



The Ultimate Estate Administration Procedures Training Package

MODULE #3:

Initial Contact with the Firm & Getting the First Meeting Booked

SPEAKER

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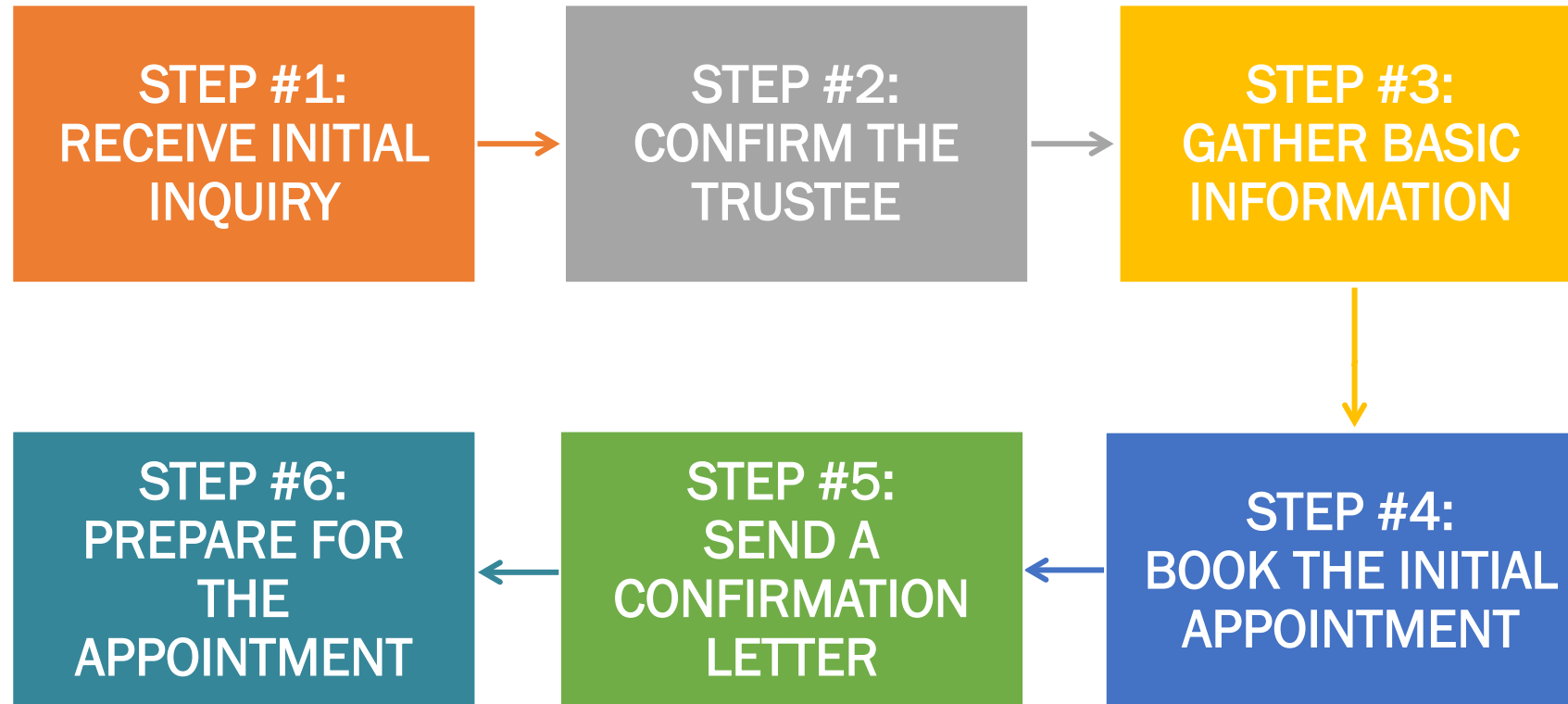
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INITIAL CONTACT WITH PROSPECTIVE CLIENT

INITIAL CONTACT WITH PROSPECTIVE CLIENT:

Overview of the Process





STEP #1: RECEIVE INITIAL INQUIRY

CRITICAL STEP IN THE WHOLE EA PROCESS:

Live Receptionist Answering the Phone

- When people are reaching out to law firms to get help following the death of a loved one
 - They are grieving and highly emotional
 - They are anxious and want someone to help now
 - They may already assume they won't reach someone
- This is your firm's HUGE opportunity to capture more EA cases than others by having a live receptionist answer the phone
 - Even if they cannot directly assist the prospect!

