

Staying Connected With Our Friends, Family, and Clients Through Social Media

On March 21, 2006, Twitter made history when it published the very first tweet. Since then, Twitter has continued to grow and has accumulated more than 450 million monthly active users. A few years after Twitter launched, we saw other social media platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok join the game. Now, everyone has multiple social media accounts, and we often spend ample time scrolling through our feeds and connecting with others.

I use social media regularly in my personal and professional lives. I primarily use my personal accounts to keep friends and family updated with things happening in my life and my immediate family's lives. I'll post what the kids are doing on Facebook or Instagram, so everyone is in the loop. My kids are active in sports, and we often travel for tournaments or games. I'll post updates or photos from their events since not everyone can make their games. My son even used social media to create and post recruitment videos, which must have helped to some extent, as he was recruited right out of high school to play college baseball at a school in Boston. There are many benefits that come with using social media in our personal lives.

I don't use social media solely for personal reasons; I also use it to share advice and information pertaining to my business. Estate planning, elder planning, and long-term care planning aren't usually the most exciting topics for people. Talking about death or what will happen when someone passes away can be anxiety-inducing for many. I try to make these topics more approachable and entertaining, which I can do through social media.

We'll often create posts tied to current events or pop culture. There have been instances where prominent celebrities have passed away without an estate plan, which causes in-fighting within their family. We'll take those situations and use them as examples of why it's important for everyone to have an estate plan. Sometimes, we'll make and post videos about these situations, while other times, we'll write articles.

Another thing we'll do is look at popular shows and discuss estate planning tips for fan-favorite characters. One of our most popular posts discussed estate planning advice for various "Game of Thrones" characters. I talked about how I would advise Jon Snow if he were interested in making an estate plan, among other topics.



I was amazed at how popular this post became. People are still visiting that page, almost four years after the finale. It becomes more entertaining and exciting when you take these angles, and I can still deliver important information to our clients.

We also use social media to inform our clients about everything happening at our office. We want to let you know if we've hired someone new or are hosting a seminar. Sometimes, I'll even give updates about what's happening in my personal life through the firm's social media accounts. It is a great way to connect with others and shows that my team and I are not a bunch of scary, stuffy lawyers.

Social media has brought many benefits to our lives, and we're still discovering new ways to use these platforms every day. If you want to hear more about what's going on with our office and get regular doses of valuable estate planning and elder law tips, check out our Instagram page, @monteforte_law. You can also find us on Facebook! I guarantee you'll learn something new and be entertained by looking through our posts!

—Mike Monteforte Jr.

The Mac and Cheese Legal Debacle

Can This Lawsuit Elbow Its Way to a Courtroom Win?

Here's a fun fact for you: In the fall of 2022, a woman in Florida sued food giant Kraft Heinz — all because it took her a few extra minutes to prepare her mac and cheese.

This may sound like a made-up plot straight out of "The Onion," but it's true! The woman's name is Amanda Ramirez, and according to National Public Radio, she's suing Kraft Heinz for \$5 million over its "misleading advertising." What exactly misled her? Well, Kraft's cup of Velveeta Shells & Cheese claims it will be "ready in 3 1/2 minutes" — when in fact, that's just the microwave time.

Apparently, Ramirez felt betrayed when it took her slightly more than 3 1/2 minutes to peel the lid off the container and add water to the noodles. Her outrage only climbed as she waited for her pasta's cheese sauce to thicken after 3 1/2 minutes of staring at the microwave window. Before long, she was steaming over the notion that she'd been ripped off by a greedy manufacturer intent on selling false convenience.



NPR reports that Ramirez's lawsuit reaches beyond her kitchen and even beyond the state of Florida. It "looks to cover consumers in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, New Mexico, Alaska, Iowa, Tennessee, and Virginia who purchased the mac and cheese cups during the applicable statute of limitations period." Over 100 people fall into that category, maybe including you!

Does Ramirez stand a chance? It's hard to say. NPR reports that her legal team expects Kraft to try to get the case dismissed, but the U.S. *does* have a history of successful lawsuits against misleading advertising by food companies. According to NBC News, a class-action lawsuit filed over a non-GMO advertising campaign cost Chipotle \$6.5 million in 2020. And just last spring, a Florida attorney went to bat against Burger King, claiming its Whoppers were smaller than advertised.

As we write this, the mac and cheese fiasco is still unresolved — but you can bet we'll be watching the news. We may even chow down on a bowl of Velveeta Shells while we do it!

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What does parental alienation look like?

Imagine you're running five minutes late to pick up your child, and your ex tells them "Daddy/Mommy is late because they don't love you anymore" — a blatant lie. In this case, you would be the "target" parent and your ex would be the "alienating" parent manipulating your child.

