

What to Do After You Die

The Motley Fool

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If you've made a will and taken estate planning issues into account while managing your money, you may think you're all set. After your departure, your surviving loved ones will be provided for, and they'll know exactly who's supposed to get what and where to find everything.

Or will they?

It's one thing to leave your prized pewter locket to Cousin Bertha, but it's another thing entirely for your bereaved loved ones to find it in the clutter after your death. Even worse, if you've always been the one to handle some aspect of the family finances, your spouse or children may not know how to access your accounts—or even where they are, or who to call. Unless you like the idea of your family holding a seance to ask your departed spirit for the phone number of the family's insurance agent, you should assemble all the information they'll need now, before you depart—and put it where they'll be able to find it.

Not sure what to include? Grab some folders and use this checklist to help you get started.

A complete list of your financial accounts. You may have bragged about all your great stock picks from the Internet boom, but how will they know what you've got now and where to find it? Make a full list that includes your bank accounts, brokerage accounts, annuities, and any IRAs or other retirement accounts, as well as key information on any loans or credit card balances you have outstanding. For each, list account numbers, access instructions, and beneficiary information, and include copies of statements. If you have investment advisors or accountants, include their names and contact information—a trusted advisor who knows your finances could be a vital resource for your family in the aftermath of your death.

All insurance information. Not just life insurance, which should be obvious, but all the rest—home, auto, and any other policies you may have, including policies related to any businesses you may own. Include full information and the name and contact number of your agent(s), if applicable.

Legal documents. You'll include your will, of course, but you might want to add a living will and a power of attorney in case you're incapacitated before death, as well as instructions for your final arrangements. Also include any deeds, titles for vehicles, trust documents, and any licenses or permits for property such as firearms, as well as names and contact information for your lawyers. Here again, a trusted and helpful professional who knows your situation could be invaluable to your family in the days and weeks after your passing.

Details on recurring bills or expenses. Include full details—balances, payment information, account numbers, and contact information—for any mortgages or loans, if you have any, as well as for all utilities and any other recurring service providers. On a related note, here's a good place to put contact information for plumbers, repairmen, and contractors you've used and liked in the past.

Combinations and passwords. Include computer passwords, login information to all financial accounts, the combinations to any safes you may own, and details on any safe deposit boxes.

If you're worried about security—having combinations and passwords in a big red folder labeled "IMPORTANT INFO" in the front of your desk isn't exactly secure. You should split things up. Put basic instructions and contact info and a key to your safe deposit box (with instructions for accessing it) in the big red folder in your desk, and the passwords, legal documents, and other sensitive information in the box at the bank.

Robert Brokamp, who leads the Fool's [Rule Your Retirement](#) newsletter team, offered even [more ideas along these lines](#) in the newsletter's December 2006 issue. You can check out his article—and all the great content in the current issue—for free with [a 30-day pass](#). There's no obligation to subscribe.

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