

At a party, as is usually the case, I was cornered and asked for some legal advice. I didn't mind but it made me think again about an article I had read recently. It was written in praise of The Plain English Campaign and urged solicitors to "hone their communication skills". The question I was asked at the party was whether every estate needed Probate. The short answer is "it depends" but anything more useful leads me off into legal jargon. I love my job helping people but I do realise that sometimes what I say to my clients is, frankly, mumbo jumbo to them. I resolved yet again to try to speak in everyday English but, believe me, it is difficult. Why is Probate called Probate for instance - I could explain but even the explanation of its derivation from the Latin is complicated. Solicitors aren't the only ones guilty of gobbledeygook as a recent doctor's appointment left me baffled. Even the expression "honing communication skills" is bizarre - to hone is to 'sharpen on a fine-grained whetstone hence to make more effective' or even perhaps just improve. As for "communication skills" why not the way we talk and write. I hereby promise to improve the way I talk and write and I will try to answer a simple question in a clear and straightforward way. We really do all try to do this but if we don't - please tell us. Now back to the Probate question. If someone dies and has left a Will (as they really should) and anything needs to be officially and legally transferred, cashed in or sold then normally it is necessary to obtain a Grant of Probate in order to be able to do this. If someone dies without a Will (intestate) it may, similarly, be necessary to get Letters of Administration. If in doubt, come and ask us - I hate to think how many unclaimed assets there are out there. DHC