Beyond Wealth: Stewardship in Practice

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How Families Work Together to Sustain Wealth Across Generations

For families who have accumulated significant wealth, the greatest challenge becomes alignment. As assets grow and families expand across generations, wealth introduces complexity—not only navigating financial complexity, but also the relationships and dynamics within their family. The question families increasingly face is not *How much do we have?* but *How do we use this wealth well, and how do we prepare our family to carry it forward together over time?*

Families that sustain wealth across generations tend to share a common trait: they treat wealth as a shared responsibility rather than a private entitlement. Rather than focusing on structures alone, they invest in relational work that strengthens and aligns family relationships over time, including shared values, healthy communication, thoughtful decision-making, and intentional preparation of the next generation.

This paper explores the non technical foundations that help families work together over time, blending our perspective with practical guidance to improve alignment, strength, and readiness across generations.

Defining What "Wealth" Really Means

Families often assume they share a definition of wealth, until they discover they do not. For some, wealth represents security. For others, freedom, opportunity, philanthropy, or legacy. Without clarity, disagreements arise not because family members are unreasonable, but because they are operating from different assumptions.

A sustainable approach begins with a broader definition. Financial assets matter, but they are only one dimension of wealth. In *Sound Mind, Sound Money*, wealth is defined more broadly. True wealth is holistic; it includes mental, physical, social, and time wealth in addition to the accumulation of assets. When families expand the conversation beyond money, they create space for alignment. This can also help families see the bigger picture together, including what areas of their life need investment and how financial assets can be a help or hinderance to those domains.

When families expand their definition of wealth, they create space for deeper alignment, making it easier to articulate what truly matters and how money should serve those priorities.

Shared Values and a Common Purpose

Purpose and values provide the compass for long-term decision-making. They answer questions that money alone cannot: What do we stand for? What kind of family do we want to be? What responsibilities come with our resources?

In our earlier Beyond Wealth paper, Building Bonds That Last, we explain that "each family should strive to document and then practice a set of core beliefs and values that define and guide the family. Family values cannot simply be told to family members; they should be decided together." Once established, shared values can help guide families when faced with challenging decisions or circumstances by asking a simple question: *How does this decision honor what matters most to us?* Decisions grounded in shared values tend to feel legitimate, even when they are difficult.

Importantly, values are not slogans. They are revealed through how a family responds to opportunity, conflict, and uncertainty. In practice, values often show up less as labels and more as expectations and norms, such as:

- how family members listen to and treat one another (empathy, love and compassion, respect),
- what is expected around effort, contribution, and independence (responsibility, work, perseverance),
- how wealth is contextualized (gratitude, service, generosity), and
- where boundaries are drawn around privacy, loyalty, and how time and attention are prioritized (honesty and integrity, family time).

When families begin articulating these principles, the conversation often naturally expands into a broader discussion of purpose. Purpose invites the family to answer why the wealth matters at all. It reframes wealth as something to be stewarded rather than consumed. Just as a company with a strong culture is guided by a clear purpose, vision, and values, so too can an enduring family—albeit in a more personal and emotional way.

A strong purpose clarifies why a family possesses, grows, and uses wealth. It grounds financial resources in meaning rather than entitlement, helps the next generation understand that wealth represents responsibility and opportunity (not just money), and becomes a decision filter for spending, investing, giving, career choices, and navigating conflict. This shift from ownership to stewardship is often the

difference between families that fragment and those that endure. When families articulate a shared purpose, they gain a framework for navigating trade offs over time.

Preparing the next generation for wealth often starts not with numbers, but with shared beliefs about money's role in a life well lived.

One family we work with chose to begin their wealth conversation without mentioning numbers at all. Instead, they talked about how they viewed money and the role it should—and should not—play in a life well lived.

They spoke about money needing to be "valued in its place," acknowledging that while financial resources can create opportunity and security, they can also become destructive when they take on outsized importance. They emphasized hard work and saving, making clear that wealth was never meant to replace effort or responsibility. They set expectations around privacy, explaining that inherited wealth was not something to be discussed outside the family. And they framed generosity not as an option, but as a responsibility that comes with good fortune.

