



Estate Planning as a Responsibility

— by Geoff Bernhardt, Attorney at Law

In the book *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, there is a wonderful scene where the Little Prince, who is a visitor from another planet, meets a Fox. Fox begs the Prince to tame him, and explains that “to tame” means “to establish ties.” Fox explains how to tame him: “you must be very patient, come every day, sit a little distance from me, and say nothing. Gradually, I shall feel happier and happier as the hour of your coming approaches.”

So the Prince tames Fox. The hour of the Prince's departure arrived, and Fox wept. Fox told the Prince “Men have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”

This little story caused me to think about what I have tamed, and been tamed by, in this life. People and companion animals immediately came to mind. I also thought about causes and charitable organizations to which I have devoted my energy. To the extent Fox is right, and “to tame” means “to establish ties,” I have also tamed and been tamed by these causes.

How can we be responsible, forever, for what we have tamed? We can devote time, energy, and money during our lifetime. But what about after we are gone? This is where estate planning comes in. By signing a will or trust, we can provide for those people, pets, causes, and organizations to which we have established ties during our lifetime.

So, if you don't have a will or trust, see an experienced estate planning or elder law attorney. If you do, read it and make sure it is up-to-date. If the will or trust is more than seven years old, see your lawyer to review it for changes in the law and the value of your assets. It's the way to be responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.

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