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WRITING PORTFOLIO

***Blog Post* – Are You Compliant With ADA Standards?**
Written for Lohman Company, PLLC

Due to additional Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations from 2010, many Arizona businesses could face an ADA lawsuit. Depending on what zip code you're in – you could be next on the hit-list for a small handful of plaintiffs who have filed hundreds of ADA-related lawsuits against Arizona businesses in the past year.

As members of the Mesa Chamber of Commerce, Lohman Company and many other local businesses recently became aware of this issue, which could also affect you and your business. Earlier in July 2016, the Chamber held a meeting about this issue. The presentation highlighted parking lot compliance, which is the biggest target of these recent lawsuits – one person has filed over 800 lawsuits against businesses for ADA violations specific to their parking lots. Other ADA-compliance issues addressed in these recent lawsuits include accessibility of hotel pools, bars and restaurants, and bathrooms.

According to attorney Lindsay Leavitt, who has represented many businesses against these lawsuits, many business owners do not realize they aren't in compliance. If you haven't reviewed your accessibility in recent years, you could be targeted by a lawsuit.

Mr. Leavitt believes these plaintiffs are going zip code by zip code, seeking out businesses that aren't in compliance with current ADA regulations, and filing lawsuits. Some of these plaintiffs are writing warning letters, giving business owners the opportunity to become compliant and avoid a lawsuit, but the majority of these lawsuits are being filed without prior warning to the business.

What You Should Know about ADA Standards
Most Americans are aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was originally passed in 1990, but few are familiar with its specific provisions as it relates to their own businesses. The act, which has five categories of provisions to protect disabled Americans from discrimination, was most recently updated in 2010 to include additional Standards for Accessible Design.

Title III of the act, which relates to public accommodations, includes a variety of public and private entities that are subject to having parking lots and other amenities adapted to specific standards in order to be considered in compliance with ADA.

Mr. Leavitt noted in an interview earlier this year that the 2010 changes can affect your business. He noted that most private businesses are subject to ADA standards, and not all of them realize their business must comply with the standards. **Further, Mr. Leavitt stated that even if a building you own passed a building inspection, that doesn't mean that it complies with ADA standards.** Mr. Leavitt has also written about this issue a few times this year. You may read his posts here, here, here, and here.

Next Steps
The best thing you can do to protect your business from one of these lawsuits is to be in compliance with the ADA standards. Even businesses that might have been thus far exempt from ADA-specific updates may still end up facing these lawsuits and be required to make adjustments. As Mr. Leavitt noted, the plaintiffs in these cases believe that since the ADA was passed over 25 years ago,

businesses with existing structure exemptions should comply with the standards anyway because it is the law.

To get your business in compliance with the ADA standards, contact a consultant about an ADA audit. Lohman Company learned of some additional resources at the recent meeting held by the Mesa Chamber of Commerce, which are available here.

eBlast & blog post - The Election Is Over – What Next?
Written on November 10, 2016 and used for multiple clients by The Growth Partnership.

With President-Elect Donald Trump and the House and Senate both Republican majority, you may wonder what that means for your taxes. We've put together some information about how you might see your taxes change, possibly as early as the 2017 tax year. U.S. taxpayers are likely to see changes to their tax brackets, tax rates, and deductions.

Tax Bracket and Rate Changes
The most notable of President-Elect Trump's proposals would change tax brackets and tax rates, including lowering the top tax rate by 6.6%. He also proposes simplification of the tax brackets, creating just three brackets as follows:

- 12% rate for married joint filers earning under $75,000
- 25% rate for married joint filers earning $75,000 – $225,000
- 33% rate for married joint filers earning $225,000 and up

Brackets for single filers will be half these amounts

Currently, there are seven tax brackets, with marginal rates ranging from 10% to 39.6%. An overview of the current tax rate schedules can be found here.

Deductions
The plan presented during President-Elect Trump's campaign, which is still available to view on his website, also calls for changes to the deductions that taxpayers are allowed to take. The proposal includes raising the standard deduction to $30,000 for married filers (from $12,600) and $15,000 for single filers (from $6,300) and elimination of all personal deductions.

For taxpayers using itemized deductions, President-Elect Trump proposes a cap of $200,000 for married joint filers or $100,000 for single filers.

