



Last Respects Consulting

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P—Priorities and Probabilities

L—Learning Curve (what you need to know)

A—Aspects and Angles

N—Needs and Networking

Practical Aspects of Approaching the Threshold—Taking Care of Business

The Life→Death Passage is a journey. There will be speed bumps and pot holes, blind curves, vista points and pit stops; you will meet fellow travelers, hitch-hikers, even security checkpoints; there will be forks in the road and final farewells. Attend to as many predictable details and decisions as possible ahead of time so you can be more present for the precious moments.

Planning involves working through a checklist of known issues—so make peace with that knowledge and devote the necessary time to focusing on taking care of business (legal decisions, setting goals, identifying and empowering your team). There will be surprises. But by paying attention, doing your homework and taking care of business, you can conserve your resources—emotional, physical, mental and financial—to be better prepared and able to respond to unexpected challenges as they arise, so the feeling of overwhelm can be reduced because the predictable questions and decisions are already being addressed.

MINIMUM DOCUMENTS TO HAVE IN PLACE:

- **Durable Power of Attorney** naming agent(s) for managing legal and financial affairs for you. This document is only valid during the lifetime of the one naming agent(s).
- **Advance Health Care Directive**, naming agent(s) to make health care and end-of-life decisions. Named agents on the Advance Health Care Directive can also be empowered to give disposition instructions to the mortuary and/or crematorium. You can find downloadable forms online for free, or ask your attorney, local hospital or hospice for the right form to use in the state where you reside. Laws may vary from state to state.
- **HIPAA Release Form** (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) giving your named agent(s) authority to discuss specifics with medical professionals. <http://www.healthcare-information-guide.com/HIPAA.html>
- **Data needed for completing Death Certificate** in the State where you are residing. Some of the information needed may surprise you, so start collecting it now.
- It may also be appropriate to have a **POLST**—(Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment), a relatively new form, which replaces the Do Not Resuscitate Order (“DNR”) and must be filled out by a physician. <http://polst.org>

This information is in no way intended to give legal advice; only to help you start planning. Just like it is a good idea to find a family doctor when you are healthy, it's a good idea to find an estate planning attorney before you are confronting a life-threatening crisis. Don't wait until you are faced with a mind-numbing diagnosis to try to make difficult decisions. Find an attorney you trust, who understands and respects you and your particular lifestyle choices. **Do it on a good day.**

—navigating the last part of life—

BE CONSIDERATE OF YOUR LOVED ONES! In legal terms “estate” doesn’t mean a mansion with rolling lawns and a rose garden. Your “estate” is whatever unpaid debts and the possessions you owned at the time of death. Even if you think you do not have sufficient assets to warrant an “Estate Plan,” someone will need to take care of your worldly affairs, and must be legally empowered to do so. Obtain the guidance of a legal advisor. Many communities have free legal services available, and many attorneys offer free ½ hour consultations. Grief is challenging enough without the burden of unexpected legal issues and expenses!

POWER-OF-ATTORNEY FOR PET CARE

What about your best buddies? The ones who probably know you better than anybody else in some ways, but need help with things like opening cans, taking walks, cleaning the kitty-box or filling the grain bin? How can you be sure that they don't end up in a shelter or abandoned, because nobody knows about them or has the authority to look after them? A web search such as “pet power of attorney” can get you started.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND BE AN INFORMED CONSUMER!

Everywhere from social media to mainstream news you can see a groundswell of dissatisfaction with the way we die in the USA, not only among the general public (consumers) but also among health care providers. Costly medical procedures prolong the dying process rather than supporting a gentle passage; legal battles over a personal end-of-life choice, cause untold physical and emotional anguish and a devastating financial burden; expensive and toxic funeral practices further impact the environment after we die and expose mortuary workers to carcinogenic substances. We, as consumers, have the power to make changes, but to do so we have to be informed, including talking with one another about our end-of-life wishes. Here are some resources to get you started in determining your personal values and wishes:

Compassion & Choices—<https://www.compassionandchoices.org/>

Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death, Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson

www.finalrights.org

Funeral Consumers Alliance—<http://www.funerals.org>

Grave Matters: A Journey Through The Modern Funeral Industry To A Natural Way of Burial, Mark Harris—www.gravematters.us

Green Burial Council—<https://greenburialcouncil.org/>

National Home Funeral Alliance—<http://homefuneralalliance.org/>

Stanford Letter Project—<https://med.stanford.edu/letter.html>

The Conversation Project—<http://theconversationproject.org/>

IT’S YOUR LIFE, AND A FULL LIFE INCLUDES DYING

The Victorian poet William Ernest Henley ended his poem *Invictus* with these words: “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” How many of us assume that role with the full understanding that at some point we will release the helm of our Earthly existence to someone else’s caring and capable hands? Take the time and attention to leave an operating manual for the spaceship YOU, so that both caregivers and legal agents can act with clear knowledge, empowered to carry out day-to-day operations, end-of-life needs, last wishes and disposition of bodily remains with foreknowledge and grace in accordance with *your* values, needs and wishes.

Any and all information provided by Last Respects Consulting is intended to help readers become informed, but is no substitute for an attorney! Find legal counsel you trust, someone who understands and respects you and your lifestyle choices. Do it on a good day!