

Setting the Table: The Work that Makes Wealth Plans Fit

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How families address the complexity of today's wealth is an important question of modern family enterprise advisory. Advisors and the families they serve now understand that the conversations that unfold about what wealth means across generations are central to the work, not a soft preface to it. A growing number of advisors are stepping out of siloed expertise into genuine collaboration, so that a family's shared understanding can be translated into the structures that support it. Collaborative plans result in plans that families believe in, decisions that hold, and transitions that strengthen the relationships behind the wealth rather than fracture them.



This forward turn asks two things of the people involved, in equal measure. It asks the family to bring — or to develop along the way — the relational skills needed to listen across generations, hold differing perspectives with care, and align on a shared vision of what the wealth is for. And it asks advisors across disciplines to do their specialized work inside a truly collaborative team rather than alongside one another. When a family grows as it plans and its [advisors work as a team](#), the documents stop being paperwork and become the architecture of a future the family can live into.

When the Kitchen Is Full of Chefs, But No One's Cooking the Same Meal

Picture a busy, high-end restaurant on a Saturday night. In the kitchen: a world-class pastry chef, a grill master, a saucier, a head bartender. Each is technically brilliant, but working without a head chef or a waiter who knows what the guests ordered. No shared plan, no plating standard, no understanding of dietary needs or preferences. The pastry chef prepares a peanut butter dessert for a table with an anaphylactic couple. The grill master fires every steak rare. The bartender chooses a wine that clashes with the sauces. Excellent individual dishes that collide on the plate, and a terrible experience for the guests.

Families navigating generational wealth have a powerful opportunity when their advisors are working together toward a shared vision. When families also develop the relational skills to engage in thoughtful conversations about how planning documents and structures will affect them across generations, they become active co-designers of their future. Good process on the advisory side — clear coordination, communication, and shared purpose — combined with skilled, facilitated dialogue within the family creates integrated solutions that truly fit and endure over time.

Skippping the Dialogue Risks Unintended Consequences

Take the Martins, a family whose wealth came from several successful liquidity events. The parents, David and Claire, wanted to “protect” their three adult children from bad decisions and potential divorces. Each advisor

addressed protection within their own purview: the trust lawyer drafted highly restrictive trusts that limited distributions to health, education, maintenance, and support; the tax attorney layered in entities to minimize exposure; the investment advisor built a conservative portfolio to preserve capital.

On paper, the plan was impeccable. But [the trusts were finalized](#) without any facilitated conversation with the adult children about what these structures would feel like. When the plan was finally explained, the children heard a clear message: "We don't trust you. We expect you to fail." Their daughter, an accomplished entrepreneur, was furious that trustees who barely knew her would have veto power over her next venture. Their son, who had worked hard to become financially responsible after some rocky years, felt his past would define him forever. The youngest quietly absorbed the belief that she wasn't expected to develop her own financial judgment.

Had the advisors worked as a team with a skilled facilitator, the Martins might have blended strong legal protections with mechanisms that conveyed trust: co-trusteeships over time, education pathways, graduated decision rights. David and Claire would have found language for what they actually meant about their children's growth; their adult children would have had the chance to voice their own vision. The lasting gift of that process is not only a better trust document — it is a family that has learned how to speak about hard things.

From Solo Stations to a True Brigade: What Multidisciplinary Teams Do Differently

Now imagine the same restaurant with a seasoned executive chef at the helm. The team is coordinated and purposeful. There is a menu designed around what guests actually want. The head chef ensures each dish complements the next while the waiter reviews allergies and preferences before the order is placed.

In advisory terms, that "head chef" is a trusted family business consultant or another key advisor who holds the whole picture: the family's history, values, power dynamics, financial realities, and long-term goals. [A multidisciplinary team](#) brings together family business consultants and facilitators, attorneys and tax advisors, wealth managers and investment professionals, accountants and valuation experts, and, where helpful, family therapists or coaches.

