

Value Traps: Before You Start

The five mistakes that quietly cost families the most — and how to avoid every one before you move a single box.

A heads-up before you walk into this. The mistakes I see most often are not made by careless people. They are made by people trying hard, who care about getting it right, and who had no reason to know what they were walking into.

Value is not just money

Value in an estate has at least five dimensions: financial (what things are worth in the secondary market), time (what decisions cost in hours and weeks), energy (what the process costs you emotionally and physically), space (what a cleared, listable property is worth every month it sits), and relationships (what a process without clear rules can cost between people who love each other). A good decision protects as many of those as possible.

The five mistakes

- 1 Clearance before extraction — the most expensive, and irreversible. Once the truck leaves, whatever went with it is gone. The order that protects you: specialist evaluation first, general sale second, donation third, clearance last.
- 2 Donating before the sale runs — the estate sale company arrives to find the space minus the things that should have been in the sale.
- 3 Cleaning or restoring before evaluation — in the secondary market, original condition is often what buyers pay for. Ask first, clean after.
- 4 Vague family assignments without a deadline — an item with no named person and no date becomes a fixture. Put a name and a pickup date on it, or it goes in the sale.
- 5 Moving before the plan is set — moving things before you know what goes where is making routing decisions without the information you need.

This is a heads-up, not a plan. The plan is the specific routing and sequence for your home. You don't have to figure it out alone.