One parent can also alienate the other by spoiling their child with gifts and travel opportunities while maliciously pointing out that the other parent can't or won't do the same. According to TMZ, Jolie has accused Pitt of child abuse and he now has "little to no relationship" with their six kids. If Pitt is not a child abuser — as a judge's award of 50/50 custody seems to indicate — this would be parental alienation. Alec Baldwin details his experience with what he calls parental alienation in his book, "A Promise to Ourselves: A Journey Through Fatherhood and Divorce."

What can you do about it?

The ABA reports that parental alienation has been recognized by lawyers, courts, and psychologists to varying degrees for at least 200 years. In many states, parental alienation is legally recognized, which means that proving it could impact your custody agreement. Other states don't take parental alienation as seriously, so we recommend asking your family law attorney about your specific state and situation.

In the meantime, family lawyer Patricia Fersch offers this advice in Forbes: "Document everything in a diary — missed visits, alienating behavior in the presence of the child. Be consistent with your child no matter how they respond to you. Don't abandon them."



TAKE A *BREAK*



CLASSIC CABBAGE ROLLS

Inspired by TasteOfHome.com



Ingredients

- 1 medium head cabbage
- 1 1/2 cups chopped onion, divided
- 1 tbsp butter
- 2 14.5-oz cans Italian stewed tomatoes
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp salt, divided
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 1 lb lean (90%) ground beef
- 1/4 lb Italian sausage

Directions

1. In a Dutch oven, cook cabbage in boiling water for 10 minutes; drain. Rinse in cold water; drain. Remove 8 large outer leaves; set aside.
2. In a large saucepan, sauté 1 cup onion in butter. Add tomatoes, garlic, brown sugar, and 1/2 tsp salt. Simmer sauce for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. In a large bowl, combine rice, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, pepper, and remaining onion and salt. Crumble beef and sausage over mixture and mix.
4. Remove thick vein from cabbage leaves for easier rolling. Place 1/2 cup meat mixture on each leaf; fold in sides. Starting at an unfolded edge, roll leaf to completely enclose filling. Place rolls seam side down in a skillet. Top with sauce.
5. Cover and cook over medium-low heat for 1 hour. Reduce heat to low; cook 20 minutes longer or until a thermometer inserted reads 160 F.

VAN GOGH REINCARNATED?

One-Eared Rescue Dog Becomes Master Painter

When a one-eared shelter dog in Connecticut struggled to find a new family last year, one of his caretakers had a wild idea: Why not teach him to paint? With help from TikTok and peanut butter, the aptly named Van Gogh became a social media star.

"I'd seen TikTok videos of other dogs creating paintings, so why not Van Gogh?" Jaclyn Gartner, the founder of Happily Furever After Rescue, told The Washington Post. "He certainly had the name and the ear for it."

To leverage what she calls Van Gogh's "fast and creative tongue," Gartner covered small canvases in dollops of paint, wrapped them in plastic wrap, and slathered them in peanut butter. Then, she presented the treats to the boxer-pit bull mix. He quickly licked the canvases clean, creating his "art" along the way.

According to the Post, Van Gogh's first few paintings flopped — just like the work of the human artist Vincent Van Gogh, who didn't become famous until after he died in 1890. This star rose thanks to Jo Van Gogh, the wife of his brother Theo, who advocated for his work after both Theo and Vincent passed away.

You could say that Gartner was dog Van Gogh's Jo because, like the original painter's, the pup's art staged a comeback! After his first "art show" drew just two guests, Gartner started auctioning off his paintings online. His abstract work like "Peacock Swirl" and a rendition of human Van Gogh's "Starry Night" quickly raised more than \$3,000 for Happily Furever After Rescue.

As his reputation soared on social media, Van Gogh also found his forever home with shelter volunteer Jessica Starowitz. He now spends his days painting and lounging on the couch. You can follow his exploits on Instagram under the handle @officialvgdog.





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Do You Have This in Common With Brad Pitt? *The Scoop on Parental Alienation*

Whether you follow celebrity gossip religiously or just like to scan the tabloids when you pass a newsstand, you've probably heard about the latest conflict between famous divorcees Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. A recent TMZ headline blared, "Brad Pitt Sources Say Angelina Has Poisoned Kids Against Him... She's On a Hate Campaign."

These articles are chock-full of drama, but they also contain some legalese — specifically the phrase "parental alienation," which journalists have applied to celebrities like Brad Pitt and Alec Baldwin and may even apply to you. If you're divorced, have children, and aren't on good terms with your partner, you should be on high alert for signs of parental alienation.

What is parental alienation?

According to a resource published by the American Bar Association (ABA), parental alienation is a "mental condition in which a child — usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation



or divorce — allies him or herself strongly with an alienating parent and rejects a relationship with the 'target' parent without legitimate justification."

In other words, a child can fall victim to parental alienation if one of their parents constantly paints the other in a bad light through comparisons, exaggeration, lies, and manipulation. This can be emotional, verbal, or even financial.

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