

# THINGS TO LEAVE YOUR KIDS other than money

BY CHARLIE CARR

**T**wenty or so years ago, a former colleague wrote a paper describing 10 things to leave your kids. It was very successful in that it prodded me to think about it off and on for several years — how often do any of us remember a paper years later? While I loved the concept, I didn't fully agree with the 10 things he identified, which may be why it continued to percolate in my mind. Over the years, I've come to realize that the specific items are different for each of us, depending on our values, experiences and beliefs.

My wife and I eventually created our own list of 10 things, which we encoded in our family charter. We hope that our kids (who are now adults) learn these things through everyday encounters with us, but writing them down in the charter is one more step toward getting them passed. As you create or review your own family charter and evaluate your formal estate plans, you might consider what non-financial items you are leaving for the next generation, and be intentional about identifying and passing them on.

Let's review some of the categories that have made it into my list.

- **Spirituality.** What faith, beliefs and values are very dear to you? Very briefly, describe the beliefs and values you want to ensure are ingrained in the next generation. This one has the greatest danger of being too long; we managed to summarize ours in 28 words.
- **Love and support.** We want our kids to know that we will always love and be supportive of them, and that this is not dependent on performance. It's OK to make mistakes or fail.
- **Passion.** Don't just go through the motions. Find something you are passionate about, and do that throughout life. Like all of these things, let's hope we are modeling that behavior.
- **Parenting.** Having coached youth baseball for 15 years, spending lots of time with other parents and kids, we believe it's important that the relationship focus be on the spouse before the kids in order to not be a child-centered family. Others may disagree with us. What key parenting lesson do you want to ensure your kids embrace?
- **Gratitude.** We want them to proactively look to the people around them and express their gratitude for the



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## WHAT ARE THE THINGS, EXCLUDING MONEY, THAT YOU WANT TO ENSURE YOU LEAVE FOR THE RISING GENERATION?

- **Generosity and public service.** We want them to be just as generous with their time and skills as they are with their money. We have tried to teach them to be aware of the needs around them and to be the person who volunteers to help.
- **Expanding horizons.** The world has so much more than our town, state or country has to offer. We believe that experiencing other cultures provides incredible value, while making us more aware of needs within our own community.
- **Living with honor.** We certainly want to ensure our kids learn right from wrong, tell the truth, are forgiving and honor others.
- **Finding joy in the journey.** Our attitude is a choice we make every day, in every interaction, and it shouldn't be dependent on our circumstances. Let's choose joy continuously.

In our charter, we listed the 10 things on a single page. In other words, we adhered to the spirit of Mark Twain's quote, "I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead." The longer you make it, the less likely your family will read and absorb its content.

Once you document the list and perhaps incorporate it into your family charter, create reminders to review the list a few times a year. Use it as part of your annual family meeting. Tell family history stories and prepare activities that accentuate one of the items. Someone recently told me that your values determine the culture of your life. Therefore, if this list really reflects your values, they will become part of the culture of your family.

Use this as a discussion at your next family meeting. What are the things, excluding money, that you want to ensure you leave for the rising generation? **EB**

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