Once values and purpose are articulated, families still need a way to live them out together. This is where communication becomes foundational.

Woven throughout the conversation was a shared hope that these principles would guide future decisions: working hard, living within limits, respecting one another's boundaries, and using resources to help, not indulge.

Only after grounding the conversation in these principles, they explained that resources had been set aside to help during meaningful moments of need, to support growth, and to enable giving. By the time dollar figures were introduced, they felt almost secondary. The values had already done the heavy lifting.

Conversations like these are often where alignment begins, long before formal structures or decisions are required.

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Communication as the Foundation

Most family challenges trace back not to money itself, but to how families communicate. When expectations go unspoken, assumptions go untested, or difficult conversations delayed, even well-intentioned decisions can lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

Healthy families create regular opportunities, both formal and informal, to talk about goals, concerns, and expectations. These conversations are not about financial reporting. They are about understanding perspectives and building trust. As described in John Wiley's book, *Wealthy and Wise*, families benefit from creating intentional spaces, often through periodic family meetings, where sensitive topics such as money, values, transitions, and conflict can be discussed openly, without the pressure to resolve everything at once. The goal is not an immediate agreement, but a shared understanding that develops over time.

At their best, these conversations are grounded in a few core communication principles: seeking to understand before being understood, assuming positive intent, speaking honestly with care, and staying curious. Together, these practices create psychological safety. Family members must feel permitted to ask questions, express uncertainty, and disagree respectfully. Without psychological safety, families lose the ability to address small issues before they become large ones, and the next generation may disengage or stay silent. With it, families are better able to surface differing perspectives, explore trade offs, and work through challenges constructively.

Healthy communication does not happen by accident. Many families find it helpful to agree in advance on a shared set of ground rules, not to control the conversation, but to protect it. These guidelines establish expectations for how family members will show up for one another, especially when emotions run high. Drawing from best practices outlined in *Wealthy and Wise* and our experience working with families, effective ground rules often include:

Creating an inclusive environment

- Everyone is included
- Equality, no one voice dominates
- Everyone participates

Maintaining respect and emotional safety

- No interrupting the current speaker
- No blame
- Maintain respect, no raised voices
- Time out if topics get heated

Encouraging presence and listening

- Tech free, no devices
- Prioritize listening over talking

Keeping conversations productive

- Focus on issues, not personalities
- Form the agenda based on consensus
- Use a facilitator as appropriate
- Develop next steps or an action plan

When families articulate these expectations upfront, conversations are more likely to remain constructive, even when the subject matter is difficult.

In the context of generational wealth, communication becomes especially important for preparing the family to steward resources over time. When considering major decisions, families benefit from asking simple but powerful questions: Who understands this decision, and who does not? What has been communicated, and what has been assumed? This does not mean that everything must be shared at once. Instead, it invites families to consider what conversations can happen today to lay the groundwork for what will inevitably come to pass.

Communication also plays a central role in managing family dynamics and conflict. Conflict itself is not a sign of failure. It is often a sign of engagement. Families that avoid disagreement entirely may preserve surface harmony at the expense of honesty. The goal is not to eliminate conflict, but to navigate it thoughtfully. By leaning into shared values, honoring agreed upon ground rules, and creating space for ongoing dialogue, families are better equipped to address tensions before they erode trust and to emerge stronger on the other side.

In many cases, a neutral facilitator (whether an advisor or trusted guide) can further support healthy dialogue. In the business world, organizations routinely engage facilitators for strategic retreats or leadership offsites to bring focus, structure, and balance to important conversations. Families benefit from the same intentional approach. Thoughtful facilitation helps ensure that all voices are heard, conversations remain balanced, and emotionally charged topics do not derail progress. Experienced advisors often play this critical facilitator role in helping families navigate transitions, address conflict, and keep conversations aligned with shared values.

