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101 Tasks to Tackle in the Aftermath of Death

A Companion List to "The Survivor Assistance Handbook"

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By [Mark Colgan_CFP](#) | Posted: 05-28-10 | 09:05 AM | [E-mail Article](#)

Even if the news of your loved one's death is still fresh in your mind, you will immediately be called upon to start making important decisions. Perhaps you are one of the lucky ones who have had a loved one willing to create a detailed plan. If not, you may not know where to start.

PLAN YOUR LEGACY
INVEST WITH CONFIDENCE

About the Author
Plan Your Legacy empowers financial and legal professionals to provide a noble service that increases referrals, boosts revenues and retains clients for life.

Whether you are a surviving spouse, a child, another family member or friend, this companion list for *The Survivor Assistance Handbook* shall provide you with valuable information to guide you through the financial and administrative process following a loved one's death. To be sure, there is no substitute for professional advice in these matters. Nonetheless, the following checklist will be a quick and easy way to educate and organize yourself during this period of transition.

This is no time to procrastinate. Despite the pain, the grief and even the numbness you might feel right now, you are a survivor. Sit down and start

taking charge of your life. Once the nitty, gritty details of your loved one's death are under control, you can begin to heal and rebuild your own life.

IMMEDIATE CONCERNS

1. ___ Notify important people and institutions.
2. ___ Check organ donation wishes.
3. ___ Check for possible funeral prearrangements.
4. ___ Look into veteran benefits.
5. ___ Obtain death certificates.
6. ___ Maintain cash reserves for upcoming bills.
7. ___ Check with airlines for bereavement airline discounts.
8. ___ Track visitors gifts, donations, etc.
9. ___ Contact executor/executrix.
10. ___ Arrange meeting with attorney.
11. ___ Arrange to meet with other trusted advisors.
12. ___ File will.

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E	12.57	0.64	★★★★★	
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13. ___ Acquire contents in safety deposit box.
14. ___ Postpone major financial decisions.
15. ___ Make detailed budget.

COLLECT BENEFITS

16. ___ Arrange for distribution of Social Security benefits.
17. ___ Start the Social Security claims process.
18. ___ Collect life insurance proceeds.
19. ___ Collect employee benefits.
20. ___ Determine retirement benefits.
21. ___ Assess employer health insurance.
22. ___ Take advantage of flex benefits.
23. ___ Collect veteran's benefits.

GET ORGANIZED

24. ___ Retain all relevant correspondence.
25. ___ Buy folders or large manila envelopes.
26. ___ Collect life insurance policies and claims forms.
27. ___ Collect estate-related documents.
28. ___ Collect employer benefits paperwork and claims forms.
29. ___ Find last three years of tax returns and receipts.
30. ___ Collect business-related agreements and contracts.
31. ___ Assemble bank statements, canceled checks and register.
32. ___ Put together house-related papers.
33. ___ Collect paid and unpaid bills and credit card statements.
34. ___ Locate automobile title, registration and insurance policy.
35. ___ Locate decedent's personal documentation—birth and death certificates, Social Security card and military papers.
36. ___ Collect personal documentation from your family.
37. ___ Locate investment and other asset documentation.

REVIEW ASSETS

38. ___ Review all your assets.
39. ___ Evaluate existing accounts.
40. ___ Evaluate existing bank relationships.
41. ___ Transfer jointly-owned securities to beneficiaries.
42. ___ Locate any stock certificates held by decedent.
43. ___ Check on any current mortgages and notes receivable.
44. ___ Locate the title for all real estate holdings.
45. ___ Evaluate whether to keep or cash out annuities.
46. ___ Transfer ownership of cars, boats and other vehicles.

PAY THE BILLS

47. ___ Don't pay the decedent's bills with your own funds.
48. ___ First, pay funeral expenses and retain receipts.
49. ___ Consult with your attorney before paying other bills.
50. ___ Notify creditors of the death.
51. ___ Check to see if there was life insurance on any loans, mortgages and credit cards.
52. ___ Terminate vehicle lease and/or see if there was a death clause on the car lease.
53. ___ Cancel cell phone contracts.
54. ___ Transfer mortgages and notes to new owners.
55. ___ Close any accounts with online retailers, cancel online subscriptions, etc.
56. ___ Meet charitable obligations.
57. ___ Determine filing status for income tax returns.
58. ___ File federal estate tax returns within nine months.

