

ESTATE PLANNING



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‘Till Death Do Us Part

Did you know the human brain is wired to prevent us from thinking about our own mortality?

Yair Dor-Ziderman, a graduate student at Bar-Ilan University’s Gonda Multidisciplinary Brain Research Centre, has spent the last few years studying the way people deal with death. “The brain does not accept that death is related to us. We have this primal mechanism that means when the brain gets information that links self to death, something tells us it’s not reliable, so we shouldn’t believe it.”

Maybe this accounts for the worrisome stats recently gathered by the Angus Reid Institute pollsters, the following DO NOT HAVE A WILL.:

- 69 per cent of people between the age the ages of 35 to 44;
- 49 percent of Canadians between 45 and 54; and
- 34 percent of people between 55 and 64

Everyone who wants their estate to pass on to their heirs in the timeliest and most tax-efficient manner may find these statistics mindboggling. But the point of this blog is to have an erudite discussion about planning concerns for dog owners, and how to ensure that our four-legged family members are assured of being properly taken care of when their owners pass.

Today, over half of Canadians own a pet. However, a recent survey shows only 7% of pet owners have made for-

mal arrangements for them.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

TO ALL YOU PET OWNERS – if there is no provision for your pets in your estate plans, or if you’re one of the many who do not have a will, your beloved pet might not be taken care of in the manner to which they’ve become accustomed to after you’re gone.

In my very unscientific survey of pet owners, I often get the response: “the kids will certainly take care of her” or “my best friend has assured me not to worry.” But these statements are loaded with assumptions.

As a daughter of a retired veterinarian, I thought I knew everything I needed to know about pet care until my multi-dog owning parent became incapacitated overnight. Not only was there nothing in his will about his dogs, he hadn’t even entertained the possibility that his dogs would still be around after he was no longer able to care for himself.

It was left to me to find caregivers who could not only tend to him but to the dogs as well. When it came time to move him into a long-term care facility, we were fortunate that there was someone who was willing to give his beloved Bob a home on the agreement that our family would cover all the vet bills.

A BMO Estate Planning survey, “Estate planning for complex family dynam-

ics,” revealed that, of respondents who indicated they had made some kind of arrangement for their pet, only two in five had chosen to provide a monetary legacy to cover the cost of pet care after they died. Without financial support, the next-door neighbour or relative you’re relying on to take care of FIDO may not be able to do so as the pet ages. The most significant costs of pet care come in the pet’s senior years – medication and even surgery can be prohibitively expensive for somebody to take on simply as a favour to you.

Even though our brain likes to shield us from the inevitable, it behooves us to think not just about death but about the facts relating to incapacity:

- A healthy woman, in her working years, stands a 1 in 4 chance of suffering a disability that lasts three months or longer (see Statistics Canada’s 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability).
- Once you enter your retirement years, the odds of becoming incapacitated increase dramatically, due in large part to the odds of suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or another age-related dementia condition (see the Alzheimer’s Association’s Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures).
- One in three seniors is suffering from Alzheimer’s, or a similar condition, at the time of their death (see the Alzheimer’s Association’s Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures).

Estate planning is not the most popular topic of conversation. However, your family pet and family members deserve a well thought out transition plan. Doing so will not only help protect what, and who, matters most to you by creating an efficient wealth transfer, it will also ease the burden on your loved

ones. Things may be very messy if you don't plan ahead.

“Animals are sentient, intelligent, perceptive, funny, and entertaining. We owe them a duty of care as we do our children.”

- Michael Morpurgo,
author of War Horse

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