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## **THE REGISTER CITIZEN**

# Opinion:

## End-of-life planning: What RBG can teach us

By Lyn Eliovson  
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Photo: Getty Images; A protester holds a sign with a picture of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Liz Gustafson, a leading voice for women in Connecticut, described Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg as “a legal giant who never stopped defending our right to control our bodies, our lives and our future.”

Justice Ginsburg, the late Supreme Court Justice, who died last month at age 87, was an example of the courage and determination we can all emulate — in our private, as well as public lives. Despite extraordinary hurdles which she faced in her career and personal life, she succeeded as a woman attorney in a male-dominated profession. Ginsburg never stopped fighting for our rights. She was a fierce defender of all of us, and, in particular, shattered barriers for women and all Americans.

It is important for all of us to have the strength to make life-planning decisions, as well as the courage to make end-of-life decisions. It’s easy to procrastinate, but we should all understand that there is a need for us to do life planning through advance directives, such as a living will, appointing a health care proxy and powers-of-attorney, noting who has the legal authority to act for us financially. This, in addition, to our estate planning is essential.

Ginsburg grew up in Brooklyn, and she rebelled against mores that were common at the time. She went to law school and graduated in 1959, a year when women attorneys were very rare. Many people no doubt thought: “How dare she be a mother and not stay home with the children?”

I was told early on in my legal career, “Don’t put photos of your children and your husband in your office. It highlights that you should be at home with the children.” If a male colleague did the same, people would say, “Oh, what a sweet family man.”

In the early days, this is what Ginsburg must have faced, as well. But in times of challenge and uncertainty, she took control.

I am drawn to these Ginsburg quotes:

“I want to be remembered as someone who used whatever talent she had to do her work to the very best of her ability.”

“But if you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself, something to repair tears in your community, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you.”

Helping others gave her life meaning. All of us can start emulating her by looking at our families, including our heirs. Life planning not only will protect us, but it will protect our loved ones who we will want to speak for us when we can’t.

The statistics show that we are living longer and longer. Back in 1925, life expectancy was 47. Now it’s in the mid-80s. It is never too early to take responsibility for our own lives. It is never too early to set an example for our children. Show that you have courage to face reality and plan ahead.

We want our children to know what we decided so after we’re gone, they don’t have to contend with familial tension and acrimony that, unfortunately, is all too common. Family members need to know that we created a power of attorney, which says, for example, “I want my daughter, the

savvy accountant, to handle my finances. I want my son, the nurse, to handle the medical issues and related end-of-life decisions if I just can't manage."

You also want your assets, as small or large as they are, to go to who you want.

As Gustafson said, Ginsburg worked hard for all American citizens. We should honor her by taking control of our own lives and show our families that we, too, have the courage to make tough decisions.

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