



[Journal](#) > 3 Financial Planning Scenarios: Which Would You Choose?

### 3 Financial Planning Scenarios: Which Would You Choose?

by *George Kinder, CFP®*, *RLP®*

*George Kinder, CFP®, RLP®, is founder of the Kinder Institute of Life Planning ([KinderInstitute.com](http://KinderInstitute.com)), a global organization that has trained thousands of advisers from 25 countries in the skills of life planning. His latest venture is [LifePlanning4You.com](http://LifePlanning4You.com), an interactive website for advisers and their clients. He is author of numerous books including *Lighting the Torch*.*

Greg walked into a financial adviser's office. He was quickly sold on a product that could beat the market by a mile if it did what historically it had done over the past 15 years—well worth the sizeable commission he would pay to get those returns. Although there were additional costs to this investment, Greg, who thought of himself as a numbers guy, lacked the sophistication to see. That's **Scenario 1**.

**Scenario 2:** Greg walked into a financial planner's office and was impressed that he would receive a comprehensive solution, with spreadsheets to cover his financial concerns until age 100, with diversified financial products to reduce the risks he would have faced with the single product he had intended to buy from the financial adviser. The solution would include a review of his estate plan, his insurance, his retirement plan, and taxes along with investments—all subjects that bored him, but he appreciated the efficiency of getting so much done in one place. And, he could see his retirement in 20 years from quick calculations the planner did in regard to the build-up of his business and his expected savings. That was useful information.

**Scenario 3:** Greg walked into the office of a CFP practitioner and Registered Life Planner® and walked out exhilarated less than an hour later. His only disappointment: his wife Heidi hadn't been along to the first meeting. Eager to talk with her, he grabbed his cell phone and shared all but one important detail. That weekend after a long walk on her favorite beach he would bring up the topic they were always avoiding. In fact, it had been several years since they had last talked about it. They both had always been eager to have another child. He felt clear it was time to address the topic in earnest, or perhaps to face the sorrow of letting their dream go.

#### The Conversation of a Lifetime

Rather than a financial meeting with the CFP/RLP professional, it had seemed like the conversation of a lifetime for Greg, addressing every issue he felt passionate about, some of which he'd not even discussed with his best friend and business partner. It had all come out so easily, surprised as Greg was by the fact that the details didn't seem to involve financial decisions.

But now that he thought of it, the birth of a child would have huge financial repercussions. The time with his 12-year-old son Antony on the links and the stronger relationship he intended to cultivate would take time from work, as would the surprise vacation he was going to discuss with his dad in two weeks. A vacation that would echo, and in some small measure repay, the amazing adventures his father had taken him on when he was a child. A bit distant from his dad, he had been longing to renew their relationship and hoped to draw the ideas for the vacation from his coming conversation with his father, as if they were his father's ideas, not his own.

For years he and Heidi had dreamed of owning property in Tanzania, her homeland. For the first time (and in such a brief conversation) it actually seemed possible to Greg. He knew they would be discussing it in their next meeting with the planner, and he was eager to search the Web when he got home for fresh thoughts on location, cost, and quality.

He cherished his time with Heidi and was both perplexed and thrilled that he had committed to spending more time each week with her. How was it that such an obvious yearning could go unnoticed for so long, and how surprising it was to be discovered and acted on in a financial planning meeting.

They also had touched on ways to simplify his work life, along with a new direction he felt his business partner would be enthusiastic about. A direction that would put his small firm at the cutting edge in their competitive field, produce greater profits, and enable him to bring in the protégé he wanted to mentor—a secret longing to pass on his business wisdom and experience he had expected to take place perhaps on the verge of retirement 20 years hence.

#### An Exhilarating Experience

To many of you, this visit to the life planner sounds incredible. But it's actually the first two visits that are distant memories from my own past; this third adviser engagement happened just a few weeks ago in the two-day 7 Stages of Money Maturity workshop I deliver a few times a year around the world. It all took place in a half-hour demonstration of the EVOKE® life planning process, where I show the first three stages of a life planning interview.

There's more to this story: Greg's greatest personal regret was giving up mountaineering. Family and work responsibilities seemed to have taken over, but as he talked with his life planner, he realized it was the right time in his life to return to this passion. Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya were not far from where Greg and Heidi would find a home in Tanzania and would be the first of eight summits he aspired to climb. He hoped he could involve Antony in some of these as well. Getting in shape again was the challenge, but he figured he could do the first peak within 12 months.

A life planning engagement can be delivered in several meetings or just one. It is always a dynamic engagement, with the client as excited as when they held their first child (or so I've been told by my clients and by advisers I've trained).

In life planning circles we hear apocryphal stories of referrals coming after the first meeting, of cocktail or dinner party conversations ringing with reports, and celebrations of an initial life planning conversation, or of changes that have happened to a family as a consequence of visits to a life planner. The life planning engagement is exhilarating for the client, but ends with the solidity and integrity of a financial plan and financial architecture dedicated to the clients' fundamental purposes in life.

So, which of the three advisers would you go with?

### Demonstrate Your Difference from Business as Usual

The mantra most in vogue for life planners these days is: model integrity, deliver freedom. If the mantra were a global economic principal in practice across all financial services, what a different world we would live in.

Financial life planning delivers freedom to clients; that is clear. And it is equally important—indeed, it is critical to our clients—in our business practices as much as in our lives, that we model integrity in our client relationships, in living our own life plans, in our authenticity, in the cost of our services, and in keeping our distance from products and product companies. We have an extraordinary opportunity at this moment in history to demonstrate our difference from “business as usual” in financial services, by demonstrating unquestionable integrity in our business models, by modeling trusting and emotionally aware client relationship skills, and by the delivery of freedom to our clients.

A Harris Poll recently revealed the 10 most disliked companies in America. Are you surprised? Six of the 10 were from financial services, all reminders of the murky depths and dealings of the banking crisis: AIG at No. 1, Goldman Sachs No. 2, and Bank of America, Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, and Wells Fargo rounding out the lot.

On the government side, the SEC clearly knows what their business is. This summer, by a 4 to 1 vote, they freed hedge funds to advertise—presumably how they can beat the market by a mile. Clearly it is much more important for government to free up markets for highly expensive, enormously volatile products that make their managers rich at their clients’ expense than to clarify for all consumers how to find unbiased, client-centered advice they can trust, far more important to free the advertisement for product companies than give the consumer a clear and human way to judge its accuracy.

The world would welcome genuine client-centered leadership in our large companies and in government. But there exists an ongoing leadership vacuum in financial services. You have to wonder, if a banking crisis can’t bring it, what will? For now the answer is clear. Whatever leadership there is in financial services must come from us.

Our job is simple: Model integrity and deliver freedom. The message that we have to deliver is a powerful one. In the long run, it can’t fail. It is always the client who comes first. Not their money, not company profits, not products, not even spreadsheets or plans. Always the client.

Consumers want trust and integrity from their advisers and their companies, but they want freedom from their money. In life planning, we simply look them in the eye and deliver it.