

Lessons Learned in Quarantine

As many states across the nation begin the process of lifting stay-at-home orders and reopening restaurants, gyms, salons, and other businesses, there is still much uncertainty about how long our lives will be impacted by COVID-19. As much as I would like for things to return to “normal,” I know there will be some changes resulting from this pandemic that are here to stay. Through all the uncertainty, sadness, and fear, I have searched for the positive lessons to be learned from my time sheltering in place. Below are a few things I hope remain long after we are no longer staying 6 feet apart.

Recognition and Appreciation for Essential Workers

I have been encouraged by all of the love and support shown to the people in this country who do the jobs that have been deemed “essential” by state governments. From the nurses, doctors, and first responders who are taking care of the sick and vulnerable to the grocery store clerks, farmers, truck drivers, utility workers, manufacturers, and restaurant workers who have kept us all fed, clothed, and comfortable in our homes – I hope I never again take for granted the people who are doing the jobs that are vital to our survival.

Audio-Visual Conferencing

Over the past several weeks, our attorneys, paralegals, and staff have had to adapt to working remotely and interacting with each other and clients via audio and video conferencing rather than in-person. I have been impressed by how quickly and efficiently everyone has adjusted to this “new normal.” I have had numerous Zoom meetings with clients, colleagues, family, and friends during this time, and I am wondering why I never did this sooner. Perhaps I was just unfamiliar with the technology or thought video conferencing would be uncomfortable. Now that I have seen how helpful it can be for clients who are unable to leave their homes, I plan to make it a regular part of my practice moving forward. I have also found it useful for connecting with friends and family who don’t live nearby. Don’t get me wrong – I can’t wait to see everyone in person again soon. But for those times when we can’t be physically present to meet with a client or have dinner with a friend, I hope we make an effort to take advantage of audio-visual conferencing technology.

Getting Outside

I have always found it therapeutic to be outdoors. After all, I commute to Chattanooga from my farm in Alabama because I love the land and the open space (and the cows, chickens, cotton, corn, and soybeans that are grown here). With everyone spending a lot more time at home, I have noticed people of all ages and in all locations finding creative ways to be outside. I have seen make-shift home offices on the porch, new gardens being planted, and kids playing in the yard during homeschool P.E. In both Tennessee and Alabama, outdoor activities such as walking, hiking, running, and biking were deemed essential activities (while maintaining social distancing of course), and I have seen many people taking advantage of those opportunities. The land also sustains us – providing us with food, fiber, and toilet paper. I hope being forced to stay home for a while will lead to a greater appreciation for our environment and the beautiful land we have on this earth.

Planning for the Future

I have noticed over the years in my work as an estate planning attorney, people generally do not think about planning for incapacity or death until something significant happens in their lives to bring it to their attention, such as a

personal health scare or the death of a loved one. The outbreak of COVID-19 has proven to be one of those wake-up calls for people, as we at Chambliss have seen a recent increase in clients looking to create a new or update an existing estate plan.

It is easy to get caught up in our busy lives and never stop to think about our long-term goals, hopes, and dreams for the future. Sometimes it takes something as unpredictable as a pandemic to make us pause and think about the big picture. When it comes to your estate plan, it is important not only to talk with your loved ones about your wishes, but to take the next step to put it in writing in a manner that is legally valid in order to ensure your wishes are carried out. Sure, it may be painful in the beginning, but once you go through the process and get something in place, it becomes easier to address changes in the future.

There is no way to plan for every possibility. The future is unpredictable and things can change drastically in an instant. However, worrying constantly about a problem creates stress and solves nothing. Planning effectively for potential issues creates peace of mind and confidence to face the unknown. As we all journey together through these unprecedented times, I hope we recognize the need to plan for the future before the crisis hits.

If you have estate planning questions, please reach out to me or another member of our [Estate Planning team](#).