

FOREWORD BY **Ed Slott**

bestselling author of *The Retirement Savings Time Bomb . . . and How to Defuse It*

The Ultimate Financial Plan



**BALANCING
YOUR MONEY
AND LIFE**

Jim Stovall

bestselling author of *The Ultimate Gift* and *The Ultimate Life*

& **Tim Maurer**

Additional Praise for *The Ultimate Financial Plan*

“In my 38 years of banking, I saw thousands who could have avoided financial and life problems by reading the material in *The Ultimate Financial Plan* by Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer. This could be the best investment you ever made in yourself.”

—Don M. Green, Executive Director,
Napoleon Hill Foundation

“The severe recession and financial crisis of 2007–09 have shaken the foundations of the American economy. Its rebuilding and restoration won’t come from looking elsewhere for help, but will take shape through the accumulated actions of individuals and families. To help, Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer have produced a book filled with insight and utility. We would all do well to heed their lessons.”

—Carl J. Schramm, President and Chief Executive
Officer, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

“Timing is everything, especially concerning your personal finances. As you face your own crossroads in life, this excellent book (like a GPS road map) gives you the timeless, as well as timely, truths you need to reach your ultimate financial goals.”

—Denis Waitley, author of *The Psychology of Winning*

“*The Ultimate Financial Plan* is a book for our times. The authors demystify the financial industry, explain the financial crisis, and provide readers with a financial road map for navigating each financial milepost of their lives. Stovall and Maurer have artfully combined their personal stories and a healthy dose of inspiration along with a step by step plan for mastering the complexities of our financial lives. However, their greatest gift in assembling this comprehensive and insightful guidebook is reminding us all of the importance of building ‘true wealth.’”

—Carol Anderson, President, Money Quotient

“*The Ultimate Financial Plan* is a useful guide to help readers build financial plans that will support their own unique life goals. Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer provide detailed financial information in a readable, storytelling style that addresses more than just the mechanics of managing money.”

—Rick Kahler, CFP®, co-author of
*Conscious Finance, The Financial Wisdom of
Ebenezer Scrooge, Facilitating Financial
Health, and Wired for Wealth*

“*The Ultimate Financial Plan* is very conversational and it is just spilling over with excellent information. Where most personal finance books are all hat, no cattle, Jim and Tim have really delivered with a lot of actionable, quality advice. They’ve hit the nail on the head when it comes to life and money—they’re so intertwined—they do a great job of illustrating that your life comes first, and your money should simply fall in line.”

—Jesse Mecham, Founder and Creator,
You Need A Budget (YNAB.com)

“Practical, personal, and fun, grounded in the wisdom of life’s realities, promises, and possibilities, *The Ultimate Financial Plan* puts our personal relationships with money in living perspective without nagging, harping, or preaching. It will give you much to talk about and even more to think about. Highly recommended.”

—Richard B. Wagner, JD, CFP®,
President, WorthLiving, LLC

The Ultimate Financial Plan

The Ultimate Financial Plan

**BALANCING YOUR
MONEY AND LIFE**

Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer



WILEY

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Copyright © 2011 by Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993, or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Stovall, Jim.

The ultimate financial plan : balancing your money and life / Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-118-07353-7 (cloth); ISBN 978-1-118-10794-2 (ebk);

ISBN 978-1-118-10795-9 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-10796-6 (ebk)

I. Finance, Personal. I. Maurer, Tim. II. Title.

HG179.S8445 2011

332.024—dc22

2011012870

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

As always, I would like to dedicate this book to Dorothy Thompson, who, once again, turned my words into sentences and paragraphs that have become this book. Also, I would like to dedicate this effort to my mother and father, George and Florene Stovall, who taught me that money is important but is only one element of a successful life.

—Jim Stovall

I dedicate this book to my beautiful wife, Andrea, and my remarkable sons, Kieran and Connor, collectively my inspiration and reminder that money and material possessions serve no greater end than the furtherance of relationships.

