



The Four Life Fundamentals

There are four key areas in which careful planning and spending will reap great rewards in your quality of life and financial fitness. As always, you need to keep in mind the difference between wants and needs, and use your goals, values, and financial philosophy to guide your choices.

Food

“Once you’ve developed your Spending Plan, you should have a pretty good idea of how much you spend monthly on food.” You may have also noticed food was one of your largest expense items. The average American family spends around 20 percent of their monthly budget on food: about 12 percent on food eaten at home, and more than 7 percent on eating out. It’s no wonder careful planning and greater care in how you spend money for food can have a major financial impact. The following suggestions will help you make wiser choices.

1. Learn from others. Through studying books, tapes, seminars, and even

consultations with nutrition experts, you can learn the best way to purchase and consume food. In recent years, many experts have returned to the “simpler is better” point of view where food is concerned. And often the simpler, less-processed foods are more nutritious and economical.

2. Ask yourself and your loved ones. How you think and feel about the food you eat is one of the most important aspects of your plan to improve. After studying the expert’s advice, develop a plan that best suits you and your family’s tastes and interests. Get everyone involved, let them contribute—you can all share in the planning and the success. If you don’t enjoy the food you’ve prepared, you’re not likely to stick with your plan.

3. Develop menus and compare costs. Consider everyone’s tastes, and build a collection of possible menus based on nutrition, preferences, and cost. Make choices you can afford, live with, and enjoy. Also compare prices between your local

Plan Your Quality of Life

The Secret to changing your future—is wanting to. In last month’s newsletter we reviewed the steps to take to review your quality of life and decide where you are at. From a review of your life values and goals you should be able to tell if you’re not entirely satisfied with your current lifestyle. If you have discovered that traveling down the road you’re on isn’t making you happy, then now’s the time to reset your course. The choice is yours; changing things requires work, that is true, but when the end goal is happiness you have some great motivation.

Every journey begins with a single step. You can start with one of the areas we reviewed last month—family, health, community involvement, education or spirituality. Pick an area that you find you are falling short in and write down some one-week, one-month and one-year goals for that area. Post them where you can see them easily. If you are feeling particularly ambitious you can write down a goal in each area. Make them reasonable and easy to attain for the first steps. You can review your goals and add new ones over time as things improve.

The next step is to focus on the four life fundamentals. This newsletter will take you through each of the 4 areas.

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supermarkets, the difference may be surprising. Then you can even design, print, and display your menus. Have fun and share in the creativity. Food can truly affect the condition of the human spirit; make good choices which will enhance your health and your quality of life.

Remember: Nothing is written in stone, you can also be flexible with changing seasons and tastes.

"Unfortunately, we live in a world that tempts us with a great variety and abundance of food, and many of us eat not to satisfy physical hunger but to allay anxiety, depression and boredom, to provide a substitute for emotional nourishment, or to try to fill an inner void."

~ Dr. Andy Weil

4. Keep things interesting. Men and women, young and old, do not "live by bread alone" but... without it for sandwiches, French toast, blueberry muffins, etc., life can get very dull! Nothing will shoot down your plan faster than boring meals or rebellion from loved ones. Magazines, TV, cookbooks, the internet, and friends are all great sources for new and innovative ideas. Creativity will help you stick to your goals, and variety is still the spice of life... and dinner!

5. Work together and follow through. Old habits die hard. Changing your world view takes consistent effort and follow-up, especially when it also affects your loved ones. Don't get discouraged, be consistent and celebrate your improvements; they will motivate you to keep working toward your goals.

Health

We discussed earlier the importance of good health; now we'll discuss the cost. Health care costs for the average American family are a major expense, and consume a large part of your spending plan. Any steps you take to maintain better health will also definitely influence your financial freedom and quality of life.

Health Maintenance—You need to be concerned with maintaining and repairing the health of you and your loved ones. The human body is a marvelous machine. And like all machines, it's easier and less expensive to maintain than to repair it when it breaks down.

