

Family Philanthropy: Sharing Values, Leaving Legacies

*by A. Scott White, CFP[®], ChFC, CLU
President, Scott White Advisors*

Estate planning can be about more than just who ultimately benefits from your work—it can also be an opportunity to share your personal value system with future generations. When you set up your estate plan, you have three choices about benefactors: family and friends, charities, and taxes. If your estate is over a certain size, there are limitations on how much you can leave to family and friends. However, participating in a charitable giving program can shift some of your estate from taxes to a designated charity.

Charitable-giving programs open a dialogue among the involved family members over multiple family generations. Grandparents who set up the gifts typically stipulate the types of charities that can qualify to receive donations. While the grandparents are alive, they usually assist their children and grandchildren in evaluating charities to determine which ones meet the criteria, and then determine the most deserving.

All the family members involved may learn to appreciate each other's perspectives by participating in this exercise every year. By asking their children and grandchildren about the charities they value, grandparents can learn more about what is important to their heirs than they ever knew before.

After learning why their children and grandchildren feel the way they do about certain causes, grandparents can then share their feelings about charities, one-on-one with their heirs. Can you imagine the influence a grandfather has when sitting down with his granddaughter and explaining his beliefs? His message will be with his granddaughter for the rest of her life. And that establishes a real legacy.

Charitable giving programs encourage an open dialog between generations about what is important to them. Such open communication creates a much better opportunity to develop a set of family values. When grandparents, children and grandchildren make decisions together, they can support causes they believe will have a positive impact in our world. And the amount of money the government will take from the estate when it passes to the next generation could be reduced.

Scott White is president-elect of the Financial Planning Association Southwest Florida Chapter. He is past president of the Southwest Florida Chapter of the American Society of Financial Service Professionals, past president of the Lee County Estate Planning Council, and founding president of the Planned Giving Council of Lee County. For more information, visit www.scottwhiteadvisors.com or call (239) 936-6300. Scott White Advisors is an independent Registered Investment Advisor and is located at 1510 Royal Palm Square Boulevard, Fort Myers, Florida 33919. Securities offered through Raymond James Financial Services, Inc., member, FINRA/SIPC.