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Thoughts From Our Chairman - Alfred B. Van Liew

We all know death and taxes are inevitable. However, we spend more time and effort planning for taxes and typically not enough preparing for the inevitable passing. In this Spring issue of *As We See It*, our associate, Lydia Owen, goes into more detail pertaining to planning for the second part.

Crucial Conversations

How to protect the people you love most — not just your wealth

Lydia R. Owen CFP

A funeral has a way of bringing life's most important questions into sharp focus. After a recent funeral service, a friend gave voice to what may have been on everyone's mind: "If this happens to me — what could I do to make an untimely death easier on my loved ones?"

Over the years, we at Van Liew Trust have witnessed difficulties that arise when a parent or couple passes without having an open conversation about their estate plan. Family efforts to sort out these undefined details may be wrought with uncertainty, confusion, and even conflict. Relationships can be strained in the process.

The good news is this is almost entirely preventable — not with a thicker binder of legal documents, though those matter, but with honest, intentional conversations while you still can. Addressing the five topics below may be among the most important things you do for your loved ones, because having these crucial conversations may help mitigate future complications.

Sentimental Items — The disputes that money can't resolve

It may come as a surprise, but in our experience, it is more often the division of sentimental items that determine whether difficulties arise. Unlike financial accounts, a piece of jewelry or a beloved painting cannot be divided. When two heirs want the same object, the conflict often becomes about something far deeper: who was closest, who sacrificed more, who was truly known and loved. A conversation in advance where family members share what they value most, and why, before any distribution takes place, can make even difficult outcomes manageable.

Medical Directives — Giving your family clarity, peace, and permission to let go

How do you define quality of life? At what point would you want your loved ones to let go? Left unanswered, these questions can haunt a family for a lifetime. A clear, specific conversation about your wishes — formally documented in a Healthcare Proxy — is one of the most loving things you can do. Inheritance should come with grief. It should never come with guilt.

Your Digital Life — A potential blind spot in estate planning

Did you know that you can designate a Legacy Contact for your Apple devices and an Inactive Account Manager for your Google Accounts? Your digital life holds some of your family's most precious keepsakes: photographs, videos, and memories stored across devices and cloud services — yet most estate plans don't address them. We encourage clients to speak with their estate attorney about updating their documents to address digital assets. Your family will be grateful you did.

Equal vs. Equitable — Either way, please explain

Many clients distribute assets in ways that aren't perfectly equal — and for entirely good reasons. Whatever you decide, it can help to tell your family why. It is almost never the decision itself that causes lasting pain; it is the silence around it. When a child receives less and has no explanation, the gap in dollars can feel like a gap in love. Intellectually, most people understand that isn't true. Emotionally, it can be difficult. If your plans change, say so. Last-minute changes discovered only after you're gone can create wounds that may never heal. Transparency is one of the most enduring gifts you can give.

Your Executor — Setting them up to succeed

Who have you named as your executor, and do they know what that role requires? Does your family understand why you chose this person? An executor holds significant authority and responsibility at what can be an enormously difficult time. Introducing this choice — and your reasoning — before it ever becomes necessary is a gift to everyone involved.

How We Can Help

These conversations don't require a formal setting to begin. They can start over dinner, during a quiet drive, or with a simple letter sharing what you value and what you hope for your family.

If any of these topics resonate with you — or if you've been meaning to have a conversation you keep putting off — we invite you to reach out. In many instances, we may already know your children, your other family members, and your team of professional advisors. It would be our privilege at Van Liew Trust Company to help you navigate these crucial conversations.

We would be delighted to meet with you to share comments about this article, or to review your portfolio in detail.

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Ask for Joe Healy or Ted Staples

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NEWPORT

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