

How to select an executor for your estate

Selecting your executor is one of the most important aspects of estate planning. As your estate “manager”, your executor must be both honest and business-savvy. He or she must have a keen understanding of your wishes, and be capable of filing appropriate paperwork, working out potential family conflicts, and tying up loose ends.

Needless to say, all this can make being an executor a tough job. Which is why it makes sense to take some time to think carefully about your choice. What should you keep in mind as you’re considering who can fill the role? Here are some ideas.

Age

For obvious reasons, it’s usually a good idea to select someone who will most likely outlive you. If for whatever reason you feel compelled to name an elderly executor, make sure to approach a back-up choice as well.

Know-how

An executor needs to understand you and your wishes. But it’s equally important that your choice be financially savvy. That’s not to say you should limit your selection to those who have been executors before, but ideally, your choice should have considerable experience managing assets or financial affairs. Business people, accountants, bankers, and corporate lawyers are usually good choices here.

Availability

First things first: being an executor is a big responsibility—and not everyone is up for it. Better to have a pressure-free discussion with your choice about whether they’d like to take on the responsibility, rather than simply thrust the job upon a family member who can’t say no.

Communication

Share the details of your will in advance, including your choice of executor. It’s best your family finds out from you, rather than an executor who must be the bearer of bad news.

Family vs. friends

Naming a family member as your executor can create resentment and charges of favoritism from other members of the family—this can be a particular problem with siblings. If you’d like a family member to be your executor, consider naming a co-executor from outside the family who can bring balance to any conflict that may arise.

Making the job easier

Being an executor is tough enough. It can be even more difficult when you can’t find the proper documents to do your job. Make your executor’s job easier by providing them with a copy of your latest will and a list of assets including bank accounts, property, investments, safety deposit boxes and keys, and computer passwords.

Use a professional if you need to

If you cannot locate a suitable executor, or if your estate is particularly complex, it’s a good idea to hire a corporate trustee. There are a number of trust companies that specialize in performing executor duties—ask your financial advisor for details.