Unfortunately in our fast-paced society, it's easy to forget or think we're too busy to maintain our health. But if we don't—eventually we have to stop everything to recover from preventable illness, and get well. Then you not only deal with the high cost of medical care, but pain and suffering, loss of work, and a definite decline in your quality of life. An ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure.

It's no mystery. It comes down to the principles we discussed earlier, feeling good or bad. Good health is the result of correct, healthy living. The problem is your marvelous body is so good at adjusting and covering up for the mistakes of an unhealthy lifestyle—sometimes you don't know you've got a problem until it's critical. Poor health typically comes from poor health practices. Symptoms can take years to surface, and then it's much more difficult and costly to treat. Your life is precious, and your health is the very essence of your quality of life. Take care of it or lose it!

Suggestions to Get You Started

- 1. Avoid impulse buying.** Featured items and "sales" may not always be the best buy.
- 2. Use as few convenience foods as possible.** When feasible make your own mixes.
- 3. Try to limit your shopping to twice a month,** then stay with your planned items.
- 4. Avoid wasting food or cooking too much.** Be creative and vary preparation of leftovers.
- 5. Beware of expensive packaging;** it can cost more than the product.
- 6. Consider making your own baked goods from scratch,** or buying "day-old" on sale.
- 7. Reduce junk food purchases;** they're usually more expensive and the least healthy food.
- 8. Grow your own food;** it's fresh, has less pesticides, and can bring self-satisfaction.
- 9. Shop in bulk.** Buying larger quantities almost always saves money. Also the local farmer's market usually has fresher, more nutritious foods.
- 10. Build a food-storage supply** using foods you use often and like to eat, and rotate it using the oldest first. You'll have to shop less often and will be prepared in an emergency.

Good health maintenance is based on a few simple principles:

1. Good, consistent nutrition.
2. Proper and frequent exercise.
3. Prompt response to your body's warning signs, natural cycles, and needs.

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4. Avoid practices that hurt you or cause your amazing machine to break down.
5. Get regular checkups by qualified health professionals.

Efforts you make to improve your health habits will bring the lasting benefit of a longer, more enjoyable life.

Good health maintenance involves educating yourself in three steps:

Step 1—Learn what your body requires to be in the best running condition.

Step 2—Learn about nutrition, exercise, your body's natural cycles, and what may be harmful or destructive.

Remember: You don't have to know everything all at once. Your body is great at compensating for your ignorance and mistakes. Unlike your computer, your body is able to fix itself most of the time—that is until it's so neglected, alarms are sounded and it begins to shut down!

Step 3—Education and maintenance needs to be ongoing. Regular checkups with your doctor, dentist, and health professionals will keep you informed and up-to-date on your current condition. Time takes a toll, and regular assessments are vital to a good health maintenance program.

Make learning a life-long habit. Everything you learn about your body, good health, and proper maintenance will benefit you in the long run—just keep working at it! This knowledge and understanding will help you make plans and take action to properly guard, improve, and manage one of life's most precious resources—good health.

Soaring Health Costs

For most Americans, healthcare costs are the fastest growing item in their spending plan. Government, social agencies, health care professionals, and consumers—are all deeply concerned with solving this serious health and economic problem.

You need to make the same careful studied approach to healthcare as any other expense. Get as much information as you can, compare costs, and think about quality; you need your body to work for the long term.

Become a knowledgeable consumer and as a rule, you'll become financially free and have a higher quality of life. Isn't that what this is all about in the first place?

Housing

Housing costs are typically your single largest expense. Today the purchase of a home usually involves a long-term mortgage, substantial debt, and a life-time commitment. The other alternatives of renting or leasing are also expensive and involve dependency on the whims of a landlord. Your housing has the potential to greatly enhance or detract from your quality of life. Studies show the average household spends more than 30 percent of its disposable income for housing, so where you decide to live needs to be an important concern for you.

Buying vs. Renting

Even though home ownership can be an excellent financial decision, there are many factors that must be considered. You might not be able to sort out this dilemma without the proper knowledge and careful consideration. Tax breaks, etc., tend to make owning your home more fiscally favorable. However, the ease of movement and the limited responsibility associated with renting or leasing are sometimes more important.

