



Other big thoughts, thanks to Maslow

In my last installment (VVP 29-30/2009) I explained how as I've pondered the state of the world and the many problems we face not just in the United States but across the globe, my thoughts keep returning to three notable people - Confucius, Abraham Maslow and Adam Smith. As my mind lingered over each of these people and the legacy they left, a number of thoughts bubbled up. Ultimately, a single question emerged: can financial Life Planners save the world? I wrote about Confucius and his genius in understanding what was wrong in the society around him.

Another 'big thought' I have is about Maslow and values-based financial planning. The

"In financial life planning we are delivering people of all economic means to what is most profound"

great thing about life planning and using the Three Questions (see sidebar) I developed and began using in the 1990's is

that the values that we discover for a client are real. They're not abstract; they're not generalizations. They're rooted in their family relationships, they're rooted in specificity of creative action and they're rooted in the meaning of spiritual values in one's life.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs - which is a beautiful hierarchy -- is often depicted as a pyramid consisting of five levels: the four lower levels are grouped together as being associated with Physiological needs (also known as 'Deficiency needs'), while the top level is centered on growth needs associated with psychological needs. Deficiency needs must be met first. Once those are met, seeking to satisfy growth needs drives personal growth. The higher needs in this hierarchy only come into focus when the lower needs in the pyramid -- survival needs, safety and security, love and belonging, and esteem.-- are satisfied. If they are not met,

the body gives no indication of it physically, but the individual feels anxious and tense.

Once an individual has moved upwards to the next level, needs in the lower level will no longer be a priority. If a lower set of needs is no longer being met, the individual will temporarily re-prioritize those needs by focusing attention on the unfulfilled needs, but will not permanently regress to the lower level. For instance, a businessman who is for all intensive purposes living at the esteem level will if diagnosed with cancer spend a great deal of time concentrating on his health (physiological needs), but will continue to value his work performance (esteem needs) and will likely return to work during periods of remission.

Now, let's go back to our role as financial planners. As financial life planners, what we're doing in a way, by making the financial planning process much more real, by the use of the Three Questions, is that we are applying that hierarchy throughout every client relationship. We are insisting that clients live at their very highest level. And it is interesting that at the top of Maslow's hierarchy, three of the top things are morality, creativity and spontaneity. Creativity is one of the three major things that we as life planners talk about. We talk about family, creativity and spirit, so you can see the relationship. The family, creativity and spirit are the three major things that come out of the client completing the Three Questions exercise. So we are actually delivering people of all economic means to what is most profound.

Maslow's assertion is that you can only get to the top level of the hierarchy when you have a rich enough society -- and certainly a rich society helps. But it's our objective to do this work at all levels of society and to do it with the actual meaning, the specificity of meaning not an abstract generalization of meaning, with every person.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

The start point of creating a life plan is truthfully answering three simple, yet profound, questions:

Question 1: Imagine you have all the money you need, now and in the future. how would you live your life?

Question 2: You just found out that you only have 5-10 years left to live. will you change your life and how will you live it?

Question 3: You just found out you only have 24 hours left to live. what regrets do you have, who did you not get to be?