What distinguishes a high-functioning team is how they collaborate: shared purpose around the family's long-term well-being; values and vision surfaced through facilitation before drafting begins; steady communication and aligned sequencing; and respectful boundaries, with each advisor listening to and incorporating the others' insights. When this works, the resulting documents feel right to the family — understood, used, and periodically revised, not shelved.

How Good Process Helps Families Prevent Conflict

The Trainer family, whose wealth is held through a diversified holding company, offers a different cautionary tale. Siblings and cousins engaged an attorney to draft a shareholder agreement requiring unanimous consent for major decisions. The intent was noble: no one branch could force a decision that others opposed. But the practical effect was paralysis. Views diverged; one reluctant shareholder could block everything. Meetings became tense, and resentment built as growth-oriented members felt held hostage and cautious ones felt blamed for exercising the rights the agreement had given them.

The issue was not the lawyer's competence. The agreement did exactly what it was drafted to do. But there had never been a facilitated process for the harder questions: When is unanimity healthy, and when does it create gridlock? Which decisions truly require everyone's approval? How will this work with 28 shareholders instead of eight? With a multidisciplinary team and good process, the Trainers might have landed on tiered thresholds of approval and a governance framework that acknowledged future disagreement as normal rather than failure. The conversations that feel hardest to have are precisely the ones that teach a family how to govern itself across generations.

Why Process and Relationship Skills Matter as Much as Technical “Recipes”

Without good process, families do not understand the implications of the documents they sign, and they do not feel genuine ownership of decisions. Long-standing tensions, sibling rivalries, and power imbalances, if unaddressed, get baked into the plan — only to surface later. Without safe spaces for honest conversation, families say “yes” in the boardroom and “absolutely not” in the parking lot.

The inverse is equally true. Families who invest in building their own relational skills become genuinely capable partners to their advisors. They ask better questions, push back thoughtfully on assumptions, name when something doesn't feel right, and take real ownership of the design. A family that has done this work is no longer simply receiving advice; it is shaping it. An advisor who can draft the perfect partnership agreement but cannot help two co-owners who are barely speaking communicate about what it takes to work together has an incomplete skill set. Before the agreement is drafted, some deeper conversations need to take place. This is not a delay to the real work; it is the real work.

The preparation that happens before a family sits down together is its own discipline and one that often determines what becomes possible in the room. See the companion piece: [“Before They Come to the Table: Why Individual Coaching Changes What Families Can Do Together.”](#)

How Families Can Build Their Own Kitchen Brigade

If you are part of an enterprising family, you do not need to micromanage every advisor. But you do need to be intentional about how your kitchen is set up. This begins with appointing a head chef — one advisor whose explicit role is to hold the whole picture and facilitate integration across the team. From there, the family and advisors co-create a menu before any documents are drafted, spending real time articulating vision, values, and hopes for the next generation so all advisors share the same understanding. Cross-advisor communication should be the norm: advisors meeting together periodically, sharing drafts and assumptions early rather than after everything is finalized.

When families choose or retain professionals, they are wise to evaluate them on collaboration and process as well as expertise, asking not only, “Are they technically excellent?” but also, “Do they listen? Can they sit in hard conversations?” The process itself needs time and budget: governance design, facilitated family meetings, education, and debriefs are not nice-to-haves; they are where real alignment is built. And alongside all of this, the family has its own work to do. Treating the planning process as a developmental investment. Making time for honest conversations about what the wealth is for and what the family hopes it will make possible helps a family grow capable of stewarding what the plan puts in place.

Serving a Meal the Family Actually Wants to Eat

Generational wealth is not preserved by clever clauses alone. It is preserved when families are guided through good processes; their values honored, their trade-offs consciously chosen, and their advisors working as a team to design solutions that reflect what the family has discovered about itself. When this work is done well, what a family ends up with is more than technically beautiful documents. It is a living framework that the family can actually use, and a family whose relational capacity has grown alongside the plan.

That combined outcome is a legacy worth passing down: agreements the family understands and believes in, and a family that has learned how to make decisions together.

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