Decision Making Across Generations

As families grow, decision making naturally becomes more complex. What once worked for a single generation rarely scales when multiple households, life stages, and perspectives are involved. Successful families recognize that decision making itself is a form of education. Participation builds understanding and responsibility over time, while exclusion often leads to disengagement.

Over time, families benefit from evolving their approach, moving from parent led decisions to shared frameworks that clarify who decides what and why. This evolution is not about control. It is about continuity.

The challenge is not whether to involve multiple generations but how to do so thoughtfully. Many families begin by inviting participation in shared decisions they are already navigating, using those moments to gradually build decision making skills across ages and stages.

Practical Ways to Involve Multiple Generations

Below are common decision areas families face, along with examples of how involvement can evolve over time.

1. Family Experiences and Lifestyle Choices

Examples: vacations, reunions, traditions

These decisions are often low risk and highly engaging, making them an ideal starting point.

- **Younger children** can help choose between options and talk through simple trade offs.
- **Teenagers** can weigh in on timing, activities, or budget constraints.
- **Adult family members** balance competing preferences across households, costs, and fairness.

These conversations introduce the idea that choices involve trade offs and participation matters, even when final decisions rest with a smaller group.

2. Philanthropy and Giving

Examples: charitable focus areas, annual giving decisions, family foundations

Philanthropy often provides a natural entry point for shared decision making because it is values driven and collaborative.

- **Younger generations** can explore causes they care about and learn why others value different issues.
- **Teenagers** can research organizations, compare approaches, and present recommendations.
- **Adults** can discuss impact, strategy, and long term intent.

Over time, philanthropy becomes a training ground for stewardship, helping family members connect values to action.

3. Education and Enrichment

Examples: education support, extracurriculars, camps

When families involve the rising generation in understanding the purpose, expectations, and values behind educational support, they reinforce that wealth is a tool for growth, not entitlement.

- **Younger children** can begin to express interests and preferences and learn that opportunities involve choices and limits.
- **Teenagers** can articulate goals and discuss expectations around responsibility, effort, and follow through.
- **Adults** can evaluate trade-offs between different paths and opportunities,

This helps build judgment and ownership in the rising generation, while older generations clarify intent, boundaries, and how support aligns with family values.

4. Shared Assets and Projects

Examples: home renovations, legacy properties, major purchases

Tangible projects make abstract trade offs more visible.

- **Younger children** can express preferences and learn about constraints.
- **Teenagers** can help compare options, such as doing a project themselves versus hiring professionals.
- **Adults** can weigh cost, quality, time, and long term use.

Even when one generation retains decision authority, inviting input reinforces that financial decisions are rarely just financial.

Teaching Decision Making as a Process and a Skill

As families mature, involving the next generation in conversations and the decision-making process can be just as important as involving them in outcomes.

- Clarifying which decisions are shared and which are delegated
- Explaining how and why authority shifts over time
- Naming the role of values and purpose as decision filters

This prepares future decision makers to step into responsibility with clarity rather than confusion.

Consider, too, that the next generation will inevitably inherit not only wealth, but the responsibility to make meaningful decisions about it. What should guide those decisions, and how can decision making itself be taught as a skill?

In our paper *Teach Your Children Well*, we outlined the ownership spectrum as a roadmap, where “each stage strengthens both knowledge and wisdom, technical skills and judgment, while moving children from passive observers to confident decision makers.” The spectrum broadly covers four stages: awareness, exposure, engagement, and ownership. This integrated approach ensures children gain not only financial skills but also the judgment, confidence, and perspective to thrive.

Across all of these examples, involvement should evolve with age, readiness, and context. What matters most is not equal authority but meaningful participation. Over time, these experiences help prepare the next generation not just to inherit wealth but to steward it well.

The next generation will inevitably inherit not only wealth, but the responsibility to make meaningful decisions about it.