—Tim Maurer

Contents

Foreword		xi
Preface		xv
Acknowledgments		xix
Introduction		xxi
Chapter 1	The Gift of Money: Money 101	1
	<i>The Value of Money</i>	3
	<i>Money Beliefs</i>	4
Chapter 2	The Gift of Purpose: Personal Principles and Goals	7
	<i>Personal Principles</i>	7
	<i>Goals</i>	10
Chapter 3	The Gift of Discipline: Household Cash Flow	17
	<i>Personal Financial Statements</i>	17
	<i>Financial Crises</i>	25
Chapter 4	The Gift of Enough: Debt and Financial Freedom	27
	<i>Financial Freedom</i>	28
	<i>The Danger of Discontent</i>	29
	<i>Emergency Reserves</i>	32
	<i>Bad Debt</i>	35
	<i>Better Debt</i>	39

	<i>Economics and Emotions</i>	41
	<i>The Cure for More</i>	43
Chapter 5	The Gift of Discernment: Risk Management Decisions	45
	<i>The Accident</i>	47
	<i>Risk Management Techniques</i>	48
	<i>How Insurance Works</i>	50
Chapter 6	The Gift of Security: Life Insurance	55
	<i>Life Insurance: Why?</i>	55
	<i>Life Insurance Needs</i>	59
	<i>Life Insurance: How?</i>	62
	<i>Life Insurance Wants</i>	67
	<i>Different Types of Life Insurance</i>	70
	<i>Purchasing Life Insurance</i>	73
Chapter 7	The Gift of Certainty: Auto, Home, and Liability Insurance	77
	<i>Auto Insurance</i>	79
	<i>Homeowner's Insurance</i>	82
	<i>Excess Liability (Umbrella) Insurance</i>	84
Chapter 8	The Gift of Health: Health, Disability Income, and Long-Term Care Insurance	87
	<i>Health Insurance</i>	89
	<i>Types of Plans</i>	89
	<i>HSA's and FSA's</i>	90
	<i>Recent Health Insurance Changes</i>	93
	<i>Disability Income Insurance</i>	95
	<i>DI Moving Pieces</i>	96
	<i>Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare</i>	99
	<i>Long-Term Care Insurance</i>	100
	<i>LTC Moving Pieces</i>	101
Chapter 9	The Gift of Clarity: Investing and Portfolio Management	107
	<i>Stocks and Bonds</i>	109
	<i>All Things Considered Equal?</i>	111
	<i>Mutual Funds</i>	112

<i>Economic Analysis</i>	115
<i>Market Valuation Analysis</i>	117
<i>Technical Market Analysis</i>	118
<i>Efficient or Not?</i>	119
<i>Passive versus Active</i>	119
<i>Investing with “Style”</i>	121
<i>Relative Return versus Absolute Return</i>	123
<i>Index Huggers, Return Chasers, and</i>	
<i>Risk Managers</i>	126
<i>Decisions, Decisions</i>	128
Chapter 10 The Gift of Transparency: Annuities	131
<i>Immediate Annuities</i>	134
<i>Fixed Annuities</i>	136
<i>Variable Annuities</i>	137
<i>Equity Indexed Annuities</i>	140
<i>Annuity Disadvantages</i>	141
<i>Annuity Advantages</i>	143
Chapter 11 The Gift of Preparation: Tax Planning	147
<i>Tax Myths</i>	150
<i>Tax Rules</i>	155
Chapter 12 The Gift of Learning: Education	
Planning	159
<i>Family Education Policy</i>	162
<i>Having The Talk (no, not that talk)</i>	166
<i>Education Savings Plan</i>	169
<i>The 50 Percent Rule</i>	172
Chapter 13 The Gift of Fulfillment: Retirement	
Planning	175
<i>Retirement Past</i>	179
<i>Retirement Present</i>	180
<i>Retirement Future</i>	180
<i>Employer-Sponsored Retirement Plans</i>	181
<i>401k Rollovers</i>	182
<i>Traditional IRAs</i>	184
<i>Roth IRAs</i>	185
<i>Traditional versus Roth</i>	186

