Personal Finance: The Toughest Race of All

Cross Financial Strategies, LLC

Redefining the Client-Advisor Experience

Time is short, distractions abound, discipline is required and critics are generous with their advice.

Without a doubt, preparing for a competitive athletic event has as many challenges and pitfalls as saving for that proverbial rainy day or planning for retirement. Both journeys promise difficulties that can make you think that doing nothing at all, or even giving up, is the most attractive option.

Stephen Cross, an experienced triathlete and seasoned financial advisor in Dallas, Texas, understands how "information overload" coupled with the lack of a firm game plan can prevent athletes and individual investors from achieving their goals and reaching peak performance.

"When you don't have an individualized strategic plan and you're being bombarded with information, it leads to indecision at every turn," he says. "It creates an undisciplined and unfocused effort, and can produce less than spectacular results."

Mapping It Out

Fortunately, Stephen, as President of Cross Financial Strategies, LLC, has gained an intrinsic understanding of how to avoid these potential missteps. His athletic accomplishments in the sport of triathlon have contributed to a unique perspec-tive about the parallels that exist between financial planning and training for a competitive event. He speaks often of the role that coaching plays in the process of guiding novice and experienced investors through the essential steps of visualizing, preparing for, and attaining their highly-individualized financial goals.

In 2004, Stephen committed to a personal goal of qualifying for the Ironman® Hawaii World Championship, triathlon's most prestigious and difficult event. Working with a personal coach to develop a training program that would take his athletic performance to the next level, he ultimately realized his dream -- twice. Placing second in his age group at Ironman® Canada in 2005 and sixth in his age group at Ironman® Couer d'Alene in 2006, he earned consecutive Ironman® Hawaii qualifying slots. He competed in and finished the world championship both years, cementing his membership in the sport's most elite league of competitors.

Noting that clients often struggle to map out cohesive plans regarding their personal investment strategies, Stephen draws many parallels between this and what many talented-but-unfocused athletes experience. When it comes to training and optimizing athletic performance, he says "there are too many variables" for people to have success when taking a general approach. "You can't simply read a magazine article about training and implement it with predictable results," he explains. "A lot of things that sound great on paper usually don't work for each individual's specific situation."

Contact us today to find out more.

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Coaching Counts

Stephen recalls what a giant step it was when he decided to "try and punch a ticket" to Ironman® Hawaii. "Only the top five to seven athletes in each age group qualify for it," he says, "so I knew I needed coaching from an expert, someone who really understood all the nuances of this type of training. Someone who could help me develop an effective, customized training program, with the right mix of swimming, biking and running, the right gear, proper nutrition, recovery, and so on."

Just as crucial, he adds, is having an individualized strategic plan when it comes to developing a financial plan. Stephen puts an emphasis on delivering objective financial advice and developing a customized plan for each client. "I put my clients first. There's no other agenda than to help individuals, families, and small business owners protect, allocate and invest their hard-earned dollars in an intelligent and prudent manner so they feel confident about reaching their financial goals"

Why One Size Doesn't Fit All

Stephen humbly notes that none of his impressive athletic successes would have been possible without this same type of personalized coaching and his own willingness to follow a strict and carefully-crafted training program.

"I understood how essential it was to listen to my coach's counsel and to adhere to the details of his well-thought-out plan," he explains. "That's what it took to drive my performance to the next level."

The principle is the same when an individual investor takes on a personal goal that might seem out-of-reach. "Figuring out the right way to manage your income to achieve optimal financial performance can be a frustrating and complicated endeavor," says Stephen. "And a one-size-fits-all approach never produces the desired results because we're all unique individuals and our financial goals are also unique."

His advice: "You should review your financial plan just like an athlete reviews and reevaluates a training plan, making prudent and appropriate changes when necessary. Things change in our lives and events occur that are beyond our control, but a strong financial plan and experienced advisor can provide the "coaching" you need to reach your "financial peak performance".

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More About Stephen

Born in California and raised in South Carolina, Stephen received a B.S. in Finance from the University of South Carolina. He has 19+ years of experience in the financial services industry; started as a financial advisor at Merrill Lynch Wealth Management, then launched Cross Financial Strategies, LLC in 2009.

He earned the Accredited Investment Fiduciary®(AIF®) designation from Fi360 and makes a personal commitment to his clients to recommend only those services and strategies that are relevant to their specific financial needs and goals.

Stephen has lived in Dallas for over 20 years. He and his wife Alison are proud parents of three. He hosted a radio show called "The Financial Roundtable" which aired on KEOM 88.5 FM, Mesquite, Texas.

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