September 2026 | Volume 16, Issue 2

Sentinel Trust
Together, families prosper℠

OnWatch

In This Issue:

Helping Your Parents AGE IN PLACE

Lissa S. Gangjee, JD, CFP®
President & Chief Executive Officer
Shareholder

A few years ago, I wrote about teaching my teenage son to drive. Looking back, the hardest part wasn't buying the car or negotiating the rules—it was learning to let go. Every parent eventually discovers that independence comes with risk.

Now many of us find ourselves on the other side of that equation.

Our parents are getting older. They treasure their independence every bit as much as we did at sixteen. Their home represents security, familiarity, and dignity. They want to stay there as long as possible, and if we're honest, we want that for them too.

The good news is that aging in place is often possible. The challenge is recognizing that it rarely happens by accident. It requires planning, honest conversations, and occasionally accepting help before it's absolutely necessary.

As with so many family issues, the best time to talk about it is before there's a crisis.

Start with the House

Most homes were built for healthy adults, not eighty-five-year-olds.

The greatest threat to an older adult's independence isn't necessarily illness. It's often a fall.

Fortunately, many of the most effective improvements are remarkably simple.

Grab bars in the shower and next to the toilet provide stability when balance isn't

About Sentinel Trust Company

Sentinel Trust Company, LBA is an independent wealth management firm and multi-family office that provides comprehensive wealth and succession planning, fiduciary, investment management, philanthropic, and family office services to a select group of affluent families and their closely held entities and foundations. Founded in 1997 as the successor to two 40-plus-year-old single-family offices, Sentinel Trust currently serves more than 40 multi-generational families nationwide and is responsible for approximately $7 billion in assets as of December 31, 2025.

Learn more at
www.sentineltrust.com.

what it used to be. Raised toilet seats make standing easier on aging knees and hips. Loose throw rugs that have decorated the hallway for thirty years suddenly become tripping hazards. If removing them isn't an option, at least make sure they're securely taped down.

Good lighting becomes increasingly important. Burned-out bulbs, dim hallways, and dark staircases deserve immediate attention. Consider brighter LED lighting, motion-activated lights, and illuminated pathways to bathrooms for nighttime trips.

Look around the home with fresh eyes. Are there electrical cords stretched across walkways? Frequently used kitchen items stored on high shelves? Steps without sturdy handrails? Small changes today can prevent major injuries tomorrow.

Several organizations specialize in helping seniors remain safely at home. Many employ nurses, occupational therapists, or social workers who perform comprehensive home safety assessments. They'll evaluate everything from bathroom safety and fall risks to medication management and emergency response systems, then provide practical recommendations tailored to your parents' specific needs.

Sometimes having an independent professional identify needed changes is far more effective than hearing the same advice from a son or daughter.

Who Is Feeding Mom?

One of the easiest problems to overlook is nutrition.

Many older adults simply stop cooking the way they once did. Preparing meals for one person can feel like more work than it's worth. Trips to the grocery store become less frequent. Cooking becomes physically tiring. Before long, dinner consists of crackers, cereal, or toast.

Weight loss, fatigue, and declining health often follow.

A quick look inside the refrigerator can tell you a great deal. Is there fresh food? Are expiration dates months old? Is your parent eating balanced meals or simply whatever is easiest?

Sometimes the answer is hiring someone to prepare meals a few times each week. Other families find that professionally prepared meal services strike the right balance between convenience and nutrition. The objective isn't gourmet dining—it's ensuring your parents receive adequate nutrition without turning every meal into a burden.

And Then There Are the Pets

Pets provide companionship, routine, and purpose. For many older adults, they are family.

But pets also create responsibilities.

Can your mother still walk a large dog safely? Can your father lift the forty-pound bag of dog food? Is cleaning the litter box becoming physically difficult? Who takes the pet to the veterinarian?

The goal isn't necessarily to find a new home for a beloved companion. Often, the solution is much simpler. A neighborhood dog walker, a family member who helps with veterinary visits, or pet food delivered directly to the house may allow both the parent and the pet to continue enjoying one another for years.

Sometimes preserving independence means accepting a little assistance.

