

[Guest Post] Interview with Physician on Fire

Today we have a fascinating guest taking over the blog to tell us a bit about his freedom fighting journey. He's the first doctor we have showcased on the blog, and has already become financially independent (with a net worth around \$3M), and work has therefore become optional. He hasn't pulled the plug on the day job just yet, but he is moving to a reduced work schedule. You could say that he is suffering from a chronic case of "one more year" syndrome.

Without further ado, I introduce to you, Physician on Fire...

1) Who are you and what do you do? What is your story? How are you fighting for your Freedom? Where did you start, where in the journey are you, and where do you ultimately want to end up?

I'm the Physician on FIRE, an anesthesiologist with an eleven year career (post-residency) under my belt. Actually, I don't wear a belt. I wear scrubs. Not that it matters. Where were we?

Oh, yes. My story is conveniently told in a story I wrote called [My Story](#). More details about my Freedom Fight are contained in [My Path to Financial Independence](#). That path was completed shortly after I discovered the term we've acronymed [FI](#). Officially, I felt I earned my FI merit badge the day I sold our one-time dreamhouse and deposited the proceeds into our bank account, but if I had counted the home equity, I was already there when I first read about the concept. I feel quite fortunate to have stumbled into this position.

2) What is your favorite Quote or Mantra that you live by?

When I answered my friend [Mr. 1500s 10 questions](#), I quoted [Ferris Bueller](#), so I feel I should be consistent. "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in awhile, you might miss it."

Scratch that, it was actually my neighbor to the north, Andrew of [Family Money Plan's questions](#) where I quoted that first. Call me Geto Boys, cuz [My Mind Playing](#)

[Tricks on Me.](#)

I've powered through college, medical school, residency, and launched a busy career as my wife and I started a family. I am ecstatic to be in a position to take advantage of my FI status soon. I'll be [going part-time this fall](#) and will likely go no-time a year or two after that. I expect to have plenty of time to stop, look around, and enjoy life at a much more comfortable pace.

Runner-up: "I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy."

3) Where in the world are you from?

I have spent 30 of my 41 years in the land of 10,000 lakes and [1 unique accent](#). After leaving for residency and the bulk of my career, I have returned home to Minnesota. It's not a perfect place, but I strongly identify with the state and its inescapable Scandinavian heritage. I can be happy anywhere, but home is home.

4) What is the worst financial decision you have ever made?

The other day, I said "Yes" when the waitress asked if I wanted fries with my bacon & egg cheeseburger. I totally forgot how good the homemade chips were that normally come with the gut bomb between the bun. I foolishly fell for the upsell. At a burger joint.

Besides that, I would have to say I overbuilt when we "settled down" into our "permanent home." We went all out with every detail in our waterfront dream home, only to see the hospital fall into bankruptcy four short years later. After several years of playing landlord, we sold the home at a nearly quarter million dollar loss.

It's only a terrible decision in hindsight. If the fates had smiled, and I had finished out my career there, I would have no regrets. But life rarely cooperates so kindly.

5) What is the best financial decision you have ever made?

This is a tough one to narrow down. I was smart to turn down really good expensive private schools to stay close to home at my parents' alma mater for a full tuition scholarship. I'm glad I chose a good paying specialty and worked my tail off early in my anesthesia career. It was dumb luck that the beautiful grad student I met as a resident proved to be more frugal than me and happens to be a fantastic mother.

The best decision? I decided early on that I valued wealth more than stuff. Investing gave me a bigger rush than buying things. I didn't know what I was saving up for; I thought I was on a path to the [\\$10 Million Dream](#) like my pal Dom, but I've since realized I was saving for a future that is becoming clearer by the day. A future of freedom, family, and happiness that I can have with a fraction of that \$10 Million.

6) Are you a morning or a night person? What time do you wake up and go to sleep?

Yes.

When I was younger, I was decidedly a night person. My senior year of high school, I fell asleep at least once in every single class. In college, 0800 classes were my kryptonite. In medical school, I routinely stayed up through the night studying for a test and crashed hard afterwards. When we had Saturday tests in the fall, one of the bars would open early for our class, I'd take a friend to the Gophers football game, and then I'd curse the losing home team as I drifted off to sleep for about 18 hours.