PROCESS ESTATE

59. ___ Gather all significant documents of the decedent.
60. ___ Keep an organized list of all property, income, debts and expenses of the estate.
61. ___ Contact the clerk of the probate court to process estate.
62. ___ Ensure that an executor or administrator is formally named by the court.
63. ___ If required, obtain a bond before Letters of Testamentary or Administration are issued.
64. ___ Contact all heirs and beneficiaries.
65. ___ Obtain a Taxpayer Identification Number and a bank account for the estate.
66. ___ Ensure that all real and personal property owned by the estate is fully insured.
67. ___ Collect all debts owed to the estate or have payments redirected to the estate.

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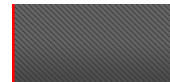
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- 68. ____ Inventory and value the high-ticket items and make a decision whether to liquidate and when.
- 69. ____ Notify all known creditors in writing and place a death notice of the decedent's death to see if there are any additional creditors that may come forward.
- 70. ____ File state and federal tax returns with nine months.
- 71. ____ Distribute assets but ensure that there are adequate monies retained to cover taxes or closing costs.
- 72. ____ Process the Living Trust, if applicable.

ATTEND TO PERSONAL AFFAIRS

- 73. ____ Consider donating clothes, eyeglasses and medical equipment and supplies or selling items.
- 74. ____ Contact the DMA to stop unwanted phone, mail, e-mail and credit card solicitations.
- 75. ____ Transfer vehicle ownership.
- 76. ____ Change or cancel utility accounts.
- 77. ____ Modify home and auto insurance policies.
- 78. ____ Pick up dry cleaning or tailoring, shoes, skis, etc.
- 79. ____ Return library books, videos, DVDs. (Note: Any fines are a debt of the estate.)
- 80. ____ Return any recent purchases that are unused or no longer needed. Cancel purchases on layaway.
- 81. ____ Cancel any future appointments with doctors, dentists, or other services.
- 82. ____ Cancel vacations or any other pre-planned events.
- 83. ____ Cancel open prescription and retail credit card accounts.

AVOID IDENTITY THEFT

- 84. ____ Avoid carrying your Social Security card and driver's license together.
- 85. ____ Use a cross-cut shredder to dispose of credit card offers, credit card checks and personal information.
- 86. ____ Change user IDs and passwords regularly. Use a combination of letters and numbers, but never use your Social Security number, mother's maiden name or date of birth.
- 87. ____ Establish more than one e-mail account—one for online transactions, one for personal communications.
- 88. ____ Never respond to unsolicited e-mails from banks, credit card companies, online auction sites, PayPal asking you to verify personal information.
- 89. ____ Install a computer firewall. Keep your virus and spyware software up-to-date.
- 90. ____ Monitor activity on banks and credit cards. Report fraud or identity theft immediately.
- 91. ____ Order copies of your credit reports at least once a year.
- 92. ____ Cancel any credit cards you don't use.
- 93. ____ Keep an eye out for double, automated billings on utilities, mortgage and car loans.
- 94. ____ Consider purchasing fraud insurance.

PROACTIVELY PLAN YOUR LEGACY AND ESTATE PLAN

- 95. ____ Draft or modify your will as needed.
- 96. ____ Draft a living will or health care proxy to make your wishes for life-prolonging treatment known.
- 97. ____ Adopt a durable Power of Attorney.
- 98. ____ Consider pre-arranging your funeral.
- 99. ____ Identify beneficiaries/owners whenever possible on insurance policies, retirement accounts, etc.
- 100. ____ Consider putting individual into jointly-held accounts.
- 101. ____ Consider crafting or reviewing your current estate plan.

This to-do list was designed to help you navigate the financial and paperwork challenges you face in the aftermath of your loved ones death. While the knowledge from this to-do list and *The Survivor Assistance Handbook* cannot replace the one-on-one consulting that you may receive from your trusted advisors, I hope you find the information both valuable and practical. I also hope that this information will ensure that your loss will not be compounded by missed opportunities, costly mistakes and missteps.

About the Author

Mark Colgan is Founder and CEO of Plan Your Legacy and President of Colgan Capital. The combination of his personal and professional background gives him a unique perspective on financial and legacy planning. In 2001, he was a successful Certified Financial Planner™ professional who'd been married to his wife, Joanne, for seven years. When she died unexpectedly at the age of 28, Mark's wonderful life was dramatically changed forever.

Inspired by the challenges he faced as a young widower, Mark authored *The Survivor Assistance Handbook: A Guide for Financial Transition*. Mark also founded Plan Your Legacy, a company dedicated to helping individuals live and leave meaningful legacies by building legacy plans that reflect and preserve their values, life lessons, memories and final wishes.

Today, Mark is a national speaker and an often-cited expert on legacy planning. His articles have appeared in such national publications as U.S. News and World Report, The Journal of Financial Planning, American Association of Individual Investors, and Money Adviser, a Consumer Reports publication. He has also been cited by Fox News, CBSMarketWatch, Oprah and Friends, and other national media.

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