

The Will Kit

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The Will Kit is for people who want to know more about the process of estate planning, who are confused about the process, or who do not see the necessity for it. Ventura takes the reader step by step through the process, and does it in an entertaining, and sometimes amusing, manner. Throughout the book, Ventura makes reference to the wills and estate planning problems of famous people -- sometimes relative to what they did right and sometimes what they did wrong. The complete wills of several well-known people are included in an appendix, and referred to in the text as examples.

I was particularly impressed by the fact that Ventura does not assume that every reader is part of a traditional nuclear family. He provides examples and information for people who are single, single parents, unmarried living with a partner, divorced, or remarried. In Chapter 7 he furnishes a number of sample wills for persons in various domestic relationships. He also illustrates how to make various types of bequests with sample wordings of appropriate clauses. The estate planning problems facing same-sex couples are given special attention, along with suggested strategies for addressing these challenges.

Ventura uses boxes to illustrate examples of what he is describing to help the reader understand complex issues or concepts. He peppers the text with "hot tips" to keep in mind during the estate planning process. Various tasks illustrated through examples along with pertinent work sheets and check lists.

In the first chapter, Ventura provides a wealth of information on the basics of wills and estate planning. Not only does he talk about types of wills, what makes a will valid, when to get legal help (almost always), and other basic estate planning terminology, he also describes the different ways that property can be owned jointly along with the estate implications of each. A separate section on wills and single people gives an overview of the estate planning issues facing the unmarried.

The remainder of the book describes the process of estate planning and writing a will relative to the types of decisions that need to be made. For example, one chapter

is devoted to making an inventory of one's assets and liabilities in order to determine what will be included in the estate at death. Another chapter covers probate and tax issues (sample tax forms are provided in an appendix).

Selecting one's executor may not be as simple as one might think. Ventura provides an overview of the executor's tasks and suggestions for how to choose an appropriate person or persons. Children, especially minor children, pose special problems, particularly when the children are not part of a traditional nuclear family, such as those born out of wedlock or stepchildren. Ventura provides a wealth of information about using such devices as trusts and gift giving to reduce tax burdens, and to secure the inheritances.

Information is presented on keeping one's will up to date and other end-of life issues in the final two chapters. Ventura stresses the necessity of updating one's will as one's circumstances (or tax laws) change, as well as the problems which can develop if left undone. Because a will is only one part of estate planning, Ventura includes other financial and legal planning tools necessary when one becomes incapacitated. These, of course, are living wills or advance directives, power of attorney for health care, and general power of attorney. Ventura provides a sample form of both an advance directive and a power of attorney for health care in the appendix.

In all, this is a very readable, engaging overview of the process of planning an estate. Anyone who works with end-of-life issues will find *The Will Kit* a good resource since it encompasses so many different types of domestic situations. This would be a great book for financial planners to read, and perhaps to even assign to their clients who are reluctant to deal with end-of-life issues. Most readers will undoubtedly enjoy the celebrity-related examples used by Ventura. Financial planners may even find them useful in explaining to clients the rationale behind certain estate planning strategies.

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