When I became an anesthesia resident, I changed out of necessity and now I'm a morning person. Workdays, I'm up at 0515 to be to work no later than 0600. And still I pull my share of all-nighters when on call because labor pains respect no clock and some patients are best served with immediate surgery, day or night.

7) What is your definition of Financial Freedom? And what is your FREEDOM number?

That's a great question, and it's one I've contemplated. The terms "financial independence" and "financial freedom" are typically tossed around and used interchangeably, but I see them as [distinctively different milestones](#).

Financial Independence suggests you can maintain your standard of living without earning additional income. Financial Freedom, on the other hand, represents a position of strength where you have the freedom to spend without the constraints of the frugality you leveraged to obtain it.

After some deliberation, I decided that if I could double my family discretionary expenses, that would be incredibly freeing. With an annual budget of roughly \$70,000, I assigned \$40,000 as core expenses and \$30,000 as "fluff," or

discretionary. Doubling the fun money to \$60,000 gives us an annual budget of \$100,000. So to have Financial Freedom with a 4% withdrawal rate requires \$2.5 Million as compared to \$1.75 Million for Financial Independence.

I guess that makes my FREEDOM number \$2.5 Million. We recently saw our retirement nest egg surpass that number, which is most excellent.

8) What is your favorite Asset Class to invest in (i.e Real Estate, Stocks, Bonds, Peer to Peer lending, etc)? Why? And what platforms do you use (i.e [TD Ameritrade](#) for stocks, [Realty Shares](#) for Real Estate, [Prosper](#) for Peer to Peer lending, etc.).

I like owning a tiny fraction of all the companies, so the bulk of my portfolio is in stocks. I'm invested in roughly 60% US stocks, 20% international stocks, 10% REIT (which are essentially US stocks), and 10% bonds & cash. The details, including the exact mutual funds I own in which accounts (and the returns from them) is detailed most recently in my [1st quarter update](#).

9) What is your favorite online financial resource, paid or free (i.e. [Mint](#), [Personal Capital](#), blogs, podcasts, [Tasty Trade](#), etc.)?

My favorite financial resource is my Feedly account, which allows me to track dozens of personal finance blogs on one page, but that's not exactly FinTech, which is what I think you're going for.

I use both Mint and Personal Capital and have never heard of Tasty Trade, but I once traded some Snack Pack for beef jerky, which I would consider a totally tasty trade.

A couple of my favorite podcasts are Docs Outside the Box (my interview is recorded but not yet published) and [ChooseFI](#).

10) When it comes to building wealth, do you spend more time figuring out how to cut expenses or increase income? Why?

No.

Both habits came naturally and I don't spend any time strategizing the optimal behavior. I don't mind spending money, but I despise wasting money. Despite a generous income, I've remained relatively frugal - a [frugal without a cause](#).

I used to work a lot of extra shifts to earn all the income I could get my hands on. I worked too many extra weekends and found [locum tenens](#) work to occupy a fair amount of my vacation time.

I've since realized [that money buys time](#) and I'm more interested in time than money, so I opt for time every time.

11) How many hours a week do you watch TV? What's your favorite show?

This time of year (summer), I average roughly zero hours in front of the television. The tube is on at work in the office, so I suppose it's maybe a few hours a week, to be honest.

This fall, I'll be in attendance for about a third of the Golden Gophers football games, but I'll be watching the other seven or eight games on TV and I catch most of their basketball games in the winter, too. I took my Dad to a game at the barn last winter and found out later that the [Grounded Engineer](#) took his bride to the same game (in which we dominated the Huskers). Go Gophers!

As far as TV shows go, I know there are a number of series that I'd like to catch up on some day. I've heard good things about [Lost](#) and [Breaking Bad](#), for example. I'm that far behind. One that my wife and I have enjoyed watching on DVR lately is [Expedition Unknown](#). I long to travel the world like Josh Gates.

12) If you had to recommend 1 book, what would it be? And why?

The Millionaire Next Door.

I write for people like me, or a younger version of me. Drs. Stanley and Danko deliver a powerful message that is counterintuitive to the uninitiated. Wealthy people are less likely to own the best of everything. Those that appear to have it all are more likely to have it all on credit.

