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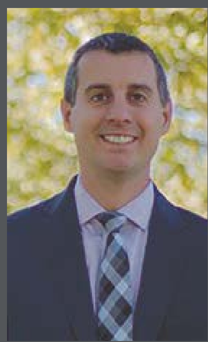
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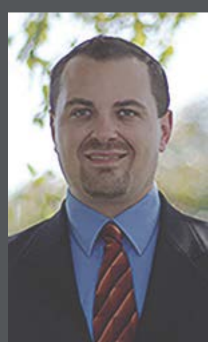
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Top four reasons why you should work with a Certified Financial Planner™

In today's world, consumers are bombarded with a limitless amount of financial planning titles such as Investment Advisor, Wealth Planner, Financial Advisor, Financial Planner, and much more. All of these terms are designed to explain someone who can help with some part of your financial life; however, it's important to look deeper than just a "title." It's essential to look for someone who has the credentials and expertise to help with holistic planning. One designation that stands out, and has become the golden standard in the financial planning world, is the CFP® designation, which stands for "Certified Financial Planner™."

Here are the top four reasons to consider a CFP® professional:

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1. Education: The individual must have a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited U.S. college or university, or its equivalent from a foreign institution. In addition, one must complete an advanced college-level course of study approved by the CFP Board of Standards, a self-regulating organization for professionals using the designation. The course of study covers subject areas such as, but not limited to, income tax planning, investment planning, retirement planning, college planning and estate planning.

2. Experience: The candidate must complete at least three years of full-time practical experience related to financial planning within the appropriate timeline. Activities that do not relate to the personal financial planning process for clients (such as time spent in corporate finance, training, practice management, marketing, software development or administrative duties) cannot be included in the reported number of experience hours.

3. Examination: A candidate must pass the CFP® Certification Examination. This test is a rigorous and comprehensive exam that covers all of the topics completed through their education. It is administered over two days, for a total of 10 hours. Candidates are expected to correctly apply one's knowledge of financial planning to real-world examples and diagnose a multitude of financial planning issues. The pass ratio for the exam in March 2017 was 62.2%.

4. Ethics & Rules of Conduct requirements: CFP® professionals are required to abide by the CFP Board's Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility, as well as its Rules of Conduct. In order to maintain the designation one must follow these sets of required documents that outline the practice and ethical standards. Each year, a CFP® professional is required to agree to uphold the principles of integrity, objectivity, competence, fairness, confidentiality, professionalism and diligence in order to maintain their certification.

By selecting a CFP® professional to help with your financial affairs, you can be assured they are required to put their clients' interests ahead of their own at all times. In addition, they will provide their financial planning services as a "fiduciary" – acting in the best interest of their financial planning clients. ■

Monthly financial checklist keeps you on track

Sometimes the scale of items that require your financial oversight can become overwhelming. Breaking them down into manageable tasks can help. This monthly checklist of some key financial tasks can help you stay motivated to meet your financial goals throughout the year.

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January

• Establish a will or trust with an estate attorney. Although many people avoid thinking about estate planning, getting your affairs in order is one of the greatest gifts you can give your loved ones. If you've already established a will or a trust, sit down and review the documents with your attorney and make any necessary changes.

• Create a budget. A monthly plan for spending and saving is an excellent way to help keep your finances in check, whether you're reevaluating your financial life or just trying to maintain good habits.

• Get ahead on your mortgage. If you can swing it, consider making a full extra payment toward your mortgage principal, which may help shorten the length of your loan.

February

• Review life, home, and auto insurance. It's a good idea to check your coverage regularly. Have you experienced a major life event in the past year, such as a marriage or birth? Any significant changes in your personal life should prompt you to reevaluate your coverage.

• Revisit beneficiary designations for life insurance and retirement accounts. Do you need to add a new beneficiary or change a designation? Review your accounts to ensure that the correct people are listed.

March

• Check your investment portfolio allocations and current holdings. Although your financial advisor monitors your investment portfolio and holdings regularly, you should be aware of where and how your assets are invested.

