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Trust and estate services:

How the right structure can help preserve more for your heirs

For many of us, building wealth is one of life's major goals. It can mean financial security, the freedom to live more fully and the ability to create a lasting legacy for your loved ones.

Without the right structure, though, your wealth may not accomplish everything you intend. An effective estate plan—including the appropriate trust solutions—can help protect what you've built, minimize avoidable costs and help ensure your assets are transferred efficiently to the people and causes you care about most.

Why structure matters

When someone passes away without an estate plan, their assets typically go through probate—a public, court-supervised process that can take months or longer. Probate fees, administrative costs and potential family disputes can erode the value of what you intended to pass on.

Having a clear, coordinated plan—including trusts and proper beneficiary designations—can help your estate avoid these challenges and help bring order to a complex process. The right structure adds clarity for your loved ones during a difficult time, reduces uncertainty and can help preserve more of your wealth for future generations.

Effective planning rarely happens in isolation. It often requires collaboration among your attorney, tax professional and wealth advisor to ensure every aspect of your plan works together smoothly. With a unified approach, you can address potential gaps early and build a framework that adapts as laws and family dynamics evolve.

The role of trusts

Trusts, in a nutshell, are legal arrangements in which a third party—the trustee—manages assets on behalf of your heirs and beneficiaries according to your instructions. The trustee can be an individual or an institution such as a bank or trust company.

There are many types of trusts, each suited to different goals. For example, a revocable trust offers flexibility because you can modify or cancel it, while an irrevocable trust provides stronger asset protection but is less flexible once established. The right choice depends on the balance you want between control and protection.

Trusts can help shield heirs from creditors, divorce or financial mismanagement, and they can play an important role in efficient tax planning. They can also help ensure assets are used for specific purposes such as education, charitable giving or family needs. For families building multigenerational wealth, trusts can help preserve assets while maintaining adaptability across generations.

Tax efficiency and 2026 changes

The "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," signed into law in July, permanently increased the federal estate, gift and generation-skipping transfer tax exemptions. The new law sets a $15 million per-person exemption for 2026 and beyond, with automatic inflation adjustments going forward.

Previously, these exemptions were scheduled to expire after 2025, which would have cut them nearly in half. By removing that "sunset" provision, the legislation provides greater clarity for families planning their estates.

While this change may remove some of the short-term urgency to update your plan, it's important to stay proactive. Future tax laws could shift again, state-level taxes still apply for many families and waiting too long can mean missing opportunities for strategic gifting, establishing trusts or aligning your wishes.

Avoiding probate and delays

Even families with modest estates may benefit from taking steps to help ensure their wealth bypasses the probate process. Simple actions—like naming beneficiaries on retirement accounts, life insurance policies and bank accounts—allow funds to transfer directly to heirs.

Coordinating these designations within a broader estate plan helps prevent overlap, conflicting instructions or unnecessary delays. With clear documentation and professional guidance, your loved ones can focus on honoring your wishes rather than navigating administrative hurdles.

Philanthropy as part of the plan

Weaving philanthropy into your estate strategy can serve dual goals: advancing the causes you value while enhancing tax efficiency. Charitable giving can also strengthen your legacy by reflecting the principles that guided how you built your wealth.

Vehicles like charitable trusts and donor-advised funds—when structured properly—can help ensure that more of your wealth benefits the people and organizations you care about while reducing potential estate and income tax exposure.

Preserving family harmony

At its heart, estate planning is about relationships. Clear documentation and open conversations can help set expectations and minimize the potential for conflict. When heirs understand the reasoning behind your decisions—whether it's supporting education, philanthropy or fair asset distribution—they're more likely to work together constructively.

A thoughtful plan fosters cooperation and a sense of shared purpose among family members. Your Mariner wealth advisor, together with our estate planning team, can help coordinate the conversations and strategies that support both your financial goals and your family's peace of mind.

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