When I read the book, I learned that [Stealth Wealth](#) was perfectly acceptable and a secret to maintaining and growing wealth surreptitiously.

13) What is the best piece of advice you have ever received or what advice would you give to the readers?

The Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you have them do unto you."

It's stupid simple and obvious, but if you treat other people in the manner that you would like to be treated, amazing things happen.

People like you. People respect you. People return favors.

I have taken this approach to blogging. I link out, I give credit where credit is due, I retweet with reckless abandon, and in 18 months, I've seen more than a million pageviews. I credit The Golden Rule as playing a significant role in my site's early success.

14) What does living life by design look like to you? A typical day, week, month, year, or whatever?

I'm slowly transitioning from a life of overwhelming productivity to a life of targeted productivity.

My family is my life and my boys are now six and eight years old. The life my wife and I envision once I [pull the FIRE trigger](#) in a year or two is one of family travel with a heavy dose of education. My wife found [an outstanding blog post](#) that described the life I want to have, at least for a few years, as a family that "road schools" around the globe.

A typical day "by design" would include some or all of the following:

- Aerobic and / or strength training
- Healthy eating. Maybe some Cheetos or Chicken-in-a-Biskit, too. So semi-healthy eating.
- Every day is a school day.
- Learning *in situ*. When you road school, you can learn about science in nature and history in the places it has occurred.
- We make new friends everywhere we go. The boys do, too.
- I'm an avid homebrewer. [I've invested in breweries](#). It's fair to say I enjoy a tasty beverage.
- Extracurricular activities. If you know what I mean. And I think you do.

15) What is holding you back from living life by design?

What if?

I started a website after I felt comfortable with the fact that I could afford to never

work another day in my life.

But... what if?

You could say that I'm suffering from a chronic case of [One More Year Syndrome](#).

The truth is I am proud of the work that I do and the last thing I want to do is walk away too soon. I've explored the things I'll miss when I retire early. I called that one the Top 5 Things I'll Miss When I Retire Early. How innovative.

Ideally, I'd like the likelihood that I'll regret retiring too soon to match the regret that I worked too many years. I'm not the type of guy [to look back with anger](#), but if I can balance that life seesaw, that would be ideal. It would be easy to undershoot or overshoot that [likelihood of regret](#). I'm hoping to split the difference.

16) Where can we find you online? If you're a blogger, this is the perfect plug to talk about your blog and why it's great.

I'm not personally big on self promotion, but I've learned it's an integral part of the #bloglife, so here goes.

My blog is great because I show all y'all high income professionals [how to think about money](#), keep enough for yourself, and live the life you deserve. I challenge my friends [to live on half](#) their takehome pay. At the salaries we physicians enjoy, it should not be difficult to do, and the reward of doing so is huge.

I can be found at [physicianonfire.com](#), on Twitter at [@physicianonfire](#) and on [Facebook](#).

I want to thank each and every one of you for reading this exhaustive interview to the bitter end. If you're a glutton for punishment and would like to hear more from me, you can [subscribe here](#) and I'll hook you up with a bonus download of some [excellent FI calculators](#).

A big Thank You to Dominic, the Gen Y Finance Guy for the invitation to share my story.

Cheers!

-PoF



Gen Y Finance Guy

Hey, I'm Dom - the man behind the cartoon. You'll notice that I sign off as "Gen Y Finance Guy" on all my posts, due to the fact that I write this blog anonymously (at least for now). I like to think of myself as the *Chief Freedom Officer* here of my little corner of the internet. In the real world, I'm a 30-something former C-Suite executive turned entrepreneur turned capital allocator. I am trying to humanize finance by sharing my own journey to Financial Freedom. I believe in total *honesty* and *transparency*. That is why before I ever started blogging, I decided that I would share all of my own [financial stats](#). I do this not to brag, but instead to inspire motivate, and also to hold myself accountable. My goal is to be a beacon of hope, motivation, and inspiration for *you*, the reader, by living life by example and sharing it **all** here on the blog. My sincere hope is that you will be able to learn from me - both from my successes and my failures! [Read More](#)