The Driving Conversation

If you've read my previous column about teenage drivers, you may remember that I eventually required my son to sign a driving contract. Rules were clear. Expectations were established before problems arose.

Ironically, many years later, I find myself thinking about driving once again—but this time from the opposite perspective.

For many older adults, the automobile represents freedom. It means seeing friends, attending church, going to the grocery store, or simply deciding to leave the house whenever they choose.

Asking someone to stop driving may feel like asking them to surrender part of their identity.

That's why timing matters.

The ideal conversation begins long before anyone should actually stop driving.

"Mom, this isn't about today. You're driving fine. But someday all of us, including me, will need to decide when it's no longer safe. What do you think those warning signs are?"

Most parents can identify them themselves.

Multiple accidents. New dents and scrapes on the car. Getting lost on familiar routes. Declining vision. Slower reaction times. Friends becoming reluctant passengers. Medication changes. Memory concerns.

Once they've identified the signs, the conversation becomes much easier later because you're simply reminding them of standards they helped create.

If the time has already arrived, empathy matters more than arguments.

“Dad, I know how important driving is to you. I also know how much independence it gives you. But I’m worried about your safety and the safety of others. Help me understand what you’ll miss most if driving becomes too difficult.”

Notice that the conversation isn’t about taking away the keys. It’s about preserving independence in other ways.

Ride-sharing services, family members, professional drivers, and community transportation programs can often replace the car without replacing the person’s dignity.

Bringing in Reinforcements

Many affluent families are discovering another valuable resource: professional aging life care managers.

These organizations, often staffed by experienced nurses or licensed social workers, serve as advocates for older adults and their families.

They can accompany parents to physician appointments, ask important questions, coordinate care among specialists, review medications, monitor changing health conditions, and serve as an informed set of eyes and ears when adult children live across the country.

Some provide 24-hour on-call support if medical issues arise. Others coordinate home care, rehabilitation services, physical therapy, or transitions following hospitalization.

Think of them as a trusted family member with clinical expertise and local presence.

For families balancing demanding careers, travel, and their own children, these professionals can provide enormous peace of mind.

Independence Doesn’t Mean Doing Everything Alone

Perhaps that’s the biggest lesson.

Our parents spent decades helping us become independent. Now it’s our turn to help them remain independent for as long as possible.

That doesn’t necessarily mean moving them into assisted living at the first sign of difficulty. Nor does it mean pretending nothing has changed.

Instead, it means making thoughtful modifications, assembling the right team of professionals, and having difficult conversations before they become urgent.

Financial planning often focuses on preserving wealth for future generations. Equally important is preserving quality of life for the generation that built it.

The families who navigate aging most successfully aren’t necessarily those with the greatest resources. They’re the ones who begin planning before necessity forces their hand.

Like so many important conversations in life, this one requires understanding, patience, respect and just a little courage. ■

SERVING WITH PURPOSE:

What to Know Before Joining a Nonprofit Board

David L. Zahn, CPA, CFP®
Director of Client Service
Senior Relationship Officer
Managing Director
Shareholder

Chances are that at some point in your career, you will be asked to serve on the board of a nonprofit organization. Being asked is an honor, particularly when the organization has a mission you care about. But before you say yes, take the time to understand what you are being asked to take on.

A nonprofit board provides oversight and may help set strategy, hire and evaluate leadership, oversee finances, and ultimately take responsibility for the organization’s direction. The best boards bring together people with different backgrounds and perspectives who are aligned with the mission and willing to contribute.

Before accepting a seat, understand what kind of board you are joining. A governing board has legal and fiduciary responsibility. A working board, common among smaller nonprofits, may be much more involved in day-to-day operations. An advisory board can provide valuable advice and connections but generally does not have formal decision-making authority.

Do Your Homework Before You Say Yes

It is tempting to accept a board invitation because you know and like the people involved or support the organization's mission. Those are good reasons to consider a board seat, but they are not enough.

Before joining, understand how the organization operates. Who is the executive director or CEO? How long has the leadership team been in place? Is there a constructive relationship between management and the board? Does the board receive meaningful financial information? Are there established processes for managing finances, conflicts of interest, complaints, and significant decisions?

