

Office Hours Study Guide

Unique Estate Planning Tactics

When to Move from Foundational Planning to Advanced Planning

Once the estate planning fundamentals are in place, advisors often ask:

What is the next level? What is the strategy that creates meaningful additional value beyond having a will, trust, and powers of attorney properly executed and funded?

The answer depends on the client's wealth, complexity, and goals, but for ultra high net worth families, advanced gifting strategies and estate tax planning vehicles may deliver significant long-term impact.

The key, however, is knowing when advanced planning adds value and when simplicity is better.

FIRST: MAKE SURE THE BASICS ARE ACTUALLY WORKING

Before introducing advanced strategies, it is critical to confirm that the foundational plan is fully implemented.

In practice, even well-drafted estate plans often have gaps:

- Assets not properly titled in the trust
- Outdated beneficiary designations
- Unfunded trusts
- Decision makers who no longer make sense
- Lack of coordination across advisors

Implementation failures create far more problems than a lack of sophisticated techniques.

For most clients, a properly drafted and properly funded foundational plan solves 95% of potential estate planning issues. Only after that foundation is secure should advanced strategies be considered.

STRATEGIC LIFETIME GIFTING: WHERE YOU CAN CREATE SIGNIFICANT VALUE

For high and ultra high net worth clients facing potential estate tax exposure, advanced strategies like strategic lifetime gifting may dramatically reduce transfer taxes and enhance multigenerational planning.

Some examples include:

- **Spousal Lifetime Access Trusts (SLATs)**

Allow one spouse to utilize lifetime exemption amounts while still preserving indirect access to assets through the other spouse.

- **Gift Trusts for Children or Descendants**

Move appreciating assets out of the taxable estate while retaining structure and control.

- **Annual Exclusion Gifting**

Particularly valuable when exemption amounts are historically high and potentially subject to future reduction.

These techniques may:

- Reduce estate tax exposure
- Shift appreciation out of the taxable estate
- Preserve wealth for multiple generations
- Align with long-term family objectives

However, advanced planning must be purposeful, not performative.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE: DO NOT OVERCOMPLICATE

One of the greatest risks in estate planning is unnecessary complexity.

Advanced structures should only be implemented when:

- A clear tax or strategic objective exists
- The client understands the trade-offs
- The structure aligns with long-term goals
- The administrative burden is manageable

Complexity for the sake of sophistication rarely serves families well.

For most clients, a strong basic estate plan that's properly executed, properly funded, and periodically reviewed will accomplish nearly everything they need. Advanced techniques should enhance clarity and efficiency, not create administrative strain.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The greatest value in estate planning does not come from exotic structures. It comes from a solid foundational plan, proper implementation, ongoing review, and strategic enhancements where appropriate.

For high net worth families, advanced gifting and trust strategies may meaningfully reduce taxes and strengthen legacy outcomes. But those strategies only work when layered on top of a strong base. The true opportunity for advisors is not in complexity. It is in thoughtful alignment between wealth, goals, and structure.

To learn more about this topic, please watch our [Office Hours video](#) or reach out to your investment consultant.

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