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My Take: Holding Your Breath for Financial Success **Brian Zdrowak**

Have you ever tried to see how long you could hold your breath underwater? When I was a kid, whether on family vacations in Picton, Ontario or at a friend's pool, I would challenge others to see who could last the longest. For the first few seconds, it feels as if you could hold your breath all day. It became a struggle for me after 30 seconds. In the times that I was too far under, panic would set in as I rushed to the surface to be followed by a rush of air and great relief.

With the recent stock market highs, I feel like many of us are holding our breath on the direction of the market and what it means for our financial goals, including retirement. When I hear people say, "If the stock market can continue like this for just a few more years, I will be OK," I get the feeling that we are setting ourselves up for disappointment, especially by ceding control of our financial plans to the whims of the market.

It feels like we are underwater, trying to hold our breath the longest and hoping that when we pop out of the water for that breath of air, all will be OK. When you think about it, this cannot have a good ending. Who are we fooling but ourselves if we only believe we will not struggle mightily with the next stock market downturn? Yes, there will be another downturn; we just don't know when.

Recently, I was in California, where buildings are constructed to withstand the earthquake tremors that are a part of everyday life. The stock market has its own tremors. Rather than holding our breath and planning with hope, why not build a financial plan that will withstand the tremors of the market?

Let's be realistic: Isn't it better to be honest with yourself, even if it means planning to spend less, save more or work longer? I know it can be frustrating when reality interferes with dreams, but at least control of your destiny resides with you and not with the fortunes or ill fortunes of the stock market.

My limit for staying underwater is 45 seconds. For some of us, maybe we have already held our breath for too long. When the market goes down (and it will go down), we will find that we are in much deeper water than we thought, and that old familiar panic might set in.

So take back control by sitting down with a trusted financial advisor to talk about making a plan that incorporates your goals and dreams. By putting together a strong financial plan, you will weather the tremors of the market and still be able to breathe easy, no matter which direction the market decides to go next.

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Brian Zdrowak, CPA, CFP® is an investment advisor for Dopkins Wealth Management, LLC, an independent member of the BAM ALLIANCE.

Brian joined Dopkins in 2005. He provides financial solutions to individuals, trusts, small business owners and employee benefit plans. Prior to joining Dopkins, Brian worked for 17 years with a Fortune 500 national marketer and distributor of food service products.

Brian and his wife Debbie have three children. On the weekends, Brian and Debbie enjoy renovating their 1870 Orchard Park home. In the community, Brian is involved with the Advisory Board for the Orchard Park High School Academy of Finance and the Key Communicators Group for Orchard Park School District.

Brian holds a master's degree from Canisius College and a bachelor's degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

