

BY MITCH ANTHONY

Financial advisors are uniquely positioned to help restore balance to clients' life portfolios (and maybe their own).

SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL

The earth spins on its axis at 1,000 mph and orbits around the sun at 66,000 mph. Gravity alone keeps us all from spinning out of control and into darkness.

Our lives spin along at an incredible rate of speed, filling us with a need for a gravitational force — one that we hope will keep us grounded. That gravitational force comes, I suspect, from people who give us a sense of meaning: wives and husbands, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, preachers and rabbis, philosophers and guides. I see far too many lives spinning around the axis of work and orbiting around a source of light that, frankly speaking, has too few watts and will eventually leave them in the dark.

Our lives are spinning and orbiting synchronously — spinning with short-term activity while orbiting with long-term significance. It is when the spin (the daily tasks) and the orbit (the purpose for doing the tasks) fall out of sync that

we begin to feel we are losing control of our existence, and that our lives are spinning out of control.

An unpublished study from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that individuals in managerial and executive positions spent an average of 45 hours at work each week in 2002. This statistic is misleading, however, because it only measures hours “in the office.” It does not include the late night and weekend juggling of phone calls, e-mail, paperwork and computer-based project work. Each electronic advance, such as cell-phones, e-mail, blackberries and more, constrict our mid-sections like a boa until we can no longer find breathing room. We no longer just go to the office — the office goes with us.

According to senior economist Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, “Over the last 30 years, middle-income couples with kids have added an average of 20 weeks of work, the equivalent of five months a year.” Bernstein’s remarks illustrate the compression of personal time that takes place when fathers, who have always worked a lot of hours, continue to work many hours, and

are now joined in the workplace by mothers, who once stayed home. While true of middle-income workers, it is all the more true of higher-income managers and executives. The more money you take home, the more time you are expected to work. Higher pay doesn’t free modern executives — it just influences the composition of metal used in forging their shackles, be it steel or gold.

Many of your most successful and prosperous clients are cases in point.

Because Linda is the youngest and only female executive in her corporation, she feels she has something to prove at all times. She has trouble relaxing. Her definition of relaxing is working a 12-hour day instead of 16 hours. When she does “relax,” she encounters the tacit disapproval of her long-divorced, workaholic CEO who believes that a 16-hour day is the benchmark of “executive dedication.” In fact, he has absolutely no problem with the way his world is spinning. He has little time to reflect on the fact that the sun around which his world orbits is solely based on making a fortune and rising to the top. Consequently, all the important people in his

life have been thrown off of his world as it spins at 1,000 mph and orbits at 66,000 mph around a false light.

Linda sometimes feels like her world is spinning too fast and that there just isn’t enough time for the important things. Like 90 percent of her fellow Americans, she would like to throttle back a degree or two and restore a sense of balance and control to her life. The fact that her health has been seriously threatened compounds her dilemma. Linda told me that she had been offered an executive position for a competitor at twice the pay and a “normal” eight-hour workday. She had to refuse the job offer, however, because the firm had serious integrity issues, and she wasn’t willing to seek balance at the expense of who she is. So, Linda’s life rotation and orbit spin on at a dizzying pace.

THE SPOILS OF SUCCESS

Peter called me on my cell phone as I was walking through security at the Ft. Lauderdale airport. I asked him to bear with me as I laid the phone on the X-ray conveyer. While the phone and I passed inspection, I processed the troubled tone

in Pete's voice. I knew instantly what I had detected in his tone — lamentation and disillusionment (like a weary King Solomon lamenting the empty space unfilled by material success). I was familiar with this tone from my early days of suicide prevention work. In the course of our conversation, he confessed that the spin of his professional life and its long-term orbit had left him in a depressive funk, which he was medicating with alcohol and thoughts of ending it all.

We had many conversations after that, which led Peter to examine the objectives around which he wanted his life to orbit and then see how congruent the spin of his daily life was with that desired orbit. When Peter realigned the rotation and orbit of his daily existence with who he was, he began to feel a new sense of meaning and purpose in his life. Peter now sees the value he can bring to every life he touches. His newfound energy and passion shows in his family life and in his work life.

Somebody told Peter — and Peter told himself — that it was all about the money and about being moved up the ladder. Nobody told him how insecurity grows with every step up a ladder or how precarious life is at the top. When you are at the top of a ladder, all you can think of is falling, because there is nowhere else to go. Peter's orbit around corporate objectives stole his soul and left him in perpetual darkness — like an Alaskan winter, with no hope of light ever appearing.

You think you want to be CEO. Think again. I recently saw a study that revealed over 60 percent of retired CEOs were depressed and disenchant-ed. For years they were too busy to notice that they had come unhinged from nature's orbit and had gone

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hurtling toward a black hole of existence. They had invested everything in something that had no power to pay them back — and many had neglected those who could pay them dividends in their autumn years.

RESTORING BALANCE

Deep down we understand that we should be using our money to make a life and not using our life to make money, but it doesn't always work out that way.

We take a job. We choose a mate, and together we find a house. Soon we find out a baby is coming, so we buy a bigger house. Maybe we get divorced, and so we have to sell the house and split time with the kids. We find a new spouse, and so we buy a new and bigger house. Maybe we stretch a bit in the

house we bought but, hey, that's the price you pay to be in a good school district. We have been working hard and feel like we deserve some reward, which is also the reason we take the trips, buy the new vehicle and run up the credit cards. Now we realize that maybe our work is costing us more than it is actually paying us, but we can see no reasonable exit ramp. We're stuck. We have created a lifestyle that cost a price that we never planned on paying, but that we must now perpetuate in order to continue paying the bills. We go to work in golden shackles — or maybe they're not even golden.