x Contents

<i>Roth IRA Conversions</i>	187
<i>Fulfillment Planning</i>	189
<i>Retirement Makeover</i>	193
Chapter 14 The Ultimate Gift: Estate Planning	197
<i>Wills</i>	200
<i>Durable Powers of Attorney</i>	205
<i>Advance Directives</i>	206
<i>Beneficiary Designations</i>	208
<i>Probate</i>	212
<i>Estate Tax</i>	214
Chapter 15 The Gift of Discretion: Choosing a Financial Advisor	217
<i>“The Big Three”</i>	222
<i>Financial Planner Compensation</i>	224
<i>Finding a Professional Planner</i>	228
Chapter 16 The Gift of Action: Your Plan for Money and Life	233
<i>Fundamental and Practical Change</i>	234
<i>Reprise</i>	235
<i>Stay Connected</i>	238
Notes	241
About the Web Site	245
About the Authors	247
Index	249

Foreword

“**B**egin with the end in mind” is an old saying, but it is as true as ever when it comes to planning. Planning for what? What is the end? What is the desired result? What is the goal? If you cannot answer these questions, then you are spinning your wheels and wasting valuable time.

This is true no matter what you are planning for. How many times have you been in “planning” meetings or have worked on business or personal plans? People spend enormous amounts of wasted hours planning how they are going to do something without knowing what the end is or why they are doing it in the first place. If you don’t know the “why,” your planning won’t pay off.

You need a driving purpose that is bigger than just getting there. It has to include the journey as well. Think about how many times you have started anything and stopped in the middle.

The classic *Gone with the Wind* recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. It was originally published by Macmillan Publishing Company in 1936. It sold for \$3.00. It took author Margaret Mitchell 10 years to complete the masterpiece, typing chapter after chapter. But the first chapter she typed was the last chapter of the book. She began with the end in mind. Everything that followed had a purpose.

Having a purpose is a key element of any kind of plan. That is especially true when that plan involves money, which almost every plan does sooner or later. So it follows that creating a financial plan requires a vision and a purpose.

When it comes to money and financial planning, life gets in the way because most of us want to have both the financial success and also a life. People talk about having balance in their lives, but few people ever achieve it, mainly because they have no plan.

The Ultimate Financial Plan by Jim Stovall and Tim Maurer, which you are about to dive into, is your guide to help you find the purpose for your plan. It is the natural extension of *The Ultimate Gift*, where author Jim Stovall showed us the value of living life to the fullest. Now that you have the message, you have been given a road map; a purpose for the best use of your resources—your gifts.

You will begin this journey with the concept of money and why it is so misunderstood. Once you understand what your personal principles are—what fulfills you—you can move on to creating goals that are more likely to be achieved by using the many “Gifts” the book includes. You’ll want them all!

One of the keys for me was the review of Benjamin Franklin’s “13 Virtues” highlighted in Chapter 2, under the “Goals” section. These are certainly good reminders and can help determine the path you and your money take in building a life you can be proud of.

As you go through the book, you’ll be looking at everything differently. When you read about life insurance for example, you’ll understand the “why” part and how important it is to manage different kinds of risk. You’ll also have new respect for the “Gift of Certainty” when it comes to topics like auto, home and liability insurance in Chapter 7 and the “Gift of Health” in Chapter 8.

Managing debt is another issue that can keep you from your dream life. It’s important to understand how discipline and the “Gift of Enough” can help you steer clear of the financial drain of debt. Think about this concept in Chapter 4: “The inverse of savings is debt.”

You’ll read about my favorite subject, Roth IRAs. That’s a gift from the government and we don’t have many of those, especially in the tax code. I’m big fan of keeping more of the money you make, and tax-free Roth IRAs are the way to go. I was so happy to read this line in the book: “*Everyone* would be better off in retirement with a healthy bucket of tax-free cash.” Think about how much more of your life’s goals can be accomplished if your retirement fund is totally tax free! I did this myself.