Other Proposed Changes
There are also a handful of other significant changes that President-Elect Trump proposes in his tax plan, including:

- Lower the business tax rate from 35% to 15%
- Elimination of the head of household filing status
- Elimination of Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) for individuals and businesses
- Repeal of the 3.8% net investment income tax
- Elimination of estate taxes
- Addition of deductions for childcare and eldercare expenses for taxpayers earning less than $500,000 if married or less than $250,000 if single

Will Congress Pass These Proposed Changes?
Tax law cannot be changed unless both the House of Representatives and the Senate pass a bill that the president also signs. According to a recent article on Bloomberg, it is likely that both Democrats and Republicans will need to flex their negotiation skills in order to pass tax reform. It's possible that we may see the Trump plan go into effect with changes. It's also possible tax reform under President-Elect Trump would pass with an expiration date, as was the case with tax cuts under the second President Bush.

Whether it's President-Elect Trump's tax plan or another tax deal, the election's outcome "materially increases the likelihood of passage of a significant tax reform package," according to Donald Moorehead, a tax partner at law firm Squire Patton Boggs.

How Will Changes Affect Me?
We recognize that during the transition period from now until January 20, 2017, many will wonder about how the new administration's various proposed policies may affect their finances and other aspects of life. For taxes at least, the U.S. will have to wait until a tax reform bill is passed and signed into law before we know what truly lies ahead. Once that happens, we'll have another update.

As always, we welcome your questions about the impact of proposed changes on your future tax situation. Please know we remain focused on helping our clients plan for the close of the 2016 tax year, which is unaffected by the election, and prepare to file their 2016 tax returns.

Series of three estate planning blogs
Written for *My Two Cents* blog for Brett Friedman, DeLeon & Stang, CPAs and Advisors

#1 - **Do You Have a Digital Estate Plan?**

Let's face it: you're online. I know this because you're reading my blog. Even if you're not on Facebook or other social media sites, you have a digital footprint. Perhaps it's just email and online banking, but what's in your email? Do you have photos or documents stored online?

Have you thought about what you want to happen to your digital presence after you've passed away – or are incapacitated? As our lives become more digital, it's more urgent that we plan for what happens to our digital presence when we're no longer around.

While you might assume (correctly) that you don't need to be concerned about your online banking passwords, there are plenty of other digital accounts that you need to think about. In addition to mainstream social media sites like Facebook or LinkedIn, where else are you online? Keeping track of your subscriptions – including cloud storage accounts – will help not only your fiduciary or executor but also the person in charge of your digital presence.

Not Just Who, How
A July article on WealthManagement.com highlighted ways to create an effective digital estate plan. The article didn't discuss, though, that it can be easier to update your estate planning documents with who should have access. Just be sure to keep a list of passwords or set up an account with a password manager as suggested in the article.

Some companies are already including in their Terms of Service agreements that they will grant access to accounts according to an estate plan. The government is starting to put some pressure to have this language included.

Other sites are starting to add the option for you to name a "digital executor" for your account. Know that if you name someone different in your estate plan, the website will generally defer to the name you provided directly to them, so it can be best to refer the site to your estate plan.

Once you decide who you want to manage your accounts, tell them, or include in your estate plan, what you'd like to happen. Facebook users, for example, might want to have their account shut down completely, or they might want to leave the page up for a certain length of time. You might want your email account to simply be shut down, without providing access to an executor. Include the instructions in the plan so that your heirs know your wishes.

If you haven't considered your digital presence in your estate plan, then it's time for a review. Contact one of DeLeon & Stang's professionals today to discuss your estate plan.

#2 - **How Does Your Estate Plan Stack Up?**

While most of us know general information about estate planning, not everyone has one. Even if you do have a plan in place, what does it consider? Some estate plans aren't set up for several "what if" scenarios, instead focusing on a person's money and other tangible assets after death. As technology and medicine advances, there are more things to consider when developing an estate plan.
Traditionally, we think of an estate as cash, real estate, and personal possessions such as jewelry and furniture. In the last 15-20 years, estate planning has also included general and healthcare powers of attorney. As our lives become more complex, so does our estate plan, and there are even more considerations today than there were 10 years ago.

If you don't already have an estate plan in place, here are some suggestions for what you should consider when developing your plan. If you already have one, it can serve as a guide to measure where your estate plan stacks up.