Review the organization's recent Form 990 filings as well. Looking at several years can reveal trends in revenue, expenses, compensation, assets, liabilities, and fundraising, as well as related-party transactions and governance practices.

The point is not to expect a nonprofit to be perfect. It is to understand what you are walking into. A strong mission does not necessarily mean strong management. If something raises a question, ask about it before you join.

Understand Your Protection—and the Organization's Risk

One of the most important questions to ask is whether the organization carries Directors and Officers (D&O) liability insurance. But simply having a policy is not enough.

Ask whether coverage is appropriate, premiums are current, and there are meaningful exclusions. Understand who is covered and whether the policy protects both the organization and individual directors and officers. It is also worth asking whether the organization carries other insurance appropriate to its activities.

More broadly, insurance is only one part of risk management. You should be comfortable with the organization's management, financial controls, governance processes, and relationship with regulators and other relevant authorities.

A board member can step into significant problems that existed long before he or she arrived. Imagine discovering after joining that insurance has lapsed, required Form 990s have not been filed, relationships with regulators are strained, or financial controls are inadequate. Those problems may have predated your arrival, but once you become a director, they become your concern as well.

The question should not simply be, "Do you have D&O insurance?" It should be, **"Do I understand this organization well enough to be comfortable becoming one of its directors?"**

Know What Will Be Expected of You

Have a frank conversation about the practical commitment. How often does the board meet? Will you serve on a committee? How much preparation is expected? Is there a fundraising or personal giving expectation?

Financial expectations vary. Some boards have meaningful annual giving or fundraising requirements, while smaller organizations may place greater value on a director's time, expertise, network, or willingness to help with specific projects. It is better to understand these expectations before accepting the seat.

You should also understand the organization's conflict-of-interest policy and disclose any personal, professional, or financial relationship that could create a conflict.

Governance Is Not Management

Good board members understand the difference between governance and management. Your role is generally not to run the organization but to provide oversight, help leadership solve problems, think strategically, and ensure the organization is fulfilling its mission responsibly.

That does not mean board service is passive. Read the board packet, review the financial statements, understand the organization's key risks, and come prepared with questions. The best directors are willing to ask uncomfortable questions when necessary.

Why Serve?

People join nonprofit boards for many reasons. Some want to advance a mission they care about. Others want to share their expertise, develop new skills, expand their network, or become more involved in their community.

Understanding what you hope to contribute—and what you hope to gain—can help you find the right organization. Someone looking to roll up their sleeves may enjoy a working board, while someone interested in governance and strategy may prefer a governing board. A junior or associate board can be a good entry point for someone earlier in their career.

You also do not need to be a CEO or 30 years into your career. Many nonprofits have junior, young professional, or associate boards that offer a way to learn how an organization operates and develop skills that can lead to future opportunities.

Money can sometimes feel like a barrier, particularly when you are younger. But your time, professional skills, network, energy, and willingness to help all have value.

Done well, nonprofit board service is a rewarding way to contribute while also developing yourself. But a board seat is more than an honor or a line on a résumé. It comes with responsibilities, and potentially liabilities, that should be understood before you say yes.

Do your homework. Understand the organization, its leadership, finances, governance practices, and risks. Know what will be expected of you. And once you commit, be prepared to do the work. ■

Katherine M. Rose, MBA, CFA®, CTFA
Managing Director
Shareholder

After Signing Your Revocable Trust: WHAT COMES NEXT

You've signed your revocable trust. The documents are in a drawer, your attorney has sent you home with a thick folder, and you feel like you can finally check "estate planning" off your list.

Not quite.

One of the most important parts of creating a revocable trust happens after you sign it.

Why You Created the Trust

A revocable living trust generally serves three important purposes: avoiding probate, maintaining privacy, and planning for incapacity.

Probate is the court-supervised process of settling an estate. A properly funded trust can allow assets to pass to your beneficiaries without going through that process. A trust also generally remains private, unlike a will, which becomes part of the public probate record.

And perhaps most importantly, a trust can make it easier for someone you have chosen to step in and manage your affairs if you become unable to do so yourself.