The book travels with you in all phases of planning, from saving, to insurance, to education, through debt, to estate planning and even evaluating your financial professionals, whose job you will make easier if you can tell them what you want to accomplish, and more important...why.

You are holding *The Ultimate Financial Plan*. You will find that as you go through the book, you will discover many gifts and understand their purpose in your life and in the lives of those you love. As you begin with the end in mind, your path to financial freedom will appear. Enjoy the journey.

ED SLOTT,
America's IRA Expert and bestselling
author of a number of retirement books,
including the latest, *Stay Rich for Life!*

Preface

I have written a dozen books prior to this one. These books have included autobiographies, motivational books, business books, and several novels. As a blind person, I write in a totally unique and quite unusual way. I dictate each of my books to a very talented colleague, Dorothy Thompson, who is the best grammarian I have ever known. As I dictate, she puts the books into sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. We write very quickly and rarely make any changes or edits. With over 8 million books in print, we must be doing something right.

I have a number of unwritten rules that I follow when I am writing. I never plan or outline my work. I don't title a book until it's finished. And I rarely read what I've written until it is completed. Another of my unwritten rules involves never collaborating with anyone else in authoring a book. I've had a number of very flattering offers to cowrite a book with some very well-known and talented people. I have never accepted one of these offers because of the unique and unusual way that I work.

Now, for the first time, I find myself collaborating on a book. This goes against everything I have done to date, but I'm willing to alter my successful system for one very important reason: It is best for my readers and the overall project.

I've never considered collaborating on my novels because they merely require me to tell the story that is in my mind. Authoring autobiographical books would not lend themselves to collaboration, because I am still the world's leading and undisputed authority on me and my opinions. But now, as I seek to write something meaningful about financial matters and the current economic conditions that affect every area of our lives, I find myself facing some new challenges that I have not dealt with before.

When I write a motivational book, it is simply a matter of telling my readers why they should do the things that they already know to do.

In these matters, we don't fail because we don't know what to do—we fail because we don't do what we know. However, as I face the daunting task of attempting to lead my readers through the turbulent times we are facing in the economy and in our own personal finances, I recognize it's not only a matter of motivating individuals regarding why they should undertake a financial strategy, but additionally, they must know what it is that they should do.

We are facing an economic landscape that is totally unique and unprecedented. Furthermore, it is changing daily. These factors combined to convince me that the only way to address this effectively is to collaborate with an individual who has the expertise and track record of helping real families in the real world.

As an author, columnist, platform speaker, and founder/president of a television network, I have been interviewed on literally hundreds of radio and television programs. Only a handful of these stand out in my mind over the years. I remember the day when I arrived at my office, and I was told, among many other things, my calendar called for a one-hour interview on the radio to promote my book, *The Ultimate Gift*. I deplore long interviews as most radio and TV hosts neglect their homework, leaving you floundering to fill the time on their program. When you are facing even a 10-minute interview with one of these unprofessional interviewers, it can seem like a transcontinental flight just getting through a few moments on the radio.

When I sat down to do what was to be an hour interview with Tim Maurer, I will admit that I was filled with a bit of dread; however, when Tim and I began talking about *The Ultimate Gift* book and movie, as well as life in general and the things that matter to real people, the hour flew by before I knew it. I will admit that I was actually excited when Tim called the following year and asked me to do another full hour to discuss my business book, *Ultimate Productivity*. He was positive, upbeat, and—unlike most of his radio colleagues—had actually read the book. Talking with Tim Maurer is like talking with an old friend, while you let the radio listeners eavesdrop.

When Tim called and asked me to collaborate on this book project, my initial reaction was not positive, as it violates all of my rules to date; but since I had already built up so much respect and esteem for Tim, both personally and professionally in our radio

encounters, I was willing to listen and give him the benefit of the doubt.

I came to the conclusion that if I'm going to write about anything at this point in time that will make a difference in people's lives, it's going to have to deal with financial matters and the economy as a whole. The current trends on Wall Street and on Main Street are affecting every area of daily life. Money is far from the most important thing in life, but it affects each of the areas that *are* the most important things in life.

