



Year End Family Wisdom Capture - Digital Do's and Don'ts!

Iris Wagner

CEO, Founder and Executive Producer of Memoirs Productions

6th Dec 2013



"There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." - Albert Einstein

As the year draws to a close and as family office staff are finalizing philanthropy and taxation issues, families look forward to spending quality time together over the holidays. This special time of year is a wonderful opportunity to open up communication between elders and next-gens through storytelling and reflection on the year gone by. Capturing these moments is critical to helping preserve a family's non-financial legacy.

With technology advancing at a more rapid pace than ever, new tools and online platforms offer the ability to record our stories like never before. However, these tools should be used and managed with caution and understanding. This article will attempt to serve as a guideline and review helpful tips to inspire preservation of family legacy using these digital technologies.

Storytelling at the Holiday Dinner Table

There is no place where a family gets together more often than around the dinner table. We have always encouraged our clients to place a smartphone on the holiday dinner table, turn the voice memo feature on, and prompt family members to share their stories. Then we encourage them to sit back, listen and, most of all, enjoy. Ask Granddad about his memories of childhood. Ask Grandma to recite how she met, fell in love with and got engaged to Grandpa - or how she managed motherhood for the first time! These are priceless tales and, once recorded, they can be easily shared between family members for many years to come.

In our work with recording legacy families on camera, we have learned that some of the most inspiring families have long-standing rituals around these holiday times.

For example, each year on Christmas day, one such family gathers together to view one hour of raw footage interviews that Memoirs Productions recorded for them of stories told by the matriarch and patriarch (he is now dearly departed). They also play a slideshow from their digital photo album and reminisce with fond memories. This family has told us this experience brings them closer together and reinforces the value of "Family".

The advent of a New Year is the time when many people make resolutions, set goals, and plan for the coming year. Why not take this opportunity to set aside an hour, sit down at your laptop (or with an old-fashioned "pen and paper") and write down some reflections on the life you have lived for the past year?

Here are some topics we suggest for review: major challenges and/or triumphs you experienced; obstacles you overcame; goals you achieved; the things that made you happiest and saddest; and personal highs or lows. Most important to capture are the "Lessons Learned"



from the experiences of the year. These may take a bit more time to reflect on, but once written down, the lesson is typically crystallized. There's no need to write it in perfect form, just jot it down with enough detail so that, if reviewing it years later, you will have a clear recollection.

Please be advised to back up electronic copies on a separate hard drive or memory stick and place this backup in a different location so they are safe from being lost.

As a parent, it's good to do this exercise for children that are too young to do it for themselves. Writing these Legacy Letters on their behalf is a thoughtful gift. We suggest, once a year on their birthday (or New Year's Day) to sit down and spend one hour "pouring" into a document all the reflections you have on how they lived their life this past year. List the obstacles they overcame and the achievements they gained. And define their lessons learned.

Imagine their surprise when they are gifted with this treasure upon graduation from college, or on their wedding day. Once printed and bound beautifully on archival paper, it is a priceless memento. Parents also comment that they personally enjoy the experience of writing these Legacy Letters and look forward to it every year.

Leaving a Legacy in the Digital Age

But what about Social Media? How does this affect our family's privacy and legacy? With Facebook, Twitter, blogging and Instagram, as a few examples, the possibility that private family holiday moments end up being documented for the public can be fraught with risk. We've all heard of the stories where grandkids boasted online that their family would be vacationing for two weeks at Christmas and, subsequently, the family home is ransacked.

It is very important to realize that what we post online leaves a permanent digital record. It is possible to delete posts after publishing, but there is the possibility those

posts may have already been saved to a device, removing your access and, therefore, your control over what could be done with it. We recommend communicating with your family members about your privacy concerns and the importance of maintaining respect for one another's privacy wishes online. Our online presence is part of the legacy we leave behind and we can unwittingly hurt our own reputation or those of family members.

In summary, does your family office have holiday plans to communicate the stories of the elders, record them in some way, and preserve the memories privately amongst family members? We certainly hope so!

Editor's note: To contact Iris Wagner, please email her at: Iris.wagner@MemoirsProductions.com, visit: www.MemoirsProductions.com or call: Toll Free: (866) 481-9303