

Voya Life MattersSM

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After the winter we had here in New England, and most of the country, we're finally beginning to thaw from the arctic chill. It is with great anticipation that we look forward to the warm weather, birds returning and the blooming flowers the spring season brings.

I would like to take this time to look back and reflect on the past year. Can you believe it has been a year since I first penned a column for Voya Financial and the Life Matters newsletter? I guess time does fly when you are having fun or chasing babies and toddlers around. Personally, in the last year I have been fortunate to usher in the birth of my beautiful daughter and watch my son sprout into a fearless toddler. Professionally, we have seamlessly transitioned to Voya Financial and we continue to offer a Lifeline Program committed to assisting you during times of transition. Additionally, I always look forward to the wonderful communications I receive from you, our valued accountholders. Like spring, the last year has been a breath of fresh air.

So, as the climate slowly warms, I urge you to take a moment to reflect. Whether you are looking back, thinking about loved ones, or looking forward to new opportunities ready to blossom, take a little time to enjoy the fresh air and all the possibilities that await in bloom.

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Hiring an in-home caregiver

What can family members do if a senior needs help with daily activities but rejects the notion of a nursing home or assisted living facility? Hiring an in-home caregiver may be the way to enable a loved one to remain at home, even if he or she can no longer live independently.

Many decisions must be made before hiring a caregiver. Will you require someone to provide meals, transportation, housekeeping and laundry? Would you want the caregiver to offer companionship and conversation as well as to manage specific health needs? Is assistance needed for day-to-day activities such as getting dressed, bathing and dispensing medications? These requirements should be included in a detailed job description.

The task of choosing a qualified and well-suited caregiver is not an easy one and may require the services of a geriatric care manager to evaluate the physical and emotional needs of the client as well as to provide referrals to the appropriate agency or individual

caregiver. The website of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers at CareManager.org is a good starting point. Other resources for finding a qualified caregiver may include: the client's physician, your local non-profit Family Service Agency or faith-based agencies which may offer caregiver services, the local senior center, or your state's Agency on Aging through the website www.n4a.org.

The cost of hiring personnel through a licensed agency is greater than contracting with an individual, but the caregivers have been pre-screened and trained. Replacements are available if the caregiver calls in sick or quits. Also, the agency handles paperwork involving payroll, taxes and insurance.

Once you have some possible candidates, contact at least two of their references. Ask about the employee's punctuality, work ethic, personality and whether there were any difficulties or problems. Interview the candidates about experience with clients who have

needs and limitations similar to those of your family member's. CPR and First Aid training are necessary requirements. You may want to hire an agency to conduct background and criminal checks. Because it is important that your senior is comfortable with the person, consider hiring someone for a month-long trial period before making a commitment.

From the outset, clarify in writing your expectations about schedule, hours, meals, privileges, duties, pay rate, days off and benefits. Be specific about use of the family car, and check with your insurance carrier about coverage. Establish emergency procedures. Give immediate and constructive feedback.

Regardless of whom you hire, always secure valuables and have a relative or trusted friend drop in frequently to make sure that your loved one is safe, secure and happy with the caregiver.

Finding the right person ensures that your loved one is cared for with compassion and safety.

be ready™

Checking credit reports

Each individual has a credit – or FICO – score that predicts how likely one is to pay bills and loans on time. Your FICO score often impacts the interest rate that you will pay for auto loans, mortgages and credit card balances. It also affects your ability to obtain credit. FICO scores have sometimes been used by landlords to determine the creditworthiness of potential tenants, by utility companies to determine the size of the deposit, by auto insurers in setting rates, and by employers in evaluating new hires.

A FICO score is a credit score developed by Fair Isaac – a company that analyzes data to make informed predictions. Your FICO score is calculated based on information in your credit reports at the three national credit bureaus – Equifax, TransUnion and Experian.

If you apply for credit, the lender will request a copy of your credit report. Excessive lender “inquiries” can have a negative impact on your overall score because they imply that you may be taking on more debt than your finances can handle.

Many consumers are under the false impression that if they check their own credit reports, this can also hurt credit scores. This is not true. A personal request, or “soft inquiry,” is not part of the score calculation and thus does not adversely affect the score.