I'm very proud to collaborate with my friend, Tim Maurer, as I tell you why money is important and how you should prioritize it and as Tim tells you what you should do and when you should do it. I feel as if I'm the travel agent or tour guide, encouraging you to go to a marvelous destination and enjoy everything it has to offer, while Tim is the captain of the airliner that will get you there safely, no matter how turbulent the conditions may be.

Being motivated to act is useless unless you know what to do. Conversely, knowing what to do is irrelevant unless you are motivated to act. Together, Tim and I will endeavor to help you plan your financial destination and help you get there safely and on time.

Just as I have offered the readers of my other books, I want to offer you the following opportunity. If this book raises questions that it does not fully answer to your satisfaction and comfort, or if somehow you don't believe financial success and well-being is within your grasp or meant for you, pick up the nearest phone and call me at 918-627-1000. As always, I want you to know that you have one guy that believes in you, your dreams, and your financial success.

JIM STOVALL

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jim Stovall for his willingness to consider, support, and undertake this collaboration. I learned very quickly why Jim is a highly sought-after speaker and prolific writer, as his words and actions breathed life into this project when it was little more than a hopeful notion.

Every word and phrase in this book benefited from the review and critique of Dorothy Thompson, Jim's right and left hands, and Robin Maurer. The latter also answers to Mom when I or my brothers are around and helped ensure the book's content was technical enough to teach but fluid enough to read.

I so value and have internalized Drew Tignanelli's thoughts in the study of money and life, they most assuredly have been presented as my own throughout this book in addition to where he is quoted. I thank him for his selfless contributions to the book's content, and to me and my family, personally.

Many colleagues and industry experts have contributed their comments and encouragement, such as Steve Forbes, Mark Victor Hansen, Don Green, Don Golden, Denis Waitley, Ezra Kucharz, Carol Anderson, Carl Schramm, Dick Wagner, Rick Kahler, Carmen Wong Ulrich, Pat Goodman, Addison Wiggin, Marcus Harris, Aaron Patzer, Jesse Mecham, Odysseas Papadimitriou, Dan Singer, Sean Kelly, Kelly Morrison, Russell Lagreca, Manash Ray, Eric Pines, Matt Rakerd, Greg Rittler, Chris Guillebeau, Kimberly Palmer, Robert Brokamp, and Josh Itzoe, lending considerable strength to this project.

Thought leaders in the arenas of money and life who unknowingly lent their wisdom and humor to this book are Stephen Covey, David Allen, Dave Ramsey, Ted Klontz, Warren Buffett, Richard Foster, Rob Bell, Bono, and, of course, Chevy Chase.

Special thanks to everyone at John Wiley & Sons for bringing this content to the page, but especially Laura Walsh for helping

xx Acknowledgments

craft the vision for this project and Judy Howarth for aiding in the implementation of that vision.

Finally, I'd like to thank my colleagues at the Financial Consulate for their support of this initiative—Ben Lewis, Chuck Bender, Roger Bair, Kelly Allen, Sue Fenimore, Suzanne Hall, DeAnna Tefke, Amber Shinsky, Jeff Will, and especially Mike McCarthy, who worked tirelessly to create the online exercises for the Timely Applications in each chapter.

TIM MAURER

Introduction

“Okay, what did the old goat give me?”

In *The Ultimate Gift*, billionaire Red Stevens’s stratospheric financial success had created a generation of greed and sloth in his family. He had created an enormous estate, but no legacy of character that would be passed on. He hoped to make it right from the grave by putting his youngest relative, grandnephew Jason Stevens, through a grueling 12 months of life lessons to upend his view of money and life. The only way Jason would receive his inheritance was to comply.

Who is the main character in *The Ultimate Gift*? The billionaire, Red Stevens, or perhaps the playboy spendthrift, Jason Stevens? No, it’s MONEY. Or, at least, that’s what Jason thought. After all, who among us can claim that money is not a main character in our lives? We rarely escape a day in which it is not spent, moved, invested, swindled, wasted, or earned, and even if we sought to eliminate its influence in our lives, we’d be sure to fail at that task. And that’s okay, because while it is not an adequate love, passion, or muse, it is also not irrelevant, unimportant, or evil. Money must not be the hero in our story, but it is an excellent supporting cast member.

