beneficiary Forms**

Some assets do not follow your will. Life insurance, retirement accounts, and certain bank or investment accounts usually go to the person listed on the beneficiary form.

That means an old form can cause a big surprise.

You may have updated your will, but if your life insurance still names an ex-spouse, an old friend, or someone who has passed away, that form may control where the money goes.

Ask yourself:: Have I checked my beneficiary forms recently?

### **2. No Backup Person Named**

Your estate plan usually names someone to be in charge, such as an executor, trustee, or personal representative.

But what if that person cannot serve? People move. They age. They get sick. They may no longer be the right fit. Sometimes they simply do not want the responsibility.

Ask yourself:: If my first choice cannot help, have I named a backup?



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### **3. Digital Accounts No One Can Access**

So much of life is online now.

Bank accounts, email, photos, subscriptions, bills, passwords, investment accounts, and even two-factor authentication can all become difficult for your family to manage if they do not know where to look.

Your loved ones do not need your passwords sitting out in the open. But they do need a safe way to find important information when the time comes.

Ask yourself: Would someone I trust know where to find my important documents and digital account information?

### **4. No Plan for Incapacity**

Estate planning is not only about what happens after death. It is also about what happens if you are alive but unable to make decisions or manage your affairs.

Without the right documents, your family may not be able to pay bills, access accounts, talk to doctors, or make medical decisions for you.

Ask yourself: Do I have a power of attorney and healthcare documents in place?

### **5. Assuming Everyone Understands Your Wishes**

Many people say things like, “My family knows what I want.” Maybe they do. But that does not always make things legally clear.

This can be especially tricky in blended families, second marriages, or situations involving stepchildren. Good intentions can turn into confusion if the documents are not specific.

Ask yourself: Do my documents clearly say who should receive what?

### **6. A Trust That Was Never Finished**

Creating a trust can be a smart step. But signing the trust is not always enough.



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For a trust to work properly, the right assets usually need to be connected to it. This is often called “funding” the trust.

If assets were never transferred or coordinated with the trust, your family may still end up dealing with probate or other delays.

Ask yourself: Are my major assets titled the right way for my plan?

## 7. Leaving Behind an Expensive Problem

Not every inheritance is simple.

A house, condo, timeshare, or piece of land may come with repairs, taxes, insurance, mortgage payments, association dues, liens, or other costs.

What looks like a gift may become a burden if your heirs are not prepared.

Ask yourself: Am I leaving behind anything that could be costly or difficult for my loved ones to manage?

## When Should You Review Your Estate Plan?

A good rule of thumb is to review your estate plan every three to five years.

You should also take another look after a major life change, such as:

- Marriage
- Divorce
- A death in the family
- A new child or grandchild
- A move to another state
- A major financial change
- A serious health event
- A change in family relationships

Your estate plan should match your real life — not the life you had years ago.

A short review now can help prevent confusion, delays, and unintended surprises later. Most importantly, it can give your family clearer instructions when they need them most.