• Explore loans, grants, and other sources of financial aid. There are many ways to finance college and postgraduate education expenses. If you have a college-bound child, it's wise to get an early start researching the options available to you. The government-sponsored website http://studentaid.ed.gov is a great place to begin.

April

• Review your online social security statement at www.ssa.gov. Check your benefits information and earning record, and update any outdated personal information, such as your address or phone number.

May

• Review 401(k), IRA, and SEP plans. No matter your retirement goals, keeping an eye on your balances and making regular contributions is essential. Depending on your circumstances, consider increasing the amount you contribute.

June

• Check your credit report. Request your free credit report at www.annualcreditreport.com, and review it carefully for mistakes or suspicious charges, which could be a sign of identity theft.

• Shred old documents. Any financial documents that you no longer need, such as bank and investment statements, should be destroyed to ensure that they don't fall into the wrong hands.

July

• Research 529 savings plans. Withdrawals from 529 plans are tax-free when used for qualified higher education expenses, making them an excellent way to save for a child's or grandchild's schooling.

August

• Review online accounts. Take a look at the usernames and passwords you currently use for your online accounts. If the passwords are too basic or if you've held onto them for too long, consider changing them as a security precaution.

September

• Assess your overall investment goals and strategy. Reevaluate your financial goals at least once a year, especially if you've had any major changes or unexpected events in your life. Discuss your situation with a financial advisor and adjust your financial plan accordingly.

October

• Contact your CPA for year-end tax planning. Before tax season hits, it's a good idea to speak with a certified public accountant about changes in your personal circumstances, expiring tax breaks, and so on.

• Consider charitable giving. Donating to charity at year-end is a popular way to do good while reaping potential tax deductions.

November

• Review the balance in your flexible spending account (FSA). FSAs require special attention so that you don't lose unused funds at year-end. Employers may allow employees to roll over $500 in FSA funds to the next year. Be sure to check the rules of your FSA plan and review your available balance.

December

• Consider refinancing high-interest debt. Consolidating your mortgage, credit card, or car loan payments can make your financial life more efficient (and possibly lower your overall interest rate).

• Pay off credit card balances every month. For the New Year, make a resolution to pay off your credit card balances every month, if you're not doing so already.

Milestone events

In addition to the monthly tasks outlined here, keep these significant planning milestones in mind as you near retirement age:

• Age 50: Consider making catch-up contributions to IRAs and qualified retirement plans.

• Age 55: You can take distributions from 401(k) plans without penalty if you've retired.

• Age 59½: You can take distributions from IRAs without penalty.

• Ages 62–70: You can apply for social security benefits.

• Age 65: You become eligible for Medicare.

• Age 70½: You must begin taking required minimum distributions from IRAs, 401(k)s, and 403(b)s.

Although this may seem like a lot of information to take in at once, glancing at the checklist each month and preparing for important retirement-related dates can keep you on track to achieving your financial goals.

5 things you need to know before paying your college bills

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You've been saving in your 529 plan getting ready for that day when your student goes off to college. Well, the day has finally come. What now?!

How can you use your 529 to pay for college? What else do you need to know?

1) Know your due dates! Most colleges have early August due dates for the fall semester and December or early January due dates for spring. They are probably communicating reminders with your student who may not always do the best job of reminding you…the one who is paying the bill! Be sure to stay in the loop.