Staffing for Handling Initial Phone Calls

- **BEST:** Having someone dedicated to this process and the person that all initial inquiries are routed to
- It's also good to have people properly cross-trained to assist with these calls in the event that the primary person is unavailable
- **LAST RESORT:** Receptionist to take a message and have someone call them back

Be Sure the Receptionist is Properly Trained

- How they answer the phone
- How they address the prospective client when they indicate that a loved one has just passed away
- How they put people on hold
- How long they put or leave people on hold
- Has a script and procedure for how to handle the call if the staff person who is supposed to help them is not available

IF PERSON TO HANDLE INBOUND CALLS IS NOT AVAILABLE:

Receptionist Script for First EA Calls (EXHIBIT 10)

- Once informed that calling because someone passed away:
“On behalf of Kavesh, Minor & Otis, please accept our condolences. Please be assured that our firm will take care of you. We offer a free consultation to go over the estate plan and assist in the administration process.”
- Gather basic contact information
 - “What is the (full) name of the person who passed away?”
 - Date of Death (“I’m sorry to have to ask, when did he/she pass away?”)
 - “What is the best phone number for us to reach you?”
- Conclude with: “Again, I am so sorry for your loss. Please expect a call back from _____ within the next hour.”

IF PERSON TO HANDLE INBOUND CALLS IS NOT AVAILABLE:

Receptionist Script for First EA Calls (EXHIBIT 10)

- **IMPORTANT:** Receptionist should immediately notify the correct staff person (not just email or leave a voicemail)
- We recommend having some kind of system for checks and balances that this is being done properly
 - **EXAMPLE:** Have a timestamp for initial contact with the firm and a timestamp for staff person's phone call back (Office Manager to track/manage)



DO's & DON'Ts HANDLING THE INITIAL EA INQUIRY

DO's When Handling Initial EA Inquiries

- Keep things simple and make things easy
 - If your process requires a lot of work or effort, for the prospect, they are likely to try and find someone else
- Express condolences
 - *“I’m so sorry for your loss...”*
- Be reassuring and helpful
 - *“Please be reassured that we are here to help you and your family with everything you need to get through this...”*

DON'Ts When Handling Initial EA Inquiries

- Quote fees of any kind
 - *“During your free meeting with the attorney, he/she will review what may need to be done and quote you a fee for any services that our firm may be able to provide. It will then be up to you to decide if you wish to proceed.”*
- Put people on hold for extended periods of time
 - Ideally less than 30 seconds
 - Should have some kind of musical hold or some way to keep them engaged over just silence

DON'Ts When Handling Initial EA Inquiries

- Instruct them to do anything or answer any types of legal questions that they may have
 - Try and defer legal questions for the first meeting with the attorney
 - If question is pertinent to them scheduling a meeting (or there is urgency), could get answer from attorney and get back to them (try to not let it prevent them from booking the first meeting)



STEP #2: GATHER BASIC INFORMATION

You Must Confirm the Trustee

- We are only able and willing to schedule a first meeting with the named Successor Trustee(s)
- Typically the Trustee is the individual calling in to notify the law firm that the decedent has passed away, but could be someone not named in charge and who wants to take over the process!
- Importance of keeping this information readily available and updated in your firm's database/records
 - Staff can quickly verify on database (attorney can formally verify with EP documents later)

If the Caller is NOT the Successor Trustee

- Let them know that you can only speak with the named Successor Trustee(s)
 - WARNING: Staff cannot tell the caller who the Successor Trustee is!
 - *“Unfortunately, due to confidentiality rules, we are not permitted to meet with and give legal advice to someone other than the Trustee. We also cannot tell you who is the Trustee. If you know who that is, we ask that you please have the Trustee call us immediately.”*

If the Caller is NOT the Successor Trustee

- This is why it is crucial to get information for your client's Successor Trustees (phone number, e-mail, address) during the Estate Planning process!
- If you do have the Trustee information available, the Trustee is called immediately and asked to set up a meeting with an attorney

If the Decedent is NOT Your Client

- Ask the caller to send a copy of the trust (via e-mail to expedite process or they can drop it off)
 - Used to verify who the Successor Trustee is
- Additionally, request a copy of the death certificate (may need to instruct caller on how to get a copy of the death certificate)
- If the individual is NOT the Trustee, let them know that we cannot assist them without speaking with the Trustee and to ask if they can get the Trustee to call the law firm

KEY TIP:

Bring Existing Clients Back in RIGHT NOW!