Every consumer is entitled to obtain a free credit report annually from each of the major consumer reporting companies. It makes sense to check periodically to make sure there are no errors or evidence of fraud in your accounts. Call [877-322-8228](tel:877-322-8228) or go to www.annualcreditreport.com for information on how to order your free reports.

Storing digital photos

There was a time when photos were displayed in photo albums or stashed away in shoeboxes. With the advent of digital photos taken with cameras, smart phones and tablets, you have many options for storing and preserving your photos.

The first step is to download your camera or phone photos onto your computer. To do this, connect a cable between your computer and the device. Alternatively, you can remove the small memory card from the phone or camera and insert it into your computer. Once the photos are on the computer, store them in files by date, event or subject matter.

It's important to keep backup files. For example, you can buy a separate external drive at an electronics or big box store or online. Simply plug a cable from the external drive into your computer to back up your photos and any other important information. When you're done, unplug the drive and keep it in your safe deposit box.

You may have heard about “cloud” storage systems, the online file storage offered by internet companies. Cloud storage enables the user to access all of his or her files from a different computer or phone.

Here are some other suggestions to store your photos so that they can be enjoyed for years to come:

- Upload pictures to free online photo share sites such as Facebook, Google Drive, Dropbox or Flickr.
- Order prints of your favorite photos and put them into frames or into an old-fashioned scrapbook.
- Sites such as Shutterfly, iPhoto (for Apple users), Blurb, Mixbook, and MyPublisher offer beautiful glossy photo books that you can create at prices that are reasonable. Most of these sites offer easy instructions and customizable templates that help you to organize your photos. As a bonus, the photos that you upload to these sites are typically stored indefinitely.
- Back up your photos onto DVDs and keep them in a safe place.
- Upgrade your backup method frequently because technology changes at a rapid pace, and your backup method can become outmoded and thus difficult or impossible to access. (Remember those Zip drives, VHS tapes, eight-track cartridges and floppy discs?)

To store your memories safely for future generations, use several different methods to back up your photos; and don't keep all of the copies in the same place.



Convenience accounts

Q I understand from your article, “Protecting a Loved One’s Finances,” (Sept. 2014) that there are risks to both myself and to my father if I become the co-owner of his bank account. What else can I do?

A An Account of Convenience can be a useful alternative that would enable you to sign checks on his behalf and pay bills that he might overlook.

Having your father set up a Trust and giving you a Durable Power of Attorney for financial matters is often an ideal combination to protect a loved one’s financial assets. A Convenience Account, however, is often a much simpler alternative. It allows several people to sign checks but does not include a right of survivorship.

The account need not contain all your father’s cash assets, and he would not be giving up control. A Convenience Account provides that the additional signatories are to act on behalf of the person whose money it is (your father’s). These signatories serve as agents to pay bills, make deposits and assist with day-to-day management of finances. Upon the death of the account owner, the money would become part of his or her estate. Creditors of the co-signers are not normally able to access any of the proceeds.

If your bank isn’t familiar with the term “convenience account,” ask to set up a “multiple-party account without right of survivorship.”

Lessons from Luminaries

The PBS series “*Downton Abbey*” can teach some valuable lessons

The British drama series *Downton Abbey*, now in its fifth season on Public Television, revolves around a fictional aristocratic family headed by Lord Robert, Earl of Grantham, and their huge staff of butlers, gardeners, footmen, maids and cooks, who ran the family’s estate outside of London. While the TV series reflects a time, place and circumstances very different from that in which any of us live, it does provide us with valuable lessons for today’s world.

The story began in 1912, when the closest male heirs to Lord Grantham died aboard the *Titanic*. A distant cousin – Matthew Crawley, a lawyer – was next in line to inherit the title of Earl, and with it, authority over the land and castle named Downton Abbey.