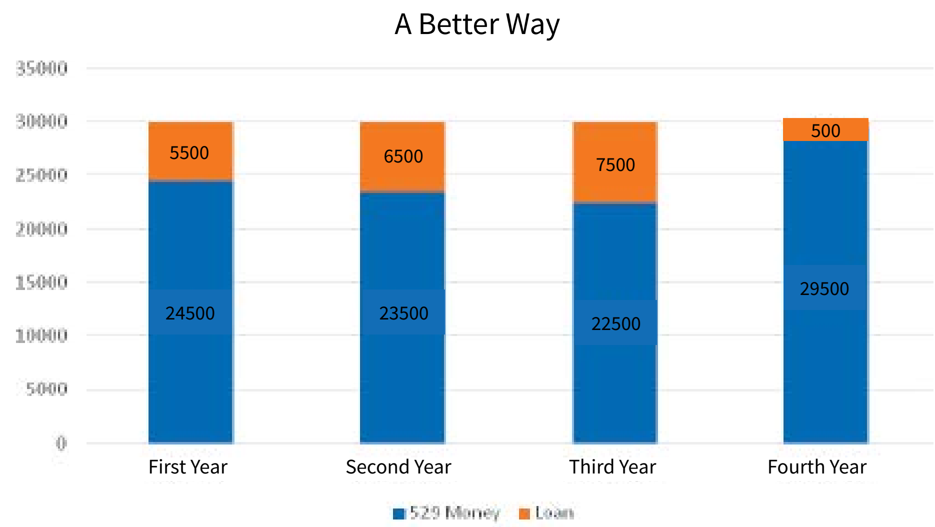
2) Who is getting the funds? 529 plans can disburse money either directly to the institution, directly to you, or directly to the beneficiary (your student). When you log in to your 529 plan online, you can request a withdrawal and indicate the party receiving the funds. Allow enough time between the request and the due date. Sometimes it can take 10 days for the funds to get to where they are going. As the owner of the 529, you can be the recipient of the withdrawal when you need to reimburse covered expenses (like books) that you paid out of pocket. If you go this route remember to keep all of your receipts in case you are audited.

3) Should I use up my 529 funds first? Many parents will make the mistake of using their 529 money to pay all the expenses until it is all gone. They will then turn to loans to cover the remainder.

Maybe the first three years are paid using 529 money, and then the fourth year comes and the family is looking at loans. This is a mistake.

Federal student loans (Stafford) have the lowest interest rates and best repayment options, but they are capped at a certain amount each year: $5,500 freshman year, $6,500 sophomore year, $7,500 junior and each year after in undergraduate education. We call them "use it or lose it" loans.

Here's an example. A family has saved $100,000 in their 529 plan. (Good for them!) The school costs $30,000 per year. They use 529 money to pay the first year, the second year, and the third year. They are forced to take out $20,000 in loans during the last year.



Because the federal loan is capped at $7,500, they will be forced to get loans without the favorable interest rate.

A better way is to use the maximum federal loan available each year. The total loan amount remains the same; however, the result in terms of repayment is much better.

4) Don't forget cash flow funding. If you are already saving $200 each month for college costs assume that can continue. It may not seem like much, but $200 x 48 months is $9,600! Also consider that when your student is at home, they aren't free right? When they go to school, some of these costs end. You can use that money to make payments for college. Many colleges will even accept a payment plan spread out over the semester.

Also, consider flowing funds through the 529 while in college. Many states, like Ohio, allow for a state tax deduction on the first $2,000. It's a no brainer! Might as well.

You want to avoid parent loans at all costs so these simple cash flow funding tips can fill the gaps.

5) Use tax credits but don't double dip. The American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) equals 100% of a student's first $2,000 in qualified education expenses plus 25% of the next $2,000 for a possible total credit on your taxes of $2,500. This total credit applies per student for up to four years of undergrad.

To claim the full credit, your MAGI, modified adjusted gross income must be $80,000 or less ($160,000 or less for married filing jointly). You receive a reduced amount of the credit if your MAGI is over $80,000 but less than $90,000 (over $160,000 but less than $180,000 for married filing jointly). You cannot claim the credit if your MAGI is over $90,000 ($180,000 for joint filers).

You cannot claim qualified education expenses under the AOTC using investment growth from your 529 savings or Coverdell Education Savings Account. The exact details can be tricky so always consult a tax professional for advice. To make it simple, the best idea is to use non-529 money for AOTC qualified expenses.

If your income is below the phase out limits, you should spend $4,000 of your own money (if you can) on qualified expenses to take advantage of the $2,500 tax credit each year.