- If you do not have your clients' Successor Trustee names and contact information readily available, it's time to do so RIGHT NOW!
- Make this a part of your EP process right now
- Start bringing existing clients back in
 - Review their estate plan, including chosen Successor Trustee
 - Make any recommended changes/updates
 - In this process, gather contact information
 - See Module #2 or our [Client 3-Year Review Marketing Package](#)

Gather Basic Information

- See **EXHIBIT 11** for our First EA Checklist

FIRST EA CHECKLIST

☐ **GATHER BASIC INFORMATION**

Name of Decedent: _____

Date of Death: _____

Name of Trustee: _____

Trustee Phone #: _____

Type of #: ☐ Mobile ☐ Home ☐ Work ☐ Other: _____

Best Time to Call: ☐ AM ☐ Lunch Hour ☐ PM ☐ After 5PM ☐ Any

Address of Trustee: _____

Trustee Email: _____



STEP #3: SET THE APPOINTMENT

When to Schedule the Appointment

- If they have a death certificate, the appointment can be booked in about 2 weeks out
 - Want them to have enough time to gather necessary information to bring with them to the initial meeting
- If they do not have a death certificate, book the appointment for 4 weeks out
 - They need enough time to ensure they can get death certificates and gather all of the necessary information to bring to their first meeting (more important than EP!)

Communicate Reason for Booking Meeting 2 to 4 Weeks Away

- Be sure to clarify that we schedule meetings 2 to 4 weeks out all the time, because there is nothing that needs to be done RIGHT NOW (in fact, best to not do anything without speaking to attorney first)
 - Don't want people to think your firm is “too busy” and choose to go somewhere else
 - Or take premature or incorrect actions that may cause them legal liability later
- May wish to ask if they have access to an account to pay bills and expenses (even those can go for a few weeks without penalty once informed about death)

Confirm the Appointment Details

- Be sure to clarify the day, date, time and location
 - Duration: 90 minutes
 - Whenever possible, hold the meeting in-person at your office
- Fill out the First EA Checklist where noted

☐ SCHEDULE FIRST MEETING

DAY: _____ DATE: _____ TIME: _____

Attorney: _____ ☐ In-Person ☐ Zoom

Confirm What's Needed for the Appointment

- Let them know that you will be sending a formal confirmation letter (**EXHIBIT 12-14**)
 - Page 3 includes a checklist of items that they need to bring with them to the meeting
 - Be sure to confirm that they will want to get several original death certificates and bring those to the meeting (one for each piece of real estate and a few extras); cheap and may be more difficult to get later
- If the appointment is by phone or Zoom, be sure to stress the need for them to drop off or send in items **BEFORE** their meeting

Script to Wrap Up Initial Phone Call

“So, I have your initial 90-minute appointment confirmed for [DAY], [DATE], at [TIME] at [LOCATION] with our attorney, [NAME OF ATTORNEY]. I will be sending you a confirmation letter which will include a list of items that you will need to collect and bring with you to the meeting. These items are necessary for Mr./Ms. [ATTORNEY LAST NAME] to properly assist you and answer all your questions in your meeting.

Please be reassured that there is nothing for you to do immediately. Right now, it is important that you take care of yourself and prepare for your meeting with us on [DATE] and we will let you know how we can help you.”



STEP #4: PREPARE & SEND A CONFIRMATION LETTER

Prepare and Send the Appropriate Confirmation Letter

- Letter comes from attorney and is sent by mail and e-mail (with Zoom link, if appropriate)
- Prepare and send out the corresponding First EA Appointment Confirmation Letter
 - **EXHIBIT 12** – In-Person Meeting
 - **EXHIBIT 13** – Zoom Meeting
 - **EXHIBIT 14** – Telephone Appointment
- Emphasis for items to be sent in or mailed in *prior* to the appointment for Zoom or phone meetings

Items for Client to Bring/Send In (Page 3)

