

The Complete Idiot's Guide(R) to Wills and Estates (2nd Edition)

by Stephen M. Maple

As a development officer for a prep school, I was looking for a book that would give me a birds-eye view of issues involved with estate planning. Steve Maple's The Complete Idiot's Guide to Wills and Estates does this masterfully. And, to my relief, in plain English. Impressive for an attorney that's taught and practiced for the over 25 years!

In very easy-to-read language, Maple thoroughly lays out the whole terrain of estate planning'from having a will to ways to save on current taxes and issues to consider in caring for aging parents. Going beyond mere explanation, he's packed this book with helpful forms and lists to get the reader started in their own estate planning. I picked up this book to help me with my conversations with donors but I ended up sitting down with an attorney to work on my own plan!

Maple groups his 24 chapters into five sections:

Part 1: Assets, Assets, Assets

Part 2: About Wills, Trusts. . . and Probate

Part 3: All in the Family'and Just a Little Beyond

Part 4: Taxes You Must Pay, and Those Maybe You Don't

Part 5: Retirement, Elder Issues, and the Broad Planning Picture

The structure of The Complete Idiot's Guide to Wills and Estates makes it a great book for busy professionals. It's very easy to read in short chunks of time. And it's not just for the beginner. Although it's now somewhat dated, Maple gives some pretty technical examinations of taxes and IRS regulations. For readers that way find themselves losing interest during the dryer technical sections there are tips, quotes, and anecdotal information interspersed throughout. As a development professional, I was particularly glad for Chapter 18 'How Charitable Donations Can Save You Money.' I'm trying to figure out how I could make this chapter required reading for prospective donors.

More than any planned giving seminar I've attended, and for a lot less money, The Complete Idiot's Guide to Wills and Estates has helped me see estate planning from the donor's perspective. I highly recommend this book.