So, you made it…you're sending your student off to college. Remember to stay on top of those deadlines, know who you want to pay, understand how to take advantage of federal student loans and cash flow/payment plans, and don't forget those tax credits. Carefully planning all four years and how you are going to pay for them can give you the financial edge. ■

Primary considerations in developing your special needs financial plan

A well thought out plan will provide a roadmap for the future care of your child with a disability. This article addresses key issues that should be considered as the formal plan is developed. Primary issues that need to be considered in establishing your special needs plan include:

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How independent will your child with a disability be? Will your child likely need constant or limited supervision? Will your child be able to live with roommates or will he or she be better suited to living by themselves in the family home?

What kind of public assistance will be available to your child? Your child will likely qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and some Medicaid assistance. He or she may qualify for Social Security Disability (SSDI) if the family has Social Security earnings. Understanding how to maximize and protect this assistance should be an integral part of the special needs

How much additional assistance would you like to provide your child on an annual basis? Hopefully, between Medicaid, Social Security and any work earnings of your adult child will cover most of the basic living costs; however, funds will be needed to cover gaps in expenses not covered and for extras, like entertainment and travel. Your plan will want to estimate in aggregate what amount will be needed to fund these expenses over your loved one's lifetime. One popular way to pay for this amount is through a second to die whole life insurance policy.

Who will be looking after you child after your death? Are your estate planning documents in order? At a minimum you should have a will and powers of attorney in place to make necessary financial and health care decisions for your child. Your will establishes how your assets are to be distributed and who will be the guardian for your child. Your plan will name a guardian and/or a trustee to look after the child with a disability and their financial assets.

Do you want any remaining assets set aside for your child with a disability to go to other family members after the child's death? Unless specific provisions are made to do so, your child's assets will go to Medicaid to pay for services rendered. If there are substantial assets at stake, the family will want to consider setting up a third party special needs trust (SNT). With a third party SNT, assets in the trust don't count against the child's eligibility and will remain in the trust for the benefit of other family members after the child's death.

These are some of the important questions that need to be addressed in establishing a special needs financial plan for your child. It is more important to get started with your plan than having all the answers. You may not know, for example, how independent your child will be when they reach adult hood. For many of these unknowns, making an educated guess is sufficient. Your plan should be updated at least once every three to five years to adjust for new information that relates to these questions. Simply having a plan in place, even with educated guesses and gaps in funding, will give you a greater peace of mind about your loved one's future.

To sign up for free monthly Disability Insights articles please email barry@cmpfinancial.com. ■

What's the Difference Between Leasing and Buying a Car?

Clients often ask us whether it makes more sense to buy their next car or just lease it? The answer depends on how you plan to use the car. Here are the major differences between buying and leasing a car:

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Leasing is simply a different form of financing. For example, if you want to buy a $30,000 car, and pay $5,000 for the down payment, you will need to finance $25,000. If you lease the same car, you're paying for the vehicle's depreciation during the lease term. In this example, if we assume the residual value is $15,000, you are only financing $10,000 over the lease period.

If you are the type of person that wants to have a newer car every few years, leasing is a great option. But be aware of some restrictions: leases generally limit how many miles you can drive during the life of the lease, typically 12,000 miles per year. If you go over the limit, you will pay a penalty, which adds up quickly. For example, if the contract stipulates $0.20 per mile over the limit, you would pay $1 for every 5 miles in excess of the limit.

Another thing to note with a lease is that you must perform all regularly scheduled maintenance on the vehicle (oil changes, tire rotations, and all recommended manufacturer maintenance). Failure to do so can result in additional fees or termination.

If you tend to drive a car for several years, put thousands of miles on it, and are not concerned about having the newest car, purchasing would be a better option. If you finance the car, you continue to build equity on a monthly basis, and own the car outright at the end of the loan term. If you keep your car for eight to ten years, that could mean no car payments for four to six years – sufficient time to save up for the next car's down payment.

When it comes to buying or leasing, there really is no one-size-fits-all solution. Many considerations need to be evaluated, and of course, cash flow and credit score will impact the final decision. If you are thinking about whether to lease or buy your next car