Much like Jason Stevens, we need to allow our minds to be reprogrammed (regularly) to put money in its place—or places, really. Those places often include tangible “buckets” like checking accounts, savings accounts, 401ks, IRAs, Roth IRAs, education savings plans, and real estate as well as home, auto, business, health, disability, and long-term care insurance. But other less tangible places are investments in our knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, which lead to purpose-filled careers, sleep-at-night security,

artistic endeavors, creative philanthropy, fulfilled retirements, and meaningful legacies.

The ultimate gift is “life lived to its fullest,” so the ultimate financial plan is the deliberate application of the tangible and intangible resources at your disposal for the purpose of living your life to the fullest.

The word *ultimate* carries a great deal of weight. It must not be used lightly, lest it be considered a hopeful embellishment. How, then, can we be sure that a title as deep and wide as *Financial Plan* is deserving of such an adjective as *Ultimate*? Is it because this volume houses all of the objective facts known to exist on this vast topic? No, that’s impossible, and quite frankly, you’d never buy that book because of its ridiculous page count and tendency to cure insomnia. Is it because it has the backing and endorsement of the financial industry establishment? Again, no; while many industry experts and third-party outsiders have lent credibility to this project through the inclusion of their thoughts and affirming words, this book is certainly more independently minded than (if not counter to) the mainline thought processes in the financial industry.

The reason we can be so sure that this is the *ultimate* financial plan is because it is strenuously focused on YOU. The most brilliantly crafted financial plans often go unimplemented because they are more about defending the mainline industry thought processes and the financial planner rendering the recommendations than they are about YOU. We highlight the most important financial planning facts and we explain the industry’s presumptions (even as we often dispute them), but we always do so as your advocate first and foremost. And there could be no more important time to do so.

An Economic Pearl Harbor

“It really is an economic Pearl Harbor,” said Warren Buffett, speaking of our most recent, and arguably current, economic crisis. What brought us to this point? There is certainly no shortage of blame being spread around. Opportunistic, self-serving companies deserve their fair share of the blame. Their dedication to profit over service led them to create and sell products that were destined to hurt consumers in the future. Additional blame cast on us, as consumers, is also justifiable. Corporate greed would not have gained a foothold had we not cast aside the financial wisdom of generations past,

instead seeking to have more sooner and save less, or never, while suckling off of our overinflated home equity. Much has been said, and more will be, of the actions (and inaction) of companies and consumers that led to this historic economic demise.

However, our actions are only symptomatic of our thought processes. A thought precedes every action, yet we rarely even recognize our thoughts about money. Indeed, talk of money and things financial is pervasive in our society, yet we address money as though it is purely objective, dollars and cents—an end, not a means. How then can we alter our money behavior without examining what we believe about money? What you believe about money will determine what you will do for and with it.

What would it look like to apply the money and life lessons learned by Red and Jason Stevens in your present and future?

This is a personal financial planning book exploring the intersection of money and life. We explore the connection between our actions as well as our thoughts and feelings regarding things financial. You may not be quite the cynic Red was or the spendthrift Jason was, but you needn't go through a rock-bottom epiphany to learn how to better integrate money into your life. We'll reintroduce timeless financial truths, many of which were forgotten in the run-up to our current economic crisis, and offer the timely practical application of these truths that can improve your life today. We'll offer you an insider's look into the recently humbled "Big Three"—the banks, brokerage firms, and insurance companies—and the inner workings that often set their proprietary goals and objectives over our own. These findings are not speculative but based on my experience working as a financial advisor in each of them.