We know we work too much and that our lives are out of balance. We know we buy things we don't need with money we don't have. We know we have become slaves to those we owe. We know that our children grow up much too fast and that we'll never get these years back. We know we have sacrificed important parts of who we are for the things we thought we wanted to get.

Money is the means, and quality of life is the end. Perhaps we all know this to be true, but somehow and somewhere that money tail began wagging the dog in many of our lives.

I suggest that of all manageable earthly resources, time is exponentially more valuable than money and ought to be the head rather than the tail in the process of designing a life that works. People complain about not having time to do the things they want to do. Is it because these people have chosen to spend their time in an activity that does not satisfy? Why would they do this? Is it because these same people have mortgaged their ability to fully utilize their energy and abilities for the shackles of material acquisition? It is this path of reasoning that

causes many to reflect later in life, as a poet lamented, “The man I am greets mournfully the man I might have been.”

It is our time that matters and how well we invest that time that is the real subject here. Once we settle on how we want to invest our time, the topic of how we want to invest our money takes on a whole new meaning (the sort of meaning that advisors would do well to surface in their client conversations).

YOUR DESIRED LIFE PORTFOLIO

I designed the following client conversation tool, “Your Life Portfolio™,” to assist advisors in helping clients get at this sense of meaning for their money. This tool creates a powerful context for making investment decisions and taking decisive action. Why? Because people want to do something to change their paradigm from “using their life to make money” to “using their money to make a life.”

In this conversation tool, I have used asset allocation as a metaphor for our most critical life allocation — how we invest our time. Everyone has 168 hours a week to invest. Clients fill

out their allocations and then the software produces a pie chart like the one above. The first thing that jumps out at most clients is the blaring red siren of work and the dearth of verdant family green and tranquil leisure blue. We then ask clients to fill out their Desired Life Portfolio. Once this is filled out, the advisor makes the commitment to help them organize their money in a way that causes their Desired Life Portfolio to materialize and to continue. The investment planner is now a vital facilitator in the self-actualization process in a way that would make Abraham Maslow blush with satisfaction.

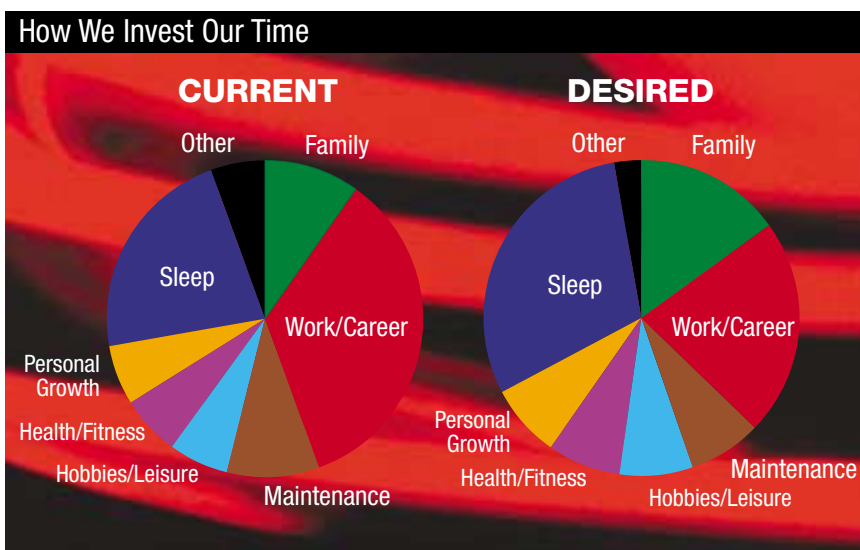
However, advisors must first invest in their clients’ lives before expecting their client to invest with them. Invest in your clients by inquiring into their working lives and discovering their ultimate work-life goals. Many of your clients are at wit’s end with their working lives. They have no balance and don’t know when or where they’ll find it. Although money is an integral piece of this conversation, it is not the lead piece. Money is the supporting actor in the drama of your clients’ lives.

There will always be night and day, but when it is dark for months and years at a time, it’s time to reexamine both the axis *and* orbit of our lives. How we invest our time — and the reasons for spending time as we do — are the most pressing investment issues facing Americans today. If you engage in this sort of dialogue with your clients, they will feel much better about asking you to manage their money, as long as your suggestions and advice support their desired life portfolios.

I was surprised when I learned how fast the earth rotates — 1,000 mph. It certainly doesn’t feel like the earth is moving that fast. The amazing power of gravity keeps our footing secure. I was doubly amazed to learn how fast the earth orbits around the sun — 66,000 mph (100 times the speed of sound). It doesn’t seem possible that we could be moving that fast, but we are.

Our lives are moving that fast.

As a professional, you ought to examine both your daily rotation and your long-term orbit. When your activity and purpose are in synchronicity, you will be an example and inspiration to your clients. You may find yourself doing more than just giving financial advice. You may find yourself giving financial advice that keeps your clients’ lives from spinning out of control. **IR**




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