

In an era when you can find a video online that will walk you through everything from upholstering a sofa to building a deck, we often feel confident that we can tackle any task as long as someone provides us with step-by-step instructions. And online estate planning software seems to do just that.

But success with a DIY project requires more than just knowing what to do. It requires knowing *how* to do it. Software that helps you create a will, for instance, is not equipped to tell you which provisions would be best for your unique situation and how these provisions should coordinate with other components in your plan. The software doesn't help you *plan* at all. And estate planning is about developing the right strategy for your family's future. If you make a mistake, the results are a lot more problematic than a sofa with a few wrinkles in the upholstery.

Seeing the Big Picture

DIY tools such as programs to create your own will take a piecemeal approach to estate planning. That is the equivalent of going to the orthodontist and having them straighten two out of your 32 teeth. The others may still be misaligned, and the two that you've had "fixed" will probably not line up with them. You may end up further from your goal of a perfect smile than you were when you started.

An estate planning attorney will be looking at many different aspects of your current situation, anticipated future needs, and goals for your family's future. An experienced attorney can suggest different options and explain how they work so that you can make an informed choice about what would be best for your situation. If you want to add a component to plans you already have in place, your attorney can describe the impact and any other adjustments that may be necessary to achieve your goals.

If your circumstances change, your attorney can help determine which aspects of your plan need to change and how. Your attorney can also suggest strategies to support your objectives that do not involve the creation of new documents, such as beneficiary designations and retitling of assets. The right strategic approach can save you and your family thousands of dollars and considerable time and effort.

A DIY program cannot do that with any degree of effectiveness. Even if the program provides a series of questions designed to assess your needs, the list and the resulting recommendations will still be so generalized that finding the best option will come down to a matter of luck.

Mistakes Can Be Heartbreaking

Another big problem with using DIY software to create estate planning documents is that you won't know if they work until it is too late to correct the mistake. You might create a will that is valid, but it could operate in a way that you didn't intend. Or you might set up a power of attorney that banks will not accept, so your agent cannot pay your bills while you are incapacitated.

You have to ask yourself if it's worth the risk. Do you want a safety net that could unravel or turn out to be filled with holes? Isn't that just providing a false sense of security?

Find Out the Advantages an Experienced Planner Can Provide

One of the best ways to decide whether you should work with a professional estate

planner or take a DIY approach is to talk to an estate planning attorney and get an idea of the assistance they could provide in your particular situation.

At The Nordhaus Firm, we can develop a comprehensive new plan or review your existing plans to see whether you need to update components to fit changes in laws or circumstances. Just schedule a strategy session to get started.