Traditionally, there have been great benefits in owning real property, especially your own primary residence. Citizenship rights, voting rights, social standing, and a host of other benefits have often been dependent upon owning land or real property. Special tax breaks are awarded to those who own or are buying real property. There's a sense of pride associated with owning your own home—even

though ownership typically includes a long-term financial commitment.

Renting or leasing on the other hand, avoids many of the problems associated with home and real property ownership. Homes require considerable attention and maintenance to preserve them as valuable assets. Typically leasing or renting doesn't include financial responsibility for maintenance and repairs—that rests with the property owner. When renting or leasing you're usually responsible for:

1. Making the monthly agreed-upon payments
2. Using the property in a reasonable and responsible fashion
3. Insuring against any possible loss of personal property or property damage.

Your quality of life can be greatly influenced by whether or not you own or rent your home, and where you choose to live. It comes down to what you want and need. Whatever your choice; make sure it's an informed decision. Your confidence in your decision and your peace of mind, are major factors in whether you feel good or bad about how and where you live. Friends, neighbors, schools, churches, and many other things can also be greatly affected by where you live.

Where Future Housing Is Headed

There are three important aspects to consider in purchasing your home.

1. The cost of housing
2. Where you live
3. Future trends in housing

In recent years, we have all seen the devastating effects of recession and have watched as prices of homes plummeted. The cost of housing is starting to trend back upward but it may be awhile before the value of your home gets back to where it was in 2008. Sometimes local factors cause the price of housing to go down but the long term trend has been upward.

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Where you live is an important consideration. “Location, location, location” has often been stated as the three most important issues in choosing your home. It affects the value of your home, your standard of living, neighbors, commute, schools, community, etc.

Since the industrial revolution, there have been cycles of people moving between the cities and more rural settings. These trends vary depending on job availability and cultural lifestyle changes. At times there’s been greater interest and pressure to move to a rural setting, to get out of the “rat-race.” Other times there’s a trend toward the city and its increased job and activity possibilities. These trends affect housing prices up or down depending on the direction of the current movement.

You need to consider where and how you’ll live in the future. Be watchful and responsive to changing trends. Your home and quality of life will be affected in ways you can’t always predict, so keep abreast of the latest developments.

Future trends in housing have always interested people. Architects, social, and city planners, often speculate about the shape of the home of tomorrow. Houses hold a unique position within society by reflecting current values and trends in families and communities. The nature of the occupants, and the quality of life they enjoy, is often reflected in how and where a family lives.

Recently, the traditional house has become less and less the focus of family activity and identity. With increased outside activities and interests, people are spending less time at home. Although some see the role of the home becoming more functional, where both work and social activities take place.

Transportation

How much of your monthly income is spent on transportation? The national average is more than 20 percent—a high price just to get where you need to go! That’s why it’s important to review how much money you spend on transportation. For most Americans the expense is largely due to the purchase and upkeep of their cars.

If your lifestyle doesn’t require you to use a car, you’ve avoided a major expense. There are other forms of transportation that may impact your budget: trains, planes, buses, taxis, and bicycles—but cars are typically the most expensive and have the most bearing and affect on expense and quality of life.

America’s love affair with the automobile originated in the early 1900s, and hasn’t slowed down since. The car is a status symbol and source of identity, rolled into one. There have been trends toward large luxury cars, small fast cars, big sports utility vehicles, and everything in-between. They’ve become a reflection of high-fashion, creating images of power, prestige, beauty, and intelligence.

Need an attitude adjustment? Is that possible without seriously compromising your lifelong enjoyment and perception of cars? First of all, you only need to adjust your attitude if you think a problem exists. After careful consideration and soul searching, if you decide you’ve been putting too much emphasis on your car at the expense of your financial stability—by all means, make an adjustment. You’ll need to reassess your world view of cars and how they fit into your quality of life. Use your intelligence and creativity to help keep you on course toward financial freedom. ■

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