1. **Who should control money or make decisions before you die.** As we continue to have advances in medicine, it's important to specify one or more of your heirs to act on your behalf if you become incapacitated. This may include a coma, but these days it also can mean Alzheimer's, dementia, or other illnesses that prevent you from making decisions. You may want a different person acting as your fiduciary than the person who will make healthcare decisions, but it could be the same person.
2. **What should trigger – or terminate – your power of attorney.** Traditionally, estate planners have written that two physicians should make the call. However, getting a second opinion isn't as easy as it used to be. Many estate plans today have moved to a two-party decision, where one physician – usually your primary care doctor – plus a family member who won't be acting as your fiduciary can determine that you're incapacitated. Your plan should be written for the possibility of temporary incapacity.
3. **Who should be your executor.** Usually, you have the same person or people acting on your behalf prior to death be the executor of your estate. However, there can be reasons to select an alternate fiduciary after death.
4. **What you want to happen with your digital accounts.** As noted above, it's important that even if you don't think there's much of an online footprint to be concerned about, things like email and cloud storage space should be considered. Refer to our recent post about digital estate planning for more details.
5. **How you'd like to distribute your possessions.** Other than your cash assets, how do you want your property divided? For personal possessions, it's always best to write a list for your heirs. Even if you have faith that your family members will agree on how to divide things like furniture, art, and dishes, it can still help to put it in writing for items of high value, whether that value is monetary or personal.

Discuss your wishes with your advisors and your family before having an attorney draft or update your documents. Because these are complex issues, don't use fill-in-the-blank documents unless absolutely necessary (e.g., prior to an emergency surgery).

If your estate plan is missing one or more of these elements, it's time for a review. Contact one of DeLeon & Stang's professionals today to discuss your estate plan.

#3 – **Who's On Your Estate Planning Team?**

If you haven't been keeping up with My Two Cents, we've been talking about estate planning recently. To catch yourself up, you can read more about digital estate planning and what to include in your estate plan. Almost as important as having a comprehensive plan for your estate is selecting advisors.

Building Your Team

Be sure to have an accountant among your advisors so that he or she can discuss tax implications of your estate plan. Wealth managers or financial planners should also be included in your discussion. Finally, while you don't have to meet with an attorney to begin estate planning, you will eventually need one to draft documents.

When selecting your advisors, ask questions. In an initial meeting with any advisor – whether or not it's for your estate plan – the goal is to find out if the relationship will be a good fit. If you're price-sensitive, it's okay to talk about fees, but keep in mind that your budget shouldn't outweigh the feeling of trust and confidence that comes when you have a skilled advisor.

Meeting about Your Estate Plan

When you meet with your estate planning team, you'll want to cover topics discussed in my two previous posts. If you haven't already met with advisors, following is a list of things that you should know or ask about when meeting with your estate planning team.

1. **What the size of your estate is.** For an initial appointment, you don't necessarily need to provide account statements or verification of the assets. However, it's always helpful to have an estimate of your net worth – which means both your property and your debt needs to be shared with your advisors.
2. **How the taxes should be paid.** Depending on the size of your estate, most estate tax is related to your final income tax return. Oftentimes, there are ways to have the estate pay all of these taxes, but it's important for your advisors to know the plan so they can write it according to your wishes.
3. **How you'd like to distribute your assets.** While you want to distribute cash and investments to your heirs – usually by assigning percentages – you don't have to limit this discussion to how these are divided. If you aren't sure about dividing your possessions, or if you think you might change your list assigning them to your heirs, discuss this with your advisors too.

Finally, remember that even if you have an estate plan in place, you should regularly review with your advisors. Things like retirement, children growing up, or other changes in your family's situation can impact your estate plan. Just like going to the doctor for a check-up, having your estate plan reviewed once a year is a good practice.

If it's been a while since you last updated your estate plan, contact one of DeLeon & Stang's professionals today.

***Blog post* - A 360-Degree Manufacturing Perspective**
Written for DeBoer Baumann & Company's blog on their niche website focusing on providing accounting services to the manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing is a complex business. Not everyone in the industry views how the business runs with a total perspective, as some factory workers never see the business side, and some executives are never on the floor. Bonnie Spencer Swayze, President and CEO of Alliance Rubber, writes that there can be a competitive advantage by learning all aspects. She shares this advice in an article for Industry Week, "From the Factory Floor to the Boardroom: What I've Learned in Manufacturing."

Recalling the long hours her father put into the family business, Swayze writes that she learned from a young age that diligence and perseverance are key factors to a business's success, whether manufacturing or otherwise. As she began working at her father's factory as a teenager and moving through the ranks of the firm over the years, spending time in each department, she gained a broad perspective of the various aspects of a manufacturing business and how they all work in concert with one another.

Swayze recommends manufacturing leaders incorporate the following "key elements" in their businesses for a more successful firm.

- **Increase product knowledge.** Do more than simply know about what you're making and selling – become an expert.
- **Educate yourself.** Beyond a formal education, don't stop learning.
- **Collaborate with and help others.** Building the right team at your firm is important, but also share industry knowledge when appropriate.
- **Innovate with technology.** While this is good advice across all industries today, it's highly important for manufacturers in order to remain competitive.
- **Allow for flexibility.** The status quo is friend to no business. Whether it's technology or being open to a new process, being flexible helps manufacturers respond to, and create change.

