

[Encouraging Succession Planning with Movies](#)

By: Academy Guest Blogger, Gail Rubin, Author of *The Family Plot Blog* & *A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die* Posted in [Client Services](#), [Estate Planning](#)

When a family business is part of an estate, succession planning is vital. Who's going to run the business after the founder(s) pass on? The kids may not have the financial temperament or business skills to step into Mom or Dad's hard-to-fill shoes.



Personalities play a big part in the success or failure of business succession. How do you talk about this topic with your clients? You can get a little help from Hollywood in starting the succession planning conversation.

Here are some films and television programs featuring scenes that raise questions and can illustrate the finer points of passing along the family business.

Red River

This 1948 film stars John Wayne as hard-driving rancher Tom Dunston, who won't listen to anyone else's advice, and Montgomery Clift as his adopted son Matthew Garth. They raise a herd of 10,000 cattle starting with only two. The 1,000 mile cattle drive to get their beef to market drives a wedge between the two men. Dunston's tyrannical ways prompt Matthew to take the herd away from Dunston and head to a new railhead in Kansas.

There are a number of scenes that show young Matt disagreeing with Dunston's business practices. Dunston had wanted Matt to inherit the ranch, but after the split on the cattle drive, he's not sure what he'll do. What advice would you give to a warring family that can't agree on how to run the business?

This is Where I Leave You

This film released in 2014 focuses on a family of adult Jewish children brought together for a week of sitting *shivah* after the father dies. The siblings have a heated argument over the inheritance of the family's sporting goods store. The serious eldest son has been running the business with Dad. They ne'er-do-well youngest son wants to become part of the management team.

The four siblings each get an equal share of the business. How do you work out the business' operation side going forward after the death of the founder? This one scene very vividly illustrates the need for a family business to map out next steps.

The Six Wives of Henry Lefay

As you might guess from the title, Henry Lefay has been married a few times. One of his ex-wives is still his business partner, running a successful audio-video store. Henry seems to have died while para-sailing in Mexico. At the visitation, the current wife has a meltdown and announces she owns everything, including Henry's half of the business.

Because a crazy wife owns half of the business, does that mean she has a say in the operations? What protections can be put in place before a key employee dies to insure the business continues to run smoothly?

Six Feet Under

This award-winning HBO television series aired from 2001 to 2005. In the first episode, the father, founder of Fisher & Sons Funeral Home, dies when the hearse he is driving gets struck by a bus. His two sons, Nate Jr. and David, have two very different personalities. Nate ran as far away from the funeral business as he could go, and David became a buttoned-up funeral director.

At the reading of the will, both sons inherit the business. David is furious about the joint inheritance. Nate wants to give David his half of the business. Plus, the family has to consider a buy-out offer from a large funeral corporation, Kroehner Service International. How can succession planning deal with these issues?

Showing your clients scenes from these movies can help foster productive conversations about family businesses and inheritances. Consider an outreach event on succession planning illustrated with film clips as a way to generate more clients with family-owned businesses.

*Gail Rubin, CT, The Doyenne of Death®, brings a light touch to serious subjects as a [speaker who uses humor and funny films](#) to attract people to discuss mortality, end-of-life, estate and funeral planning issues. She is Certified in Thanatology: Death, Dying and Bereavement, author of the award-winning book and host of the TV and radio shows **A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die**. She is a regular contributor to the AAEPA blog. Her website is <http://www.AGoodGoodbye.com>.*