Unfortunately, Lord Robert then speculated with the family fortune in what he thought was a “surefire investment” in a Canadian railroad company that ultimately went bankrupt. The loss placed Lord Robert’s ownership of the Downton Abbey castle and land in jeopardy, and threatened the jobs of all those who worked on the estate. After Lord Robert made several futile attempts to raise money to stave off bankruptcy, cousin Matthew Crawley agreed to bail Lord Robert out so he could pay off his creditors and remain at his ancestral home. In exchange, Crawley demanded – and got – a 50% ownership share in all of the Downton Abbey property.

As a lawyer, Matthew Crawley should have known the importance of having a complete estate plan. Sadly, he died suddenly in an auto accident, leaving his wife and their young son. He had never drawn up a Will. This created issues as to who would manage the estate during the child’s infancy.

Throughout the episodes, footmen and other employees at Downton who wanted to invest their meager savings turned to people with minimal experience for advice. As a result they made costly mistakes.

The Lessons:

- 1) Accidents can happen at any time, making it important for everyone – not just an Earl or owner of a huge estate – to have an estate plan that includes a Will, Powers of Attorney for financial and healthcare decisions, and sometimes a Trust. Sufficient life insurance is also important to spare your family and survivors from financial harm and emotional stress.
- 2) Review all of your estate planning documents on a regular basis, particularly when circumstances change because of marriage, birth, adoption, divorce or death.
- 3) There are no “sure thing” get-rich-quick investments.
- 4) Your insurance proceeds account, which is fully-guaranteed by your insurance company, helps you protect your insurance money, pays you competitive interest rates and allows you easy access to your funds.

Knitting can be therapeutic

Knitting can provide more benefits than the completion of beautiful handmade goods. The physical act of knitting, with its coordinated, repetitive and rhythmic movement has a meditative, calming and relaxing effect. Working on a complex project may also provide a welcome distraction and can refocus attention away from stressful situations or sad thoughts.

British physiotherapist, Betsan Corkhill, has studied the specific benefits of knitting as therapy and has published the results of an online questionnaire that had 3,500 respondents from 39 countries. Corkhill set up a knitting therapy program at a hospital for patients experiencing chronic pain or anxiety attacks.



She found that patients who participated in a knitting program on a regular basis reported reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The non-profit Project Knitwell in the United States believes that knitting can be therapeutic. As such, it provides knitting lessons and supplies to patients, relatives and caregivers at some Washington, D.C. hospitals.

Knitting – along with other portable craft hobbies such as crocheting, needlepoint, cross-stitch and the like – appears to have some mental health benefits. Another published study found that quilt making also had therapeutic benefits, helping with concentration and focus and providing a calming effect.

No experience or particular talent is needed to get started with knitting or other similar crafts. You can sign up for a class at a community school, local craft store or even learn the basics via online tutorials on YouTube. Taking up a craft can be a way to pass the time productively, channel negative thoughts towards something pleasant and have a finished product to show for your efforts.

House cleaning advice

Even if you thoroughly clean your house from top to bottom each season, there are certain household tasks that need attention on a more regular basis. In particular, the bathroom and kitchen can harbor bacteria that cause illness. While most bacteria are harmless – and exposure to even bad bacteria can build immunity to fight disease – there are some germs that can truly make your family ill.

A researcher at the University of Arizona's College of Public Health advises the following keep your home clean and safe:

- All towels and washcloths that are used daily should be washed in warm or hot water every few days. Skip the fabric softener as it can reduce absorbency.
- Use handy household wipes every other day to quickly disinfect the toilet rim and seat as well as the toilet and sink handles. This is not a substitute, however, for a thorough cleaning of those surfaces.
- Change your bed linens each week because sheets and pillowcases can be a breeding ground for dust mites. Wash mattress pads and pillows – even feather pillows – in the washing machine twice a year.
- Before restocking the refrigerator, wipe the vegetable bin and shelves with a soapy sponge or with some baking soda and water.
- Wash kitchen towels often because they can carry dangerous E. coli bacteria. Dishrags can be disinfected with a capful of bleach in a bowl of water.

Sources used in this issue include: Good Housekeeping, Caregiver.org, AARP, British Journal of Occupational Therapy, U. of Arizona, Consumer Reports, JAMA, Washington Post, LA Times, CNN, PBS, Wall Street Journal, Experian, Forbes.

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