Financial Planning is all about balance

"We need to be true to what we encourage our clients to do: we need to walk the talk," urges **Barry Horner,** chief executive of Paradigm Norton Financial Planning

In the good old days of product sales clients would often ask about critical illness policies, PHI, life cover and so on. They would say to me: "I guess you have all this stuff yourself?"

I now run a Financial Planning firm where our focus is not on product sales but rather on asking clients such questions as:

- "how can we get you from A to B?"
- "how can we help you meet your goals?"
- "how do you balance building financial capital with social and spiritual capital?"

Quite rightly clients now ask me: "How do you balance building a business with home, family, friends and other aspects of your life."

To provide the answers we need to be true to what we encourage our clients to do: we need to walk the talk. At Paradigm Norton we work a nine-day fortnight. Each member of the team is encouraged to take a day off work every other week to refresh. In fact, we call them refresher days. The idea is to take time out to reflect, to recharge the batteries and do the stuff that gets crowded out through work or the general pressure of life. It's what author Steven Covey would call "sharpening the saw".

Refresher days, however, can sometimes present challenges in themselves. Fridays, the day when most of the team refresh, are often very busy as we have fewer of the team to answer the phones, deal with client queries and cover routine tasks. This can cause client service issues. But the general consensus is that the team very much appreciate the refresher day work pattern, even if it does result in longer working hours on the other nine days, and the occasional frenzied Friday.

The Paradigm Norton philosophy is all about creating time and space for our clients to reflect on their broader goals and, indeed, their life purpose. "What would define a life fulfilled?" is a question I often ask my clients. If we were sitting here together in 40 years' time looking back - what would "good" look like? What would you be satisfied with? How might you have better apportioned your time between work, family and the building of social capital?

These are profound questions, but clients need to be asked them. If Financial Planners do not do it then who will?

At the beginning of May we held our annual team conference and invited seven clients to join us to feed back on what they thought of our service and what was most important to them in our business relationship. None of our clients said "achieve benchmark plus investment returns" or that they valued multi-asset-class investing!

They did say they valued us:

- spending time with them thinking through their priorities
- being their gatekeeper - helping them to spot where not to invest
- holding them accountable to their goals and values
- checking that their life is in balance
- helping them to work through how much to leave to their children
- helping them to get off the treadmill
- painting financial pictures for them so that they can see their financial future.

This is what our clients value and they will pay a handsome fee for it. The other stuff they expect us to do routinely, as part of the service provided by a firm of CFP professionals. Our mission statement reads as follows: "Paradigm Norton exists to create an opportunity and a financial framework for our clients to reflect on their life purpose and what would define a life fulfilled."

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We challenge our clients to think differently about their money, to see their capital as a means to an end and not an end in itself. Another area where we can create a balanced life is by creating a balanced team and business model. We deliberately keep our client numbers low. We have 350 and this will probably increase but I never envisage a time when it will have doubled. Our business model is such that we want to be able to spend time with our clients and time in planning their futures with them. High client numbers mitigate against developing this intimate relationship with clients. That is a hard lesson that I have learned having been a partner in a firm with over 6,000 clients. Our clients appreciate being part of a rather select gathering.

A balanced team approach to planning is also vital. We operate our business around the professional services model as a law firm does. I look after a book of 60 clients and manage a team of five Financial Planning professionals. Clients appreciate this approach where there are a number of team members who at any point in time know what is happening with their financial affairs. The team approach also allows me to become more involved with the Institute of Financial Planning. I see my role there as helping the profession to come of age. It is a privilege to be involved with the Institute at a time when demand for truly comprehensive Financial Planning is growing.

Balance is a key word for Financial Planners. We are constantly trying to balance two key issues: helping our clients build capital to see them through up to three decades of retirement and ensuring that they have a life in the meantime, through which they are able to achieve their short and medium-term goals.

Biography

Barry Horner is the chief executive officer of Paradigm Norton Financial Planning, Bristol, and Vice President of the Institute of Financial Planning. After graduating with a BA in Accounting and Finance, he trained with a firm of chartered accountants for three years. Mr Horner formed Paradigm (later Paradigm Norton Financial Planning) in 2001. Together with the Paradigm team he has built one of the most respected UK wealth management consultancies offering comprehensive Financial Planning to high net worth individuals. He was a founder member and director of the Association of Family Business Advisers.

In 2007 Paradigm Norton won the New Model Adviser South West award for a second year in a row. Mr Horner achieved Certified Financial Planner status in 2003 and writes regularly for the Financial Times and the financial trade press.