

MAY 2026

“At our Firm,
Your Estate Plan
is Not Business,
it’s Personal...”



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“Life is too important to be
taken seriously.”

- Oscar Wilde

THE DISCIPLINE OF SAYING “NO”

Most of us are drowning in good opportunities. Invitations arrive cloaked in flattery: a promising partnership, a seat on a committee, a weekend trip that looks great on Instagram, a ‘quick’ project that somehow never stays quick. I may be a little guilty on the weekend trip getaway, but this is a judgment free newsletter People! 😊 The modern world has made ‘yes’ our default setting, and then wonders why overwhelm is the soundtrack of our lives. If excellence is the art of choosing, then ‘no’ is the brush (and poetry is my second job!). The discipline of saying no is not about asceticism or cynicism; it is about stewardship — of your time, your energy, and your attention.



Saying no begins with a clear center. People who know what they are building find it easier to decline detours. In business, that means anchoring to a strategy you are willing to defend. In family life, it means naming the rhythms you want to protect: dinner at home four nights a week, a standing date night, a Saturday morning game with your kids. When the schedule starts to fill, you measure new requests against those anchors. This isn’t rigidity; it’s fidelity to what matters. In all seriousness, this mental mind map has helped me navigate life quite a bit!

The challenge is that some invitations are genuinely good. That’s where the second layer of discernment lives: distinguishing between good and best. A helpful rubric is the 90% rule popularized by Greg McKeown: if a prospective commitment doesn’t score a 9 out of 10 on a few pre-chosen criteria, treat it as a 0. This sounds brutal until you tally the cost of every 6 and 7 that fills your calendar with mediocrity. High performers don’t hate opportunity; they curate it.

Language matters, too. Many of us avoid no because we fear it will sound harsh. But no can be graceful: “This looks like a great fit for someone, but I’m heads-down on a few priorities and don’t want to do this halfway.” Or, “I’m honored you asked; my plate is full through August — would you like two other names?” You protect your focus while still being generous. Over time, people learn that your yes means something because it is scarce and sincere.

Boundaries are easier to hold when they are visible. Consider creating “office hours” for favors and introductions, a response window for email, or a policy that meetings require an agenda. These containers turn you from the bottleneck into a system. Families can do the same: a shared calendar, planned rest, even a seasonal ‘no’ list — the activities you’re consciously skipping this quarter so others can thrive. Each boundary is a kindness to your future self.

Saying no is also an act of humility. We say yes out of ego more often than we admit — because we like being needed, because we chase the adrenaline of being busy, because we’re afraid a door will close forever if we don’t sprint through it now. The paradox is that the doors that matter tend to be held open by trust and competence, not by omnipresence. When you prune commitments, the work you do say yes to gets better. Quality compounds. Relationships deepen. Your word carries weight.

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INTRODUCTION

Hopefully, you are well into the year and feeling a ‘rhythm’ and setting the pace for 2026! On our part, we had a slow month in February, but all other moving parts have been moving steadily forward. As a reflection, we wonder if this is a sign of the time and inflation is really starting to show its impact on people across the nation. We all silently understand... and feel the cost of war.

If you have stuck to the plan thus far, May should have arrived with longer light and... a quieter confidence. The frenzy of the first quarter has given way to steadier cadence, and families begin to look ahead: summer trips to plan, graduations to celebrate, projects to finish before the season slows us down. It’s a month that rewards focus. Someone once said that focus isn’t the ability to power through a task, it’s the ability to remove distractions. There is a lot of wisdom in that mental approach.

In our practice, May is when we nudge clients to tune instruments rather than buy new ones — refine systems, review beneficiaries, refresh powers of attorney, confirm account titles, and double-check that the plan designed on paper is funded in the real world. Small confirmations prevent big surprises. This month’s essays lean into that spirit: saying ‘no’ so your best ‘yes’ can breathe, and clarifying how today’s retirement rules shape tomorrow’s legacy. As always, the goal isn’t to do everything — it’s to do the right things, on purpose.

Retirement accounts carry more than balances; they carry rules — and those rules shape how wealth is lived with today and passed on tomorrow. The SECURE Act of 2019 and its follow-up provisions re-drew key lines: later required beginning dates for RMDs, new windows for inherited IRAs, and additional opportunities for certain small-business owners and savers. By 2026, the dust has settled enough to see what matters for real families: how to take income efficiently during retirement and how to avoid avoidable taxes and headaches for heirs.

