

## Realty king stakes out new ground

Entrepreneur Peter Thomas' latest venture is a life management program called LifePilot

**Peter Thomas, retired entrepreneur and founder of Century 21 Realty, is in Vancouver to lead workshops in what he calls an operations manual for life. He's pictured here with his wife Rita.**



Peter Thomas smiles warmly as he extends his hand and motions to his sleek yacht, Thomas Spirit, moored at downtown Vancouver's Westin Bayshore marina. With his golden tan and Roy Scheider looks, he exudes the kind of success you'd expect from an entrepreneur who's best known for turning Century 21 into Canada's largest real-estate network. He wastes little time once on board -- Thomas may be retired, but he still puts a premium on his personal time. "I give out appointments like \$1,000 bills," the 64-year-old admits as he perches on his favourite couch next to his wife, Rita. But when it comes to his latest endeavor, Thomas is eager to talk up a storm. "I want you to watch a six-minute video of what I'm doing," he says, fiddling with the controls of his flat-screen TV. Within seconds, the yacht's spacious cabin fills with catchy music as his image flickers on screen.

"Every computer that you buy, every airplane that you fly has an operations manual," he says on the video. "Let me ask you, have you seen an operations manual for life yet? ... LifePilot is an operations manual for life." It's reminiscent of those late-night TV infomercials where effusive business gurus offer to guide the way to wealth and prosperity.

This lifestyle management program is the latest creation by Thomas, who freely admits he takes his organizational skills to near obsessive levels. "All through my business career, I've been a bit of an anal guy," he says. "I organize everything."

It is, perhaps, the key to his impressive achievements. He was founder of Century 21 and Samoth Capital Corporation, a Vancouver real-estate investment firm. He developed the Four Seasons Resort Hotel in Scottsdale, Ariz., which opened in 1999. He's a best-selling author of three business books, a mentor for young entrepreneurs and an active member in several organizations and charities.

Now, three years after retiring, Thomas is working to turn his method of managing his own life into his next big business opportunity. "My plan is to create a whole new world brand, a communications company called LifePilot," he says. This program aims to align goals and priorities with personal values. It's taught by a "navigator" -- he's big on aviation terms -- in one four-hour session, which costs \$500 per person, and includes a hefty three-ring binder used to chart progress while negotiating through life.

There appears to be great interest in his idea. Two workshops in Vancouver this week are sold out, as is a Sept. 4 session in Victoria. Thomas is starting to train others to teach LifePilot.

Thomas says he's "targeting the person" with LifePilot, yet the corporate world seems keen to embrace it. "A balanced employee is a more productive employee," he says, "so corporations are eating it up."

Thomas can personally vouch for this program's success. "It's really an extension of the way I've been living my life for the last 30 years," he explains. This concept he has developed began three decades ago, when Thomas was pulling 15-hour days as a struggling realtor in Edmonton. In 1974, he attended a business seminar in Hawaii that encouraged him to match his values with his goals.

"I had my epiphany," Thomas recalls. "I was living in a place I didn't particularly like, so I moved from Edmonton to Vancouver Island within 90 days and started Century 21," he said. "By reaffirming what my values were and matching them to what my priorities were, I gave myself permission to change my life."

Over the years, Thomas has expanded on this concept to guide himself through life. He still has a black three-ring binder filled with notes, observations from when he first identified 13 core values years ago. Today, Thomas is content with just three guiding values -- health, freedom and happiness -- with personal goals like maintaining weight or reading books.

Even his wife, whom he met 17 years ago, is hooked. "I've read through Peter's book and he's read through mine," she said. "We know each other's values." It's the main reason why this couple chose to live in a Swiss alpine village: Rita always wanted to live in Switzerland, which serves as a good base to fulfill Thomas' lifelong desire to travel through Europe. And he admits he loves his new home. "There's mountains and cowbells ... it's Julie Andrews."

Despite their jet-setting lifestyle, the couple still makes time to come to North America. Their yacht is usually moored in Victoria, where Thomas' daughter and grandchildren live, and investments keep him returning to Arizona. And, of course, the LifePilot workshops have kept him criss-crossing the continent for the past year.

Thomas' lifestyle guide may have stayed within the family if it wasn't for the suicide of his son, Todd, who leapt off the 14th floor of the New York Plaza Hotel on Feb. 1, 2000. The 36-year-old artist had been struggling with mental illness -- to the surprise of many. "Todd kept it quite hidden," Thomas said. "His best friends didn't even know."

After the funeral, Thomas decided to celebrate his son's life by holding a black tie event in Scottsdale to raise money for mental health organizations. He later created the Todd Thomas Foundation, which has raised nearly \$1 million for a mental health crisis response unit at Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital and has donated money to mental health organizations in Arizona.

Thomas recognized that hosting swank affairs had a limited life for fund-raising. He started looking for other ways to raise money and a friend suggested his personal management program that would evolve into LifePilot.

"I probably would not have been doing this if it wasn't for Todd," Thomas admits. "He's my guiding light, my guardian angel ... it's for Todd and it's very meaningful."

Thomas directs the profits from his LifePilot workshops into local mental health organizations. Thomas also sees LifePilot as a way of helping others taste success, too, and to give something back to society. "I believe you have your learning years, your earning years and your returning years," he explained. "I have been so blessed in my life and now it's give-back time."