

Your Last Love Letter

An Ethical Will

The purpose of an Ethical Will is to communicate “between the lines” of your formal estate documents. An Ethical Will is a heartfelt expression of your desires, stories, dreams, beliefs and love. Most, if not all, of the wealth distributed in estate documents carries a story or legacy that wants to be shared with children, grandchildren and friends. These are the stories that may get lost in generations because they are never told.

In this last love letter, please share your stories, your legacy, what you want to be remembered.

The following three exercises offer different approaches to creating your last love letter. There are NO correct ways to create this document. It is your unique expression. It reflects you. A journal or diary can be your ethical will. A scrapbook filled with your photos, treasures, poetry, music, writings and trinkets can be your ethical will.

And don't forget technological choices: video, audio and CD-Rom. Technology, as you know, changes over time. If you choose to record your Ethical Will on today's technology, be mindful of updating to avoid losing your gift. Remember VHS? It is many years old and the tapes are demagnetizing. Old videos lose image quality.

Take your time, create an inviting atmosphere to express yourself and, yes, have fun.

Once you complete your Ethical Will, consider sharing it with your family, friends and community. Trusted physicians, clergy and professional advisors may also benefit from witnessing your expression.

Be mindful of time and reviewing and refreshing your Ethical Will. Turning points in your life, challenging events or transitions may want to be added to your legacy.

Lastly, we offer some benefits reaped for those who create Ethical Wills:

- It provides an opportunity for personal growth.
- It creates a tangible connection from one generation to another.
- It adds meaning and purpose to your life.
- It may enrich family relationships
- It results in a cherished “gift of self;” the value of which is priceless.

Exercise 1

Structure Outline with a List of Phrases & Sentences

This exercise is an abridged version taken from *Ethical Wills: Putting your values on paper*. Select items from each category as is, edit them, or write your own thought that may have been triggered by these items. You will create a “mini-draft” which you can use as a framework for your ethical will. You can expand on this draft with material you create from additional exercises.

Opening Thoughts

- To my children: A few words to express my thoughts and feelings.
- To my family: In reading my ethical will, I hope you find a few surprises.
- I want you, my family, to know how important you all are in my life and how much I love you.
- Write your own opening if you wish.

Values and Beliefs

Education/Knowledge/Learning

- Read as if your life depended on it; it does.
- I tried and succeeded in giving my children a good education. I hope that you will have a passion for learning.
- In school, learn for the sake of learning and not with an eye only to a future career or how much money you can make.
- Record your own thoughts if you wish.

Giving and Receiving

- In giving you make your life worthwhile.
- Don't refuse to accept: others need a chance to give also.
- In sharing, one learns, experiences, and reaps the highest level of satisfaction.
- Record your own thoughts if you wish.

Life Lessons

- Act on situations and opportunities, rather than be acted upon.
- Don't make assumptions of what people need. Ask them.
- You will learn more by listening than by speaking.
- Record your own thoughts if you wish.

Hopes for the Future

- I hope that you can remember the good memories.
- Try to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- Keep before you for inspiration a vision of the way things ought to be, and help us move, albeit so slightly, in that direction.
- Record your own thoughts if you wish.

Concluding Thoughts

- You all have been a great source of joy and strength for me. I love you all very much.
- As I close here, I have to chuckle because I realize that even at the end of my life I do not stop giving directions. Humor me, it is who I am.
- My love will always be with you – you get to keep it and remember it forever. I love you all.
- Record your own thoughts if you wish.

Exercise 2

Linking Generations

1. Choose an ancestor or a relative whom you are curious about or feel a strong connection. Perhaps someone who you've heard stories or "legends" about; perhaps your namesake e.g., the person you were named after. Write down this person's full name.
2. Imagine that you have the opportunity to go back in time to meet and talk with them. Write the three most important questions that you would ask them about their lives and their times?
3. Imagine that 50 or 100 years from now a future family or community member completing this same exercise choose you as an ancestor they'd like to know more about...Reflect on what you've written here.

Exercise 3

Reflections

Complete these sentence stems with as many thoughts as you wish:

1. From my grandparents I learned that...
2. From my parents I learned that...
3. From my spouse/children/siblings I learned that...
4. From experience I learned that...
5. I am grateful for ...
6. My most meaningful religious holiday/experience/tradition is...
7. An important life lesson I want to pass on...
8. I have this regret...
9. I remember when...
10. I always thought that...