Preparing the Next Generation for Stewardship

Preparing the next generation for stewardship requires more than education or disclosure. It calls for thoughtful attention to how responsibility is experienced, developed, and ultimately carried forward. Families who do this well tend to focus on three realities that shape readiness over time: readiness is about preparedness, not age; preparation unfolds gradually rather than at a single moment; and inheritance is a deeply personal experience, not just a financial event.

Readiness is about preparedness, not age

Ultimately, preparation is most effective when it is treated as an ongoing process rather than a milestone. Readiness matters more than age or entitlement. Preparing the next generation is less about transferring information and more about cultivating perspective, confidence, and resilience.

Preparation is ongoing, not a milestone

To that end, effective preparation is gradual and experiential. Rather than relying on lectures or a single wealth reveal, families can involve younger generations in discussions, observations, and low risk responsibilities over time. This approach allows readiness to develop across multiple dimensions:

- **Competence**, through exposure to real decisions and conversations
- **Confidence**, through participation and being taken seriously
- **Judgment**, through experience with trade offs, consequences, and uncertainty

Inheritance is an emotional event

Inheritance is not inherently empowering. Without preparation, it can feel confusing, burdensome, or even destabilizing. Equally important is preparing for the emotional realities that often accompany inheritance. Even in well intentioned families, wealth can introduce:

- Expectations about roles or outcomes feeling burdensome
- Comparisons among siblings or cousins
- Guilt around unearned resources
- Pressure to live up to perceived standards

When families acknowledge and address these dynamics openly, they reduce the likelihood that emotions remain unspoken or misunderstood.

As families revisit conversations, involve the next generation in age appropriate ways, and consider the emotional weight of wealth, they reduce surprises and increase resilience. In doing so, they prepare heirs not just to receive wealth, but to carry responsibility with clarity and confidence.

Conclusion: From Wealth to Stewardship

Wealth that endures is rarely accidental. It is the product of intention, communication, and shared responsibility. Families that sustain wealth across generations develop the ability to navigate complexity together, aligning decisions over time rather than relying on any single solution.

This work centers on clarity and continuity. Families benefit from articulating what matters most, creating space for open conversation, and establishing ways to make thoughtful decisions as circumstances evolve. At key moments, an outside perspective can help bring focus to these conversations and support progress.

In our work with families, we serve as partners in this process. We help families articulate shared values, facilitate meaningful conversations, and design decision making frameworks, while honoring the fact that each family's path is their own.

By defining wealth broadly, grounding decisions in shared values, and investing in communication and preparation, families shift from managing assets to practicing stewardship. In doing so, they preserve not only financial capital, but the relationships and purpose that give wealth its meaning. And when families practice stewardship with intention, they are better equipped not just to preserve wealth, but to live with it together over time. At its core, this work supports three essential conditions for enduring wealth: alignment around what matters, strength in how families engage with one another, and readiness for the decisions and transitions ahead.

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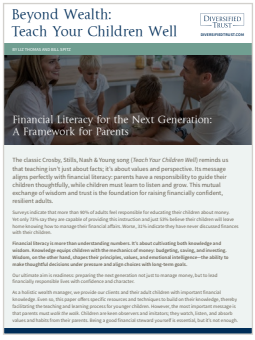

Teach Your Children Well >

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With fifteen years in the wealth management industry, Liz brings expertise in strategic communications, client engagement, and marketing leadership, along with a passion for helping families navigate wealth across generations. She works to address the human side of wealth—building confidence, resilience, and connection—so families feel prepared to sustain what truly matters for years ahead.

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As a Co-Founder of Diversified Trust, Bill has been instrumental in the ongoing development of the firm's investment platform. Bill also serves on the Board of Directors of Mass Mutual Financial Group, Acadia Realty Trust, and is Trustee emeritus of Kenyon College in Ohio. He authored Get Rich Slowly: Building your Financial Future through Common Sense and Sound Mind, Sound Money, which posits that true wealth goes far beyond a bank account. He is a frequent speaker at financial conferences.

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