But here is the catch: signing the trust is only the beginning.

The trust needs to be funded. In plain English, that means making sure the assets that are supposed to be governed by the trust are actually owned by and titled into the trust.

What Needs to Be Retitled?

This is where the process can start to feel administrative. It is also where many otherwise well-executed estate plans fall short.

Real estate. If your home or other real estate is supposed to be owned by the trust, your attorney will generally prepare and record a new deed transferring the property into the trust. You may also need to notify your lender and update your homeowners' and title insurance.

Bank and brokerage accounts. These accounts generally need to be reregistered in the name of the trust. Your bank or investment custodian will have its own paperwork and may ask for a copy of the trust or a certificate of trust.

Not every account necessarily needs to be retitled. Some families, for example, prefer to keep an everyday checking account in an individual's name for convenience and use a beneficiary designation to direct where the account goes at death. The right approach depends on your circumstances and should be coordinated with your advisors.

Retirement accounts are different. IRAs and 401(k)s generally should not simply be retitled into your revocable trust. Doing so can have significant tax consequences. Instead, these accounts are usually addressed through beneficiary designations, which should be reviewed as part of the overall estate plan.

LLCs and private investments. This is an area where you should slow down. Before transferring an LLC interest or other private investment to your trust, someone needs to review the governing documents. There may be restrictions on transfers or requirements for approval by other owners. The paperwork may include an assignment of the interest and updates to the company's ownership records.

Why Does Funding Get Forgotten?

The reason is understandable.

Creating the trust is the intellectually demanding part. You meet with your attorney, make decisions about beneficiaries and trustees, and finally sign a document that may be dozens of pages long. Once that is done, it feels finished.

The funding process feels like paperwork.

So it gets postponed.

Then you open a new brokerage account. You buy another piece of real estate. You form an LLC. Years go by, and no one checks whether those assets were properly incorporated into the plan.

This is where a little ongoing attention can make a big difference.

An unfunded trust may not accomplish what you intended. Assets still titled in your individual name may be subject to

continued on back ▶

probate at your death. And if you become incapacitated, those assets may not be as easily managed by your successor trustee as you expected.

If you own property in more than one state, the consequences can be even more complicated, potentially requiring separate probate proceedings in different states.

Think of it as an ongoing process.

Funding your trust shouldn't be something you think about once and then forget.

After the initial funding is complete, keep a simple list of your major assets and how each one is titled. When you buy a new property, open a significant account, form an entity, or make another substantial investment, ask: Does this need to be added to my trust?

It is also worth reviewing your beneficiary designations periodically. Retirement accounts, life insurance policies, and other accounts with beneficiary designations should coordinate with the rest of your estate plan.

And every few years, have your advisors review the plan with you. Your family may have changed. Your assets may have changed. The people you originally named as trustees or beneficiaries may no longer be the right choices.

The goal isn't to create a complicated system that requires constant attention. It is to make sure the plan you carefully created continues to reflect the life you are actually living.

Signing the trust is an important milestone. But the real work is making sure the trust works when your family needs it.

Take the extra step. Fund the trust, keep it updated, and revisit it as your life changes. A few hours of attention now can save your family significant time, expense, and frustration later. ■

Sentinel Trust Company is a family-owned, multi-family office focusing on the unique needs of affluent families and their closely held companies and foundations. Sentinel Trust provides advice on investment, tax, and estate strategies, serves as corporate trustee, and provides lifestyle services with a personal touch.

Together, families prosper SM

Founded in 1997 as the successor to two established, investment-focused single family offices, Sentinel Trust offers the stability of an institutional firm, the entrepreneurial spirit of a young firm, the personal feel of a family office, and the in-house technical skills of independent planning and investment management firms.

Sentinel Trust does not provide tax advice. Any discussion of tax matters contained herein (including any attachments) is not intended or written to be used, and cannot be used, for the purpose of avoiding any tax-related penalties. This communication is for informational purposes only and nothing herein should be construed as a solicitation, recommendation, or an offer to buy or sell any securities or products.

Sentinel Trust SM

2001 Kirby Drive, Suite 1200 | Houston, Texas 77019-6081
sentineltrust.com