

Three Questions with **Julia Meister**

**PARTNER AT TAFT,
STETTINIUS &
HOLLISTER**

By Corinne Minard

Julia B. Meister, a partner in Taft's litigation, health and life sciences, and private client groups and a member of *Cincy Magazine's* Leading Lawyer list, loves that her job gives her opportunities to learn more about people and help the community.

"The very best lawyers and the kind of lawyer that I strive to be are the lawyers who devote the time and attention to really learning about their clients' personal or business situation,"

she says. She's used this attention to detail to help clients and to serve on the board of nonprofits such as the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, Cincinnati Area Senior Services, Cincinnati Opera Association and the Legal Aid Society.

While she enjoys working with others, she also sees the impact of poor estate planning. For our special Retirement Update issue, we sat down with Meister to discuss how people can avoid the pitfalls of estate planning.

WHAT MISSTEPS DO PEOPLE TAKE WHEN IT COMES TO ESTATE PLANNING?

First off, not having an estate plan in the first place. I think that some people assume that they have to be of enormous wealth before it's even necessary for them to have an estate plan, but that's not true. It's certainly very important to be sure that you're working with an estate planner who understands the tax and other laws and can navigate those with you and put together a plan that optimizes your situation.

Another misstep is not working with a good estate planner, qualified to under-



stand your situation in its entirety and design a plan that works best for you and your individual situation. I will tell you that I do a lot of estate litigation and I have been involved in many cases where I'm going to call "do-it-yourself" estate planning causes problems. This is not a practice that is about filling in the blanks.

WHEN SHOULD PEOPLE START THINKING ABOUT ESTATE PLANNING?

Certainly when you're starting out your life, and then if you get married you should give thought to your estate plan in connection with your marriage. You should at least be giving thoughts to whether revisions are necessary as you have children if you do. You should make sure that if your marriage ends that you take necessary steps to have it looked at to see if anything needs to be changed in light of your divorce. And if you start to accumulate wealth as you start to acquire investments, as you start a business, and as that business starts and changes, those are times to check in with your lawyer to see what is needed. Estate planning is not something that should

start, ideally, when you are getting ready to retire because there are so many things that happen that are unexpected.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE ASSISTING THEIR PARENTS WITH THEIR ESTATE PLAN?

Certainly aging parents often will look to their children for assistance. It's important in a situation like that [to] spell out exactly who the lawyer works for. Is the lawyer the parent's lawyer or is the lawyer the child's lawyer? In your estate plan you're entitled to work with your own lawyer who can listen to you privately and who can implement your wishes as you yourself have expressed to that lawyer.

In the appropriate circumstances, I'm a fan of different generations of the family communicating with each other about estate planning issues. Sometimes, in disputes over estates, the disputes are born out of shock and surprise and misunderstanding. People have expectations that may not turn out to be what's in the documents and so they may correctly or incorrectly assume that something was amiss. ■