

All or nothing



The term 'transition to retirement' trips off his tongue as smoothly as his own name - because Theo Marinis hardly thinks about anything else, writes SUE WEBSTER

A self-admitted superannuation sad, the Adelaide planner believes his life's passion is to share with clients his profound understanding of superannuation.

Marinis sees Australia's super structure as a great tax-effective gift, a powerhouse of national growth and a bulwark that will buffer us from the US economic meltdown - something to spare Down Under

from going down under.

"Superannuation is great on every level. At a micro level it helps me set up for my retirement by helping my clients get ready for their retirement. And by using the superannuation provisions you're also making a contribution to the macro development of the country," he said. "It helps fund corporate development and growth. It might not be eco-

omic nirvana, but the reason we're not the US is because we have a savings pool that is growing and growing."

The Australian system is so good, it's too good, he said.

"The super system is so good you can be lazy," Marinis adds. "Financial advisers don't have to extend themselves much to provide an adequate result. But what you're doing is missing out on the opportunity to expand clients' savings capacity.

"It's a challenge for the industry because the system works pretty well and people don't know they need advice."

Marinis highlighted an example of a retiree from the public service who thought they had prepared a satisfactory retirement package comprising a defined benefit pension of \$55,000 taxed at the marginal rate and an investment of

\$350,000 rolled over into a superannuation fund.

Marinis instead suggested the retiree consider taking the investment out of the superannuation fund and re-contribute it to a tax-free account-based pension, which would save him \$3,000 to \$4,000 in contributions tax. Once fully unemployed, he suggested the man pay tax-deductible self-funded superannuation contributions and push those savings out to \$8,000 a year.

"Extrapolate that across, say, 20 years of retirement and it becomes a useful amount of money," said the 46-year-old CFP®.

Marinis offered another example: "A planner was dealing with the financial situation of an aunt as a favour, not for fee. She had her superannuation in an allocated pension, after all why wouldn't you re-

contribute using the tax-free threshold?

"She's not taxable now, but it could worsen the tax situation to the estate in the future. And what happens if she comes into money," Marinis asked. "You've got to over-engineer things."

A man of forthright views, with a considerable media footprint, Marinis has just penned a book on the subject close to his heart, mind and spirit. *Sexy Super* already has its own website, retailing as an e-book for \$19.95. All sales proceeds will go to Make a Wish, Adelaide's Women's and Children's Hospital Foundation in support of its neo-natal ICU, and the Childhood Cancer Association.

The reason behind his writing of the book lies in the need to simplify the issue for the average person.

"The trouble is super is a bit scary for

most people, despite being a very exciting investment structure once you get to know it," said Marinis.

"Sadly, the superannuation industry is a mess of laws, changes and almost in-built confusion.

"My aim is to clear this up to the point where the average person can have a conversation with their planner about what will probably become their biggest single asset, and give them some tips on how to get their planner thinking harder."

So why *'Sexy Super'*?

"I'd be a very unlikely sex therapist, but when it comes to helping you share in the joy, satisfaction and thrill of having a great financial discussion with your planner, I'm your man!"

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In fact, Marinis believes he was born to the task. Economics was his dream subject at Adelaide High School where, incidentally, his nickname was "Hitman". Not many financial planners would admit to that!

"I had an aptitude for economics and (I shouldn't really say this) I used to just open the book the night before the exam and still get the good marks," Marinis confessed.

He followed up his economics qualification with accountancy because he wanted to stay employed in his hometown rather than moving away for work.

"As a graduate I ended up in the super group more by accident than intention," Marinis said. "My plan was to learn everything in tax, so I worked at the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), but found myself drawn into the superannuation field, working as an ATO adviser." Marinis then felt

drawn to work for the Insurance and Superannuation Commission as an adviser before moving on to the Department of Social Security as a Financial Information Service officer.

"I knew superannuation was the right place for me to work in. I aimed to work for the three government regulators and get to know it from the inside out," he said. "It shows how boring I am!"

Boring or driven?

"I just woke up one day – it would have been in 1989 or 1990 – and I just knew that this was the industry I wanted to be in. The penny dropped that this is where I wanted to be for nine or 10 years.

"The passion came from realising the demographics of being a tail-end baby boomer. I was born at the right time and in the right place. I realised I was at the coal face at the start of growth and that this is a fantastic job."

And then, after reaching a position of considerable seniority with Centrelink, he cut loose and set up his own practice. The reason for the shift goes back a long way, to when Marinis, just 11-years-old, lost his mother in a car accident.

"My parents came from a little village in Greece," he explained. "They were almost peasant farmers and, in the typical way, arrived in Australia with only a little money.

"They would tell me: 'We've come here to give you a start in life so don't waste it'.

"I think that's why I'm now where I am. At first I thought that if my mum were here I wouldn't have taken risks. But when I left that very good job at Centrelink, I realised what she did was a big risk, coming to another country. What risks have I faced?"

Marinis established the Marinis Financial Group in June 1998 and grew the company with two acquisitions in 2001 and 2006.

His wife Julie is the company's human resources and finance officer and



has worked at the practice since its inception. The pair has two children and their practice employs four full-timers, four part-timers and a few consultants.

The client base is largely South Australians and covers a wide range of clients, from high net worth to Centrelink clients.

"My work with Centrelink meant initially I was handling those sorts of clients," said Marinis. "We were doing no risk and such. But as the other practices were acquired the spread of clients has widened.

"We seem to have a lot of doctors now," he added. "I guess the makeup of our clients has changed as the practice has shifted focus to include wealth accumulation. Before the transition to retirement provisions I only seemed to talk to 55-year-olds, while now I'm talking to 45-year-olds."

Marinis describes the transition to retirement aspect as "cathartic", both personally and in terms of the industry.

"Once I understood allocated pensions I couldn't believe how generous the tax concessions were," he said. "And when I realised the scope of transition to retire-

ment, it was a cathartic experience. I realised super was going to just get bigger and bigger.

"For me the last 20 years in the industry has seen nothing like transition to retirement. It's been the simplest regulatory change and yet it has opened up superannuation like nothing else," he said.

So Marinis writes books about it. He writes on websites, he talks at friend's dinner tables and at backyard barbecues. He doesn't flinch when he uses superannuation and passion in the same sentence.

"Of course it's a passion," he enthused. "Superannuation and sport are what I talk about at barbecues. I'm an 'all or nothing'

kind of guy – it's superannuation, football and motor racing.

Marinis is a V8 tragic with an inexplicable love of Fords. This love affair started with his first car – an XB – and is maintained with his current set of wheels – a GT Cobra finished in dark blue and white. And when it comes to his footy teams, Marinis is a one-eyed Carlton fan (The Blues colours are dark blue and white) and a crazy Sturt supporter in the SANFL (AKA The Double Blues). Are we seeing a pattern here? Blue and white for a second-gen Greek boy?

"Nah," Marinis said. "I just like the colour blue. Simple."

Like super. ♣



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