

Alan Weiss, CFP®, began his career as a CPA in Long Island, New York, but soon realized that he wanted to help clients lead a life well-lived. It's not only about the "numbers", says Alan. During his long tenure advising people on both life and money, his philosophy is best summed up by a favorite quote, from the author and educator Henry Van Dyke: "To desire and strive to be of some service to the world, to aim at doing something which shall really increase the happiness and welfare and virtue of mankind —this is a choice which is possible for all of us; and surely it is a good haven to sail for."

Q. More than 30 years ago, you joined a large firm that specialized in the relatively new area of financial planning and private wealth management. Tell us a bit more about your journey from that point.

I had come to the realization that what people really needed was meaningful advice on managing their assets in a way that was consistent with how they envision their life. They weren't interested in only investments or insurance. They were looking for guidance with the bigger picture. After several years, I moved from Long Island to Connecticut, where I decided to build a new practice. I believed that if I started a firm and did the right thing for clients, in the long run we'd both be successful. We now have clients that have been with us for over 20 years. We limit the size of our client base so that we can give the best possible personal service to each client.

Q. When did you begin to realize financial planning was really *life* planning?

I thought about it in terms of my own life – how good financial decisions can help you achieve what you desire in terms of learning, leisure, family, health and your community. Our process of discovery helps guide clients on how to go about laying out and prioritizing their vision and goals in life. We ask our clients to focus on where they are now and where they want to be – essentially, what life do they want to live? I applied it to my own life – for example, writing a check to a charity is not enough for me. It is important for me to get involved. The question becomes how do I manage my time and my finances to allow me to do that? How do I live that life? We help clients address those things in their own lives, guiding them to create their own big picture. I think that one of the most important things we can do for client is help them live a life rich in discovery and experience. None of us wants to look backward with regret when we get older. Some people say that clients only appreciate the value of financial life planning when they *do* look backward – they get to a point with a planner's help and say, "Oh, now I understand what I've been doing the last 20 years and why." They don't necessarily say, "It's because of 'the numbers they hit for me.'" It's about so much more.

Q. What are some of the hardest questions you get from clients today? What are their concerns?

We live in an age when medical advances are giving new meaning to a long life. Many clients are concerned about outliving their money. It's a genuine and very real concern. At the same time, many reach a point where they realize they've spent a long time planning for helping their children and

grandchildren and now they ask “Have we done enough for them?” It’s often hard for people to ask that question. We always listen to our clients and honor how they feel. Listening and helping them sort through their feelings about how their finances fit into their lives – especially as their lives are constantly changing – is an important part of the guidance process.

Q. In one of your newspaper columns, you mentioned David Swensen, Chief Investment Officer at Yale University, as a big thinker who helps you expand your own thinking. What do you particularly like about his views on investment management?

Swensen wrote a classic book on institutional money management, but his newest one, “Unconditional Success,” is for individual investors. He discusses the likelihood of self-inflicted pain, which unfortunately is all too common with individual investors who pay little attention to factors like investment expenses, portfolio turnover and are typically overconfident about their ability to beat the market. I particularly like how he discusses rebalancing a portfolio as requiring behavior that is at odds with traditional thinking – it really does take substantial courage. Portfolios that drift with the market generally end up more volatile than the investor is prepared for. Rebalancing also allows math, rather than emotion, to make portfolio adjustments that keep you from making bad decisions when times are difficult. Under normal market conditions, systematic rebalances trim winners and bolster losers, moves that go against the traditional grain. Under extreme market conditions, rebalancers face a test of their mettle. Dramatic bear markets signal the need for significant purchases of losers, while extraordinary bull markets call for substantial sales of winners. When markets make radical moves, investors

demonstrate either the courage or cowardice of their convictions. Swensen has some unique perspectives on the psychology of investing and investors' behavior. He believes contrarian behavior lies at the heart of most successful investment strategies. It requires shunning the love and embracing the unloved. Most people do the opposite.