

Attorney and CPA Bruce D. Sawyer of Cumberland Explains How to Avoid Estate Planning Tax Mistakes for HelloNation

What can families do to prevent unnecessary tax burdens from diminishing the value of an inheritance?

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What can families do to prevent unnecessary tax burdens from diminishing the value of an inheritance? According to a [HelloNation article](#), Attorney and Certified Public Accountant Bruce D. Sawyer of Bruce D. Sawyer Attorney at Law CPA in Cumberland, Rhode Island, says the answer begins with understanding how different assets are taxed and how coordinated estate planning can protect beneficiaries from common mistakes.



Bruce Sawyer

Many individuals assume that drafting a will or naming beneficiaries is enough to safeguard their estates. However, Attorney Sawyer explains that estate planning involves far more than deciding who receives what. The types of assets owned, the timing of transfers, and the structure of ownership can all have significant tax consequences. Without proper planning, these factors can create unexpected liabilities that reduce the total inheritance left to heirs.

Retirement accounts such as IRAs and 401(k)s are among the most misunderstood areas of estate planning. Attorney Sawyer notes that while these accounts are valuable savings tools, they can generate taxable income for beneficiaries when withdrawals begin. This can result in higher tax bills if distributions are not carefully timed or coordinated with other assets. Similarly, real estate transferred without proper planning can trigger capital gains or gift taxes that might have been avoided with other legal instruments.

Joint ownership and payable-on-death accounts also require careful review. While they can



An outdated estate plan can unintentionally increase tax exposure and create confusion for surviving family members”

Bruce D. Sawyer CPA

simplify access to funds after a death, they may unintentionally override the instructions in a will or trust. Attorney Sawyer cautions that these arrangements, if not considered in the context of the full estate, can lead to disputes, unequal distributions, or added tax exposure.

Another risk comes from relying on outdated strategies or incomplete advice. Tax laws change frequently at both the federal and state levels, and what worked in previous years

may no longer apply. Attorney Sawyer advises that working with a professional who is both an Attorney and a CPA allows for an integrated approach that balances legal structure with financial efficiency. This dual expertise helps identify risks early and ensure compliance with current tax regulations.

To reduce estate tax burdens, Attorney Sawyer recommends exploring tools such as trusts, life estate deeds, and planned gifting. Trusts can help manage assets efficiently, avoid probate, and minimize estate tax exposure. Life estate deeds allow individuals to retain control of real property while ensuring a smooth transfer to heirs. Gifting strategies, when properly documented, can reduce an estate's overall taxable value while supporting family members during the donor's lifetime.

The HelloNation article underscores that effective estate planning is not only about minimizing taxes but also about creating peace of mind. Families benefit when plans are clear, up to date, and guided by professionals who understand both the financial and emotional dimensions of legacy decisions. Early planning can help prevent legal disputes, simplify asset distribution, and preserve more wealth for future generations.

Attorney Sawyer also highlights the importance of documentation and periodic review. Life events such as marriage, divorce, business changes, or the purchase of new property can all alter how an estate should be structured. Regular updates ensure that plans remain accurate and that beneficiaries are correctly designated. For families in Rhode Island, where property values and state laws can add layers of complexity, an ongoing relationship with a trusted estate planning professional is essential.

Tax mistakes in estate planning often happen not through negligence but through a lack of coordination between legal and financial decisions. By combining legal insight with accounting precision, professionals like Bruce D. Sawyer help families avoid these pitfalls and achieve greater clarity about their long-term goals. This proactive approach allows individuals to pass on assets efficiently while protecting their loved ones from avoidable tax complications.

[Avoiding Tax Mistakes in Estate Planning](#) features insights from Bruce D. Sawyer, Attorney and Certified Public Accountant of Bruce D. Sawyer Attorney at Law CPA in Cumberland, Rhode

Island, in HelloNation.

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