

It's not [Always] About the Money!

Imagine that you are financially secure, that you have enough money to take care of your needs, now and in the future. How would you live your life? What would you do with the money? Would you change anything? Let yourself go. Don't hold back your dreams. Describe a life that is complete, that is richly yours.

Now imagine you visit your doctor who tells you that you have five to ten years left to live. The good part is that you won't ever feel sick! The bad news is that you will have no notice of the moment of your death. What will you do in the time you have remaining? Will you change your life and how will you do it?

Finally, imagine your doctor shocks you with the news that you have only one day left to live. Notice what feelings arise as you confront your very real mortality. Ask yourself: What dreams will be left unfulfilled? What do I wish I had finished or had been? What do I wish I had done? What did I miss?

This is not a test of your daydreaming skills – it's the first step of a process called Financial Life Planning. Before money is ever considered, Life Planning clients go through a series of structured exercises exploring the dreams and passions they may have discarded for "practical" reasons. The contrast to the lives they are currently living is often quite striking.

It is so easy to get caught up in making a living that we often don't find the time to make a life. A traditional financial planner can help you invest wisely, see that your children have college funds, and make sure you save enough for a comfortable retirement, all very important pieces of the puzzle. But with so much upheaval in the world today, many of us are looking for something more meaningful than monthly account balances. What is your passion and purpose – and are you living a life of integrity to yourself and the ones you love?

Because Financial Life Planners consider the person – rather than their money – to be the client, we need to understand what that person aspires to be and do in life so that their money can serve *them*, not the other way around. How many of us have had dreams that were ridiculed or dismissed as impractical? How many of us learned at an early age to bury that tiny flame of desire so that it wouldn't be extinguished altogether? When clients trust enough to share these neglected aspirations, the Life Planner can light a torch of inspiration that releases tremendous energy which leads to extraordinary results. At that point, their money is used as the tool to support and animate these precious goals.

Life Planning follows a process referred to as "EVOKE" which is rooted in resolving the often unhealthy relationships with money that we carry from childhood to adulthood. EVOKE consists of the following steps which are implemented over a series of meetings spread over four to six months: Exploration, Vision, Obstacles, Knowledge, and Execution. Using the EVOKE method, our engagement is far more fruitful than responding to the typical inquiry of, "What are your financial goals?" Although I have heard it explained as a way to build your "bucket list", true Life Planning is an affirmation that your deepest dreams and aspirations are genuine and worthy of acknowledgment.

The EVOKE system developed by George Kinder of the Kinder Institute (www.kinderinstitute.com) often yields life-changing results. Consider these true examples of people who have benefitted from Life Planning:

- Pete, a still-grieving father, found peace in his life 14 years after the death of his daughter
- Bill and Sarah realized a common dream of moving to California that they had never had the courage to articulate to each other before

- Eric, a 40-year old single businessman, learned why his anxiety about money undermined his contentment with a lucrative career

When you boil it down to what is profound in people's lives, it's often not all that costly in financial terms. Things such as spending more time with loved ones, having more integrity in your lives, being more creative, and taking more time for spiritual growth are far less expensive than a second home.

The Life Planner first prepares an executable Life Plan followed by a formal Financial Plan. She then works closely with the client(s) to ensure accountability and to help adapt strategies as needed. It's important to realize that clients begin implementing their "Life Plan" right away— not "someday" or "when I retire". Clients experience positive results immediately with (at most) a one- to two-year execution window.

Financial Life Planners like to say that we marry "money and meaning". As you can see, it doesn't have to take a lot of money to follow your heart – but it does require courage and self-reflection. And if you aren't living your life with purpose and integrity, how wealthy will you ever be?