1. Addresses and phone numbers of the decedent's children, if any
2. Original death certificate(s) (one for each piece of real estate)
3. All bank checking, savings, CD's, money market, and credit union account statements for the month covering the date of death
4. Mutual fund and brokerage account statements for the month covering the date of death
5. All stock and bond certificates, and dividend reinvestment account statements for the month covering the date of death (including all U.S. savings bonds)
6. Promissory Notes with amortization schedules and any trust deeds (securing payment of the Notes)

Items for Client to Bring/Send In (Page 3)

7. All information relating to any Limited or General Partnership interests
8. Copies of all property tax bills and mortgage balance statements for the month covering the date of death
9. All IRA and company retirement accounts information and statements and any other company benefits paid due to death (such as life insurance death benefits or deferred compensation)*
10. All annuity information and statements for the month covering the date of death (including the policies if you can readily locate them)*
11. All life insurance information and statements for the month covering the date of death (including the policies if you can readily locate them)*

Items for Client to Bring/Send In (Page 3)

12. Information relating to any family held business
13. Last year's income tax return (or the most recent one prepared)
- ~~14. Estate planning portfolio book (red or green three ring binder)
and all estate plan documents~~
15. Any checks or other evidence of gifts made by the decedent to any person in the year before death, any U.S. gift tax returns or generation-skipping transfer tax returns, and any 709 forms filed by the decedent
16. Please go to www.sco.ca.gov to search for possible unclaimed property of the decedent (or to a similar website of any other state in which decedent lived or may have had assets).

**#9, #10, and #11: Please bring information regarding beneficiary designations on accounts, if possible.*

Send a Sympathy Card from the Firm

- See **EXHIBIT 15**



Finish the Remaining Tasks on the First EA Checklist (EXHIBIT 11)

- Day, date and time of the appointment; appointment type
- Update your database accordingly
- Date the Confirmation Letter is sent
- Date the Sympathy Card is sent
- Remove the decedent's name and address from all marketing lists (mail, e-mail, newsletter and any other lists)
- Notify any mutual advisors (if applicable)



**WHAT IF THEY
DO NOT BOOK AN
APPOINTMENT?**

Series of Follow-Up Letters

- Letter that invites them to book an appointment with us, provides them generally good advice about needing to address some issues within 9 months from the date of death
- 3-Part Follow-Up
 - **EXHIBIT 16** - First Letter - Immediately upon notice of death and no appointment scheduled
 - **EXHIBIT 17** - Second Letter – 2 weeks after first letter
 - **EXHIBIT 18** - Third (Final) Letter – 4 weeks after second letter

Follow-Up Phone Call (EXHIBIT 19)

- Between the initial follow-up letter being sent and the second letter, attempt to reach the Trustee by telephone

“My name is Kristina Schneider and I am calling on behalf of the Law Firm of Kavesh, Minor & Otis. I am calling to follow up with you and see about scheduling your free meeting with an attorney in our office. As part of Robert Smith’s estate plan, you as the Successor Trustee are entitled to a free consultation meeting. In this meeting, attorney Philip Kavesh will review the estate plan to determine what, if any, actions need to take place, and the extent to which we may be of assistance to you. Would you be available on Wednesday, May 5 to come into our Torrance office?”

Follow-Up Phone Call If No Answer (EXHIBIT 19)

- Leave a simple message for a return call

“Hi, this message is for Mary Smith. My name is Kristina Schneider and I am calling on behalf of attorney Philip Kavesh from Kavesh, Minor & Otis. Mr. Kavesh asked me to give you a call regarding the Estate of Robert Smith. Can you please return my phone call at 1-800-756-5596 at your earliest convenience? Again, that number is 1-800-756-5596. Thank you.”

When You Learn of Death of Client, but Trustee Doesn't Contact the Law Firm?

- Letter sent to Successor Trustee (EXHIBIT 20)
- Sending condolences and offering a free consultation to meet with them

Be Sure to Complete the First EA Checklist

(EXHIBIT 11)

- When follow-up letters sent

IF FIRST MEETING NOT SCHEDULED

- ☐ SEND FREE CONSULT LETTER - DATE SENT: _____
- ☐ CALENDAR 2-WEEK FOLLOW-UP CALL - FOLLOW-UP DATE: _____

- Update any database records accordingly

The background of the slide is white and filled with numerous blue question marks of varying sizes and orientations, creating a theme of inquiry.

ANY QUESTIONS?

**SEND IN YOUR QUESTIONS TO
EVENTS@ULTIMATEESTATEPLANNER.COM**