Book Review

Unfinished Business: Putting Your Affairs in Order With Meaning and Purpose

Fred Fernatt
Kansas State University

Dunn, R. (2010). *Unfinished business: Putting your affairs in order with meaning and purpose*. Atlanta, GA: Ron Dunn. ISBN: 978-1-6123-640-3.

Professional financial advisors often fill bookshelves with volumes giving silent testimony to their academic and professional progress, as well as areas of particular interest. *Unfinished Business* fills a gap in many collections. Numerous books in personal libraries focus on the technical aspects of how to perform our chosen trade. *Unfinished Business* addresses the visceral issues of how and why to organize your life. The author, Ron Dunn, has no formal financial or family therapy training. Rather, he developed an industry-leading business and regularly leads personal growth discussion groups using faith-based methods tempered with good humor. His perspective as an "outsider" and his "let's get it done" approach combine to provide both practitioners and clients with an essential tool in putting their lives in order.

Early in *Unfinished Business*, Dun points out that we all have a one-in-one chance of dying. The focus is on how to leave a lasting legacy, or as he puts it, "not just who gets the stuff." Considering one's own legacy includes both deep self-examination and consideration for those we and our clients will leave behind. It is something everyone should seek to do, but very few accomplish. Both financial planners and therapists will recognize many parts of the approach used in *Unfinished Business,* yet few will have seen them integrated as well.

Unfinished Business is short, only 203 pages, but the text includes a wealth of practical information and 70 forms. Each of the seven chapters addresses a separate issue and builds one upon another. Samples of each form are in the book and they can also be

ISSN: 1945-7774
DOI: 10.4148/jft.v3i1.1623
CC by 3.0 2012 Financial Therapy Association

downloaded at: www.myunfinishedbusiness.net. The forms are easily accessible, are fillable, and may be readily saved for later completion, storage, revision, or retrieval.

Financial therapists, counselors, and planners will appreciate Dunn's approach to writing and organizational strengths. As mentioned previously, the book is short. This makes the concepts easily and quickly accessible. Dunn begins *Unfinished Business* with the simple, yet profound observation that one should not prepare for a crisis when they are already in a crisis. To begin, readers are instructed to ask their spouse or other survivors four simple questions: (a) If I were gone what would you not know that you wish I had explained?, (b) What type of information would you want to have readily available?, (c) What could I get ready now that would help you get through?, and (d) What would you wish I had included in a filing system for easy reference? Those in practice can see the merits of having these questions addressed long before they are needed.

The next two chapters deal with making order out of chaos and turning order into meaning. The second chapter emphasizes the importance of establishing an organized system for files. Again, the how and why are explained. The author's website even offers a pre-labeled file box organized according to the specifications in the book. The third chapter leads readers through a series of exercises designed to clarify thinking about assets and liabilities. Financial therapists, counselors, and planners will recognize this as one of the initial steps in the financial planning process. The chapter also discusses the importance of a budget, not as a restriction to be circumvented at the earliest opportunity, but as a way to understand cash flow.

The next three chapters focus on the practical aspects of legacy planning. Chapter 4 emphasizes the practical, from recording safe deposit contents and household maintenance suggestions, to contact information for key advisors. Such actions may seem mundane in the present, but may be highly appreciated by a surviving spouse in the future. The most important topic in chapter 5 is determining survivor financial needs. If someone passes away, what will the survivors need to carry on and where will it come from? The focus on cash flow needs of survivors is essential to the success of the overall exercise. Wills and trusts are discussed in chapter 6, but the text goes beyond the common topics of estate planning. Disposition of personal assets and extensive funeral instructions are addressed. As Dunn points out, topics may be morbid but the care given will be greatly appreciated when the time comes.

Many of the topics addressed in the final chapter are beyond the normal purview of most financial planners and therapists, but may be the crowning section of the exercise. Family trees, personal histories, and fondest memories are discussed, as are personal letters to survivors. The matters of change in marital status and possible remarriage are also addressed. While much of financial planning and therapy may focus on the temporal needs of survivors, this section is the most personal and would be most treasured by a client's survivors.

Often as practitioners, we read books that lead us to wonder, "what was the author's point?" After reading Dunn's work, I was left with the opposite question, namely, "where

ISSN: 1945-7774
DOI: 10.4148/jft.v3i1.1623
CC by 3.0 2012 Financial Therapy Association

was this book just a few years ago when I needed the wisdom it provided?" In June, 2011, I was informed that the executor and primary beneficiary of a client's estate committed suicide. In her note to her spouse, she cited the anxiety from involvement in the estate matters as a reason for her depression. Professional advisors handled most of the details, but the stress was too much for her. She inherited millions, but it didn't matter in the end. This story is an example of Dunn's core message. Through the use of careful planning strategies, delivered using proven therapeutic techniques, it is possible to help client's reduce stress, increase financial literacy, and leave a meaningful legacy. Even a small estate, carefully planned, can instill peace in the participant and leave a lasting legacy for the survivors.

Unfinished Business provides a straightforward, methodical way to address the issues of how and why to organize your life and the life outcomes of your clients. Planners will value the assembling of financial documents. Therapists will see merit in the introspection and concern for the ongoing welfare of survivors. Both will appreciate the high level of organization. *Unfinished Business* will be a welcome addition to any practitioner's bookshelf. More importantly it is an invaluable tool for advisors and their clients to use in addressing their legacy issues. It can be the difference between normal bereavement and panic during a time of loss. More information can be obtained at: www.MyUnfinishedBusiness.net.

Book reviews are the sole thoughts of the book review author and not necessarily endorsed or the opinion of the Journal of Financial Therapy or the Financial Therapy Association.

ISSN: 1945-7774
DOI: 10.4148/jft.v3i1.1623
CC by 3.0 2012 Financial Therapy Association