



# Easy Does It

**A life in balance? It's simpler than it looks**

›PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN HEWITT

**To most people,** living a balanced life is the Holy Grail of personal success — they accept that it might exist, but have given up any hope of finding it.

At no time is this more evident than in a discussion about personal finances. Money is often cited as the root of the problem — whatever the problem may be. After all, most problems do seem solvable with a little more cash; and few aren't compounded when money is scarce. So we trundle off to work in search of more, only to find that another precious resource — time — is gobbled up in the process.

I am always impressed when I meet people who have, in fact, found balance. (Yes, they really do exist.) Their lives appear effortless, filled with happiness, stress-free and rich in every sense. And their secret (which is not really a secret at all) is quite simple — they know what they want. Here are a few other valuable lessons we can learn from them.

When it comes to investing, know your own personality, and invest accordingly. If you don't like risk, don't take any — according to your own unique definition of risk. Don't buy into the "you are young enough to take some risks" story. On the other hand, if you enjoy the ride of the stock market, are comfortable with the associated risks and get antsy when your money is on the sidelines, hold equities. Don't listen to those who say you are getting too old and should be shifting into fixed-income. Whatever your personality calls for, be content. Switch off the noise of the media and don't engage in conversations at the water cooler about finance.

Know where you are financially right now. There is no fear like fear of the unknown. If you don't know your present net worth or how much you are spending or whether your savings will be sufficient when you reach retirement, chances are you worry about those things. And quite likely you have nothing to worry about. If you are off track, it is surely fixable. Find out where you are. And keep score on a regular basis.

Spend less than you make. Simple, sure, but if you don't, I guarantee you a balanced life is not within reach. It starts by knowing what you spend, and what you make. Adjust as necessary.

Live in gratitude. Regardless of your income or net worth, you have much to be grateful for. Focus on those things. That feeling of gratitude will not only move you quickly into a blissful state of existence, but it will also do something even more surprising: It will attract into your life all sorts of things for which to feel more grateful about. Like more wealth.

Know your priorities and allocate your time accordingly. Time, unlike money, is doled out to all of us in exactly the same quantity. Those who find peace in their lives use theirs wisely. Never say, "I don't have time to do that." The truth is, you chose something else instead. Make good choices.

Have a master plan. While financial planning is important, it is in fact step two in the process of getting the most out of life. Step one is "life planning." With a life plan assembled, asking a financial planner to map out the finances is like giving him the picture on the puzzle box before dumping the tiny pieces on the table.

You will ultimately find that balance isn't something you really need to pursue. When you start moving towards the realization of your master plan, balance will find you. It's all a matter of really knowing who you are and what you want. **B**



BY WILLIAM BELL

## William Bell's Rules for Balance

- Know your personality
- Know where you are financially
- Spend less than you make
- Live in gratitude
- Know your priorities and allocate time accordingly
- Have a master plan

William Bell, a certified financial planner based in Aurora, Ont., is president of Bell Financial Inc. He is the author of two books, *One Step to Wealth*, and the forthcoming *Simple Money*.

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