Read the details of Swayze's knowledge and advice at Industry Week.

Blog post – Empowering Your Employees
Written for The Growth Partnership for use for their clients' general business blogs.

When you own a business, you're accountable for its success. However, if you have a strong, entrepreneurial team supporting you, you can be confident in relying upon them to make daily decisions without your direct input. In an Inc.com article, "A Culture of Entrepreneurship: Why You Must Build It in Your Business," Sonia Thompson discusses how to hire or develop a team that can support your business goals even when you're not around.

In addition to hiring team members who already demonstrate initiative and critical thinking skills, you need to build a team of entrepreneurs, Thompson explains. She offers the following three tips to assist you with fostering your team's development:

- **Encourage strategic risk taking.** As all business owners know, even starting your business is a risk; growing it involves even more. Allow your team to drive change, and make sure they know that failing won't be the end of their employment.
- **Frequently connect your team to your customers.** Allowing the team to work directly with clients will add to your ability to serve them. It will also help foster strong relationships, which means that, even when you are unavailable, your clients can confidently turn to staff members in whom they trust with their needs.
- **Celebrate your team's individuality.** When building a team that will support your vision, don't stress conformity. Whether they're diverse in culture, ethnicity, or background, encourage their unique talents.

Building your team's confidence to take ownership of their responsibilities and work with you – not for you – can further add to your business's success.

For additional details on building your team of entrepreneurs, read the full article at Inc.com.

Press Release
DeLeon & Stang Partner Jeanie Price Receives Award from CPAFMA
I also interviewed Rich Stang, CPA, about Ms. Price and wrote his nomination of her for this award.

DeLeon & Stang Certified Public Accountants and Advisors is pleased to announce that Partner Jeanie Price, AAAPM, has received the prestigious ACE Administrator Award from the CPA Firm Management Association (CPAFMA).

"It is a huge honor to receive this award," stated Price. "I am grateful for the support that my partners at DeLeon & Stang have given me – both throughout my career and in nominating me." Price was presented with the award on June 29, 2016 at the annual CPAFMA Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. She resides in Mount Airy, Maryland, with her husband, Bob, who was also in attendance at the ceremony. One of her fellow partners at DeLeon & Stang, Brad Hoffman, CPA, was also present.

"We are tremendously proud of Jeanie," said Rich Stang, CPA, ABV, PFS, Founding Partner of DeLeon & Stang. "To me, it's no surprise that this award would be given to Jeanie. Since her first day, she has taken the lead on managing the day-to-day needs of the firm as well as working towards our long-term goals. Jeanie forces us to think forward and is the driving force of innovation at the firm. Her work allows the firm to be run smoothly."

The ACE Administrator Award is presented annually to one senior-level administrator for achievement, commitment, and excellence in firm management. CPAFMA determine winners from nominated members based on the individual's leadership and strategic importance to their firm's growth, among other factors. For more information on the award or to learn about CPAFMA, visit: www.cpafma.org.

Series of Three Ads Published in Micro-local Newspaper

Ads were 1/6 page of a newspaper on A3, slightly larger than a business card and ran for three consecutive months, each month with a different ad.

Discover an Experienced Financial Partner

DeLeon & Stang, CPAs and Advisors has served the North Potomac community for over 30 years, working to improve the financial lives of others where we live. Contact us today to find how our experienced professionals can serve you.

Discover a Knowledgeable Accounting Firm

DeLeon & Stang, CPAs and Advisors has served the North Potomac community for over 30 years, working to improve the financial lives of others where we live. Contact us today to find how our experienced professionals can serve you.

Discover a Neighbor You Can Partner With

A few of DeLeon & Stang's team members are North Potomac natives. They are rooted in the community and know the local businesses that serve its residents. Contact us today to learn how we can improve your financial life.

See also: http://www.northpotomactimes.com/november-2016-edition/ (page 7)

Ad Placed in SC Philharmonic Orchestra's Program

Client's logo is styled "Scott + Company = not your average accounting firm" and appeared at the bottom of this ad, which was 1/3 page of a standard program.

Not Your Average Orchestra

Whether you're listening to your favorite local musician or a world-class orchestra like the South Carolina Philharmonic, you can sense when a performance transforms your experience into something extraordinary.

When it comes to accounting services for your business, it's no different. Scott and Company has some of the best talent and biggest resources, yet our accountants provide the personalized service from a much smaller firm.

Choose Scott and Company – the accounting firm that transforms the ordinary into something more!