For retirees, the later RMD age means a longer runway to manage brackets. Those extra years are not a vacation from planning; they are a planning gift. Many households can use the pre-RMD window to do partial Roth conversions, harvest gains or losses, and calibrate charitable giving. The goal is to smooth lifetime taxes rather than wait for a future spike that coincides with Social Security, RMDs, and perhaps a surviving spouse filing as single. Modeling cash-flow and tax interactions over a decade is more powerful than any single tactic. As part of our clients' team, we always reiterate the importance of reviewing both your legal and financial plans at least every three (3) years.

Inherited accounts changed more dramatically. Most non-spouse beneficiaries now face a 10-year depletion rule for inherited IRAs and 401(k)s, which can push adult children into high brackets if the entire balance is left until year ten. Practical planning usually spreads distributions across the decade, coordinated with each heir's income cycles. If heirs are in peak earning years, families sometimes pair distributions with donor-advised fund contributions or time larger gifts to offset the taxable income. Blunt tools left to chance create blunt outcomes; intentional distribution schedules protect more of the pie.

Qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) continue to be a favorite move for charitably inclined retirees taking RMDs. Direct transfers from IRAs to charities can satisfy RMDs without increasing adjusted gross income, which can help with Medicare surcharges and taxation of Social Security benefits. For families who 'give anyway,' QCDs are a way to give smarter.

Small-business owners have additional levers. Solo 401(k)s, cash-balance plans, and well-designed profit-sharing formulas can accelerate tax-deferred saving in high-income years. The right plan depends on age, headcount, and desired flexibility — which is why a one-page illustration beats rules recited from memory. Owners should also remember that retirement plans are governance tools as much as tax tools: matching formulas, vesting schedules, and plan loans carry cultural signals to employees and should align with the story you want your company to tell.

And then there is the question every parent asks: should I name my kids directly on my IRA? Sometimes yes, often not. Trusts remain valuable for minor or spendthrift beneficiaries, for blended families, and for situations where creditor protection matters. But the drafting details are not boilerplate — conduit versus accumulation language, trust tax brackets, and trustee discretion all change the tax math. The best beneficiary designation is the one that integrates with the rest of your estate plan, not the one that seemed convenient on a custodian form years ago.

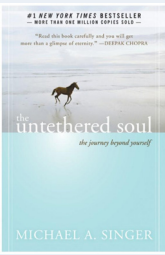
The through-line in 2026 is integration. The SECURE Act's rules don't live in isolation. They interact with charitable goals, survivor income, healthcare costs, state taxes, and business plans. A short meeting to map those intersections now can spare your heirs from expensive surprises later. Retirement accounts are magnificent tools when coordinated with a family's values and a clear distribution story. Use the rules — don't let the rules use you.



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None of this is license to become insular or ungenerous. The healthiest 'no' makes room for bigger 'yes' — yes to deep work that moves the needle, yes to margin that keeps you patient and kind, yes to the people sitting at your own dinner table. The discipline of saying no is ultimately the discipline of choosing a life on purpose. Every declined detour frees a little more of you for the road you actually want to travel.

This month, try a simple practice: for two weeks, pause before accepting any new commitment. Ask whether the request advances your top two goals at work or home. If not, say no — warmly, clearly, quickly. Then notice what happens: your calendar breathes, your attention sharpens, and your best work moves forward. That's not selfish; that's stewardship.



MICHAEL A. SINGER – THE UNTETHERED SOUL

Michael Singer's **The Untethered Soul** isn't a financial or business manual, yet many leaders keep it on the same shelf. The book's central question — who are you behind the constant voice in your head? — lands with surprising relevance in a noisy world. Singer argues that much of our suffering comes not from events themselves, but from the

way we cling to them internally. This is a struggle you can witness within your own life, but if we may share; something we have seen countless times through our clients' stories. Whether it's family trauma, sibling arguments, work struggles, etc... it has been fascinating to witness how each person interprets what happens to them and what they choose to do with that meaning. Freedom, he suggests, is learning to watch thoughts and emotions pass through without grabbing each one as if it were you.

The writing is simple, almost conversational, which makes the ideas approachable even if you've never read a page of philosophy. Singer uses everyday examples: the irritation that lingers after a tough meeting, the anxiety that spikes before a big decision, the habit of replaying conversations. His remedy is a practice of relaxation and release — “open your heart” is his refrain — that returns you to the seat of awareness. From there, you choose responses rather than reactions. This is reminiscent of the book by Viktor Frankl “Man Search for Meaning”... but not as intense of a read.

Why include this book in a newsletter about planning and leadership? Because composure is a competitive advantage, and inner freedom is the foundation to wise decisions, don't you agree? Families navigating wealth, business owners managing risk, parents shaping culture at home — all benefit from the ability to notice internal weather and let storms pass. Whether you take the book as spiritual counsel or practical psychology, its effect is the same: less reactivity, more presence. In May's push for focus and simplicity, **The Untethered Soul** is a timely companion.

