

# The International Family Offices Journal

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Barbara R Hauser

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# On Wealth

## Our choice in wealth: from scorecard to wellbeing

Feisal Alibhai

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*At 35, I had reached the pinnacle of my professional success. My company was operating in seven African and five European countries, with buying offices in Dubai, Paris and Hong Kong. I had thousands of employees and had attained a level of prosperity that many, if not most, would envy. I thought I knew what wealth looked like, but it would take a fight for my life to make me realise I had no idea what real wealth was – or how much wealthier I would become.*

### **The scorecard**

Focused on building the business legacy of my family, my approach to my career was single-minded and driven. Our activities centred around introducing and helping multinationals grow in countries like Sudan, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the fast-moving consumer goods distribution sector. We wanted to change lives – change societies – and saw the profit as a by-product. The greater the adversity, the greater the opportunity. The money we made was like a scorecard that reflected how good I had become at generating business under seemingly impossible circumstances. There was an enormous drive – a need to prove that it could be done every single time.

I thought I was ticking the boxes. I was providing for my family; I was generating wealth. But one day, at the age of 35 and seemingly out of the blue, I was served with what many would consider a death sentence. It was Stage 3 cancer. Ten tumours, the largest the size of a Rubik's Cube, in the centre of my chest. In my neck, a tumour with the mass of a tennis ball was lodged. Eight more tumors peppered my lungs. There's really nothing one can do to prepare for such news. I was in complete shock.

In the hours that passed after my diagnosis, I reflected on the comfortable lifestyle I had fashioned, the accomplishments I had achieved, and the businesses I had built. And in an instant, I realised

that none of it mattered the way I once thought it did. My survival was what was truly important, and I was going to fight for it. I decided to hand the company over to my family and partners while I underwent whatever treatment could possibly save my life. That was my new goal – one I had never even contemplated before. From that day forward, the entirety of my focus would be dedicated to overcoming cancer.

### **Clarity in recovery**

I spent the next 11 months between home and hospital, undergoing 20 rounds of chemo and three surgeries. There were moments when I came within an inch of death. Due to the insidiousness of cancer, even the news of my remission left me uneasy. I was given a 50-50 chance that the cancer may return, and those odds did not sit well with me.

During my 11 months of treatment, I had researched extensively how I might have unwittingly contributed to my illness through behaviour and lifestyle choices. It was an uncomfortable revelation: I had led a life fraught with mental, emotional and physical imbalance. But my new-found insight enabled me to draw up a plan of action, both for my recovery and for my life after I returned to work. It had become clear to me that my life up until that point had lacked professional and personal harmony. The imbalance had adversely impacted not only my physical health but also the wellbeing of my family, my spirituality and, at times, even what I thought was a remarkably successful career.

Somehow, through the most devastating of life events, I had been gifted with a do-over. I had been endowed with the insight and mercifully blessed with the opportunity to live a healthier and, consequently, wealthier life.

### **The wealth in wellbeing**

I have had time to think about what prompted the personal drive that led to such an imbalance in my life. I was trying to prove myself. But why? Most people associate self-doubt with those that have not attained

a certain level of success. In reality, self-doubt is the reason why even some of the most talented people, along with the most attractive, don't see themselves

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in the same glamorous light others do. It is also why many of the wealthiest and most influential individuals are never satisfied with what they have amassed.

After my illness, I dedicated much of my time to caring for people around me who were sick. In helping them, I found a fulfilment that I had never experienced before. My team and I founded Qineticare, the first family health office dedicated to safeguarding the physical, mental, emotional and relational health of families.

At Qineticare, we know that a shift in mindset does not have to be triggered by an extreme event like my illness. Changing what we attribute importance to and how we value it can be effectuated by understanding how wealth and wellbeing are at interplay.

Wealth is not a scorecard. Health is not a mere medical state. If we do not expand our definitions of

these two concepts, we live in a state of denial that might eventually jeopardise both.

Our wealth is a luxury that can provide us with choices in areas of life that matter. It is also a responsibility – one that requires us to grow and continuously develop our understanding of our needs and the needs of others in order to give our lives purpose. We are the custodians of our wealth, our intellectual capability, and our social responsibility.

Wealth brings you the opportunity and power to make choices. The question is, what are you going to do with it?

It was the simplest, yet most difficult choice for me to make. Would I keep living my life based on what others regard as success and wealth or let my true essence – head and heart united – guide me to a fuller, longer life? I continue to choose the latter and, as a result, I believe I have never been wealthier.

*Feisal Alibhai, a third-generation family member, is the founder and CEO of Qineticare, the world's first family health office, based in Hong Kong. He epitomised life's definition of success until a life-changing event at the age of 35 which caused him to change his focus. He now seeks to make a difference by helping others to transform their lives.*

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