

# Living Your Legacy

Meaningful legacy planning involves more than merely passing on your accumulated wealth when you're gone. It means living a memorable life and teaching your children to be independent, well-rounded adults worthy of inheriting your hard-earned money.

BY RICHELLE THOMSON

Jason Stevens, a twenty-something trust-fund baby who's never worked a day in his life, only has one thing in mind for his grandfather — he wants the old man to kick the bucket so he can inherit his chunk of Granddad's billions. But Jason's in for a big surprise — he's the only family member not getting a single cent — at least not yet. Grandpa "Red" Stevens has left behind a series of tasks, called "gifts," that Jason must complete before he can get his hands on his inheritance. Sound like something out of the movies? You'll find out what happens in this family saga with the March 2007 release of *The Ultimate Gift*, starring James Garner as Howard "Red" Stevens and Drew Fuller as Jason in the movie adaptation of Jim Stovall's novel.

Here's a hint, though: As Red planned, Jason learns there's more



to life than money. If you think this is just a tidy ending to a story that has nothing to do with your life, think again.

It's common to want some control over your legacy — and while you may not be set up to distribute billions like Grandpa Red, you probably have some fairly good ideas of how you'd like to see your accumulated wealth and property managed. More than anything, you don't want your children or grandchildren experiencing some all-too-common worst-case scenarios involving inherited wealth. But in addition to the numbers side of legacy planning, there's the personal aspect — what do you want to be remembered for, how can you help to shape the lives of your children and grandchildren so that they are strong, independent individuals? And, most important, how do you craft a worthy legacy while you're alive?

The simple answer is that it, like so many things in life, is about balance. If you've got kids or grandkids and have begun the process of estate planning, you know that it's not only about getting the most money and assets into the hands of your loved ones (and away from the tax man's grip), it's also about the intangibles: how to pass down your lessons and values, how to ensure your accumulated wealth will be a positive force in their lives, how to expand your financial and

“Friedler suggests that ‘legacy’ and ‘inheritance’ are not synonymous — that leaving your children and grandchildren financially secure is wonderful, but leaving them with memories of you is more important.”



personal assets beyond your own family and into your community as a force for good.

What follows is a roadmap — a quick route through some very important territory — on your way to living and leaving a legacy you’ll be proud to call your own.

#### Foster Independence and Entrepreneurship

Watching your children and grandchildren succeed on their own — and perhaps providing them the opportunities to capably manage your wealth as it transfers to their next generation — is a vital step in legacy building. “Many families still believe that the key to success in life is arming their kids with a good education. That’s always going to be important, but these days, it’s not enough,” says Jennifer Kushell, president and co-founder of YS Interactive and the recently launched Your Success Network ([www.ysn.com](http://www.ysn.com)), and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Secrets of the Young & Successful*. “A college education no longer offers the same competitive advantage that it used to. Giving the next generation the most effective tools to create their own money is not as straightforward as it may seem. And if any class should be required for all students, in my opinion, it would be

entrepreneurship — that’s how to arm kids with the tools they need for life. Teach them opportunity recognition, feasibility assessment, research, budgeting, sales and marketing, the basic principles behind supply and demand, how to make money, and how to use whatever resources are at their disposal to create their own success.

“Teach them what they need to know in the real world as early as possible and their transition into it will be smoother, more enjoyable, and far more rewarding all around,” says Kushell. And by providing your children with the opportunities to succeed on their own, you’re also preparing them to manage the family wealth when it’s their turn to take the reins of the family fortune.

#### Share Your Legacy While You’re Here

Passing down great wealth also brings great expectations. When young people are still in midst of an identity crisis, trying to grow into their own adulthood, it’s hard for them to understand, let alone accept the responsibilities that come with wealth management —



and that's where great conflicts arise, says Kushell. For family goals and values to be in sync, there has to be a mutual respect. Young people need to learn to appreciate where the money is coming from, understand how it was earned (including the struggles), and what their parents' and grandparents' dreams are/were in building the family's wealth.

"At the same time, it's important for parents and grandparents to encourage their children and grandchildren to take ownership of their new wealth and associated responsibilities, and allow for them to put their own spin or signature on building the family legacy," she adds.

"There's a very interesting window of opportunity for family bonding here. If key members of the different generations can invest the time and energy in openly discussing their individual ambitions and finding ways to bridge the gaps and bring the various objectives into a more inclusive picture, then everyone wins."