Family Travel Hacks — Making Memories Without Mayhem



If you have been with us for an extended period of time, you know we travel quite a bit, especially for a traditional service oriented business. Truth is our philosophy has always been one of learning and growing. Indeed, one can learn a lot from the classroom and /or the office environment. However, it is when you get out and explore the world that one truly grows. So an article about traveling is something we always enjoy sharing with you!

Travel has a way of magnifying both joy and stress. The same trip that produces the photo you'll frame can also produce the airport meltdown you'll never forget. Success isn't luck; it's small choices that stack in your favor. Start by right-sizing your itinerary. Two meaningful activities a day beat five rushed ones — leave room for serendipity, naps, and the ice-cream stop you didn't plan but everyone remembers.

Packing light is an act of mercy. Choose outfits that mix and match, and resist the 'just in case' pile that turns into a shoulder-aching suitcase. A compact first-aid kit and a small laundry pouch save more days than extra shoes ever will. For younger kids, pack one new small surprise (a book, a puzzle) for the plane or car; novelty buys calm. Our approach and fascination with Japanese Minimalism may have very well developed from all our traveling time. Everyone enjoys looking good and feeling good through clothes on a regular basis. However, when you travel, you quickly hit the reality that more 'things' equal more weight, which makes moving around quite a bit more challenging. In the process, we have learned to become more intentional in our packing, maybe less volume but better quality. This has naturally translated in all aspects of life. Moving on to more practical tips 😊

Food is the great pacifier. A few shelf-stable snacks in each bag prevent both hunger and overspending. When you do eat out, aim for local spots that can handle a little noise. Ask your server for the one dish they're proudest of — it changes the experience from a transaction to a story. And don't overlook simple picnics; a park lunch can reset a long day.

Finally, protect margins. Build in buffers around flights and big driving segments, and schedule nothing the first evening. Give everyone a job — one person handles directions, another the reservations, someone else the daily photo. Shared ownership turns logistics into family teamwork. The goal isn't a flawless trip; it's a generous one, with enough space for the moments you came to find. Heck, this sounds like running a firm, doesn't it? 😊 Anyhow, feel free to share your traveling tips with us, we can always learn more together!

FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

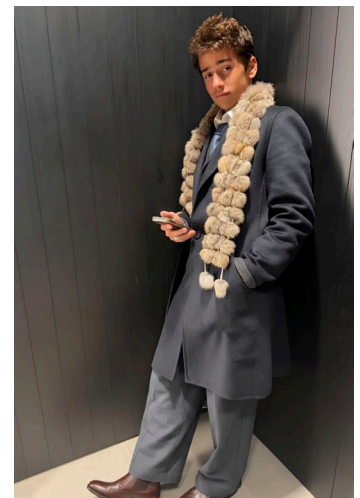
Kai Harral was born in the Year of the Dragon and shares the same Zodiac sign as his mom, Shadi: the Bull.

He has brought so much love into the lives of Shadi and his God Dad, Patrick, and family in general as Shadi's firstborn.

As a young boy, Kai was deeply into clay art, creating detailed, intricate caricatures. While he did not inherit his artistic talent from his mom—as that came from his dad—he has recently pivoted his creativity toward high fashion and clothing design. He is now known both in and out of school for his style; he often dresses Shadi for work and social events and even designed a tailor-made jacket for himself.

Kai has also excelled academically, earning honors awards throughout middle school. Despite Patrick's initial concerns about his athleticism, Kai proved everyone wrong and has become an accomplished surfer. He has kept up with "Uncle" Patrick and his dad on many local and destination surf trips over the last two years and will be joining the high school Surf Team this August. Recently, he has also displayed his athleticism through ping-pong, playing regularly with friends and family.

Although he is shy, unlike his mom lol, Kai is extremely loving and kind - he is often seen hugging and kissing his parents and other family members.





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Being a firm based on service, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of harnessing meaningful relationships! It not only provides a community, but it gives meaning to your work. Doing a service not just for the monetary exchange, but creating friendships along the way. In that process, we have also learned that you must protect your time, the sanctity of having quiet, or dare I say... resting time. As summer approaches, we want to encourage you to not always feeling like you have to say yes to everything!

May favors those who choose on purpose. A few strong 'no's create space for better 'yes,' and a little planning can make your social calendar a lot more meaningful.

This is also a good time to tune your 'vehicles,' in our world, that means retirement plans, updating your estate documents, etc... As summer approaches, take an hour to confirm beneficiaries, tidy titles, and align cash-flow with your values. Then plan a trip, even a small one — not to escape your life, but to celebrate it. We're here to help you make the quiet decisions that compound into a year you're proud of.