Economic Bias Alerts

We'll examine the role of the various financial salespeople, advisors, planners, and consultants and educate you on the economic bias of each to make you a better consumer of their product and service offerings. *Economic bias* is a term we'll use throughout the book to point out a conflict of interest in which one party may have the motivation to alter its behavior for the reason that it will benefit financially based on the action or nonaction of another. Some economic biases are obvious; when we purchase a new or used car, we understand that the selling agent (a) wants us to purchase a car

and(b) would prefer that we purchase it for a higher, rather than lower, price. When we purchase life insurance, we expect that the agent wants to sell us more so that he or she can make a larger commission. But many economic biases are not so easy to spot. Did you know that the economic bias of a home and auto insurance agent is actually to sell you *less* insurance?

We are well-served to recognize that economic bias exists in every service or transaction, corporation, or nonprofit. Car salesmen and insurance agents exhibit it, but so do financial advisors, lawyers, universities, authors, pastors, and doctors. Economic bias in and of itself is not bad, and it is not our objective to make you paranoid or judgmental of every interaction involving money. But you are a better-educated consumer if you know how to spot it, bring it to the forefront of your business dealings, and minimize it to the greatest degree possible. Throughout this book, we'll offer economic bias alerts to point out examples of economic bias in the financial services realm.

Timeless Truths

In *The Ultimate Gift*, Red teaches Jason 12 life lessons in the form of gifts, like The Gift of Work, The Gift of Problems, Dreams and Laughter. These aren't chic or trendy, but instead wisdom that has stood the test of time. Even while laws, governments, rules, regulations, and cultures change, there remain timeless financial truths. These truths are recognizable, but they're shrouded among a host of equally timeless falsehoods. These falsehoods are reincarnated in each generation, like Gordon Gekko's proud mantra in Oliver Stone's movie, *Wall Street*, "Greed . . . is good," and the entertaining but preposterous bumper sticker proclaiming, "Whoever dies with the most toys wins." Throughout this book, Jim Stovall will represent the foundational truths upon which a successful financial plan is built.

Jim also has a unique ability to offer his helpful directives and have us receive them. We all have a unique history that we bring into our decision-making, but we often rely on our uniqueness to offer justification for our actions. "Yeah, that may have worked for you, but my situation's different . . . it's harder . . . it's worse." Few of us can say that when Jim asks us to consider an alternative course of action, because virtually all of his success has come despite incomprehensible odds.

When Jim, a promising college athlete with aspirations to play professional football, went to the doctor for a routine physical, he was told that he had a degenerative condition that would rob him of his sight completely. He's human, so be assured he was extremely disappointed, but he took that disappointment and redirected it at a new competitive endeavor, becoming an Olympic weightlifter. He couldn't read with his eyes, so he began listening to books. Though he wasn't a big reader prior to his loss of sight, he now reads one book each day with the aid of a high-speed listening device. When told that blind people had nothing to gain from television, he responded by starting the Narrative Television Network, an Emmy Award-winning network serving the nation's visually impaired.

Jim's deep level of understanding regarding money issues isn't superficial, it's experiential. His first job was as a stockbroker, and although his message has broadened over the years, he has always lived the fundamental financial disciplines and inspired others to do the same. Jim doesn't recognize *can't* or *hard* or even *impossible*, and I hope that the confluence of his wisdom and his story will make it easier for you to find freedom in the Timeless Truths he shares.

Timely Application

Timeless truths may be simple, but they're not easy to apply. All the education and motivation in the world will do very little unless you know how, where, and when to apply it. It took Jason Stevens a full year and series of lightbulb moments to benefit from real change in his life, but then again, he had to be blackmailed to even begin his process of transformation! Your ownership of this book shows that you're a willing participant and have already built some momentum, and the Timely Applications contained herein will allow you the opportunity to put your motivation to work immediately.

I'll offer concrete steps designed to help you accomplish your financial goals. But before you start implementing actions, you have to know what the goals are. I'll give you an outline designed to help you create your goals. And before you can set goals, you must have a foundation upon which those goals are built. Let's call that foundation your values, or simply the stuff in life that you want to be about—your Personal Principles. I'll help you articulate them. The book's web site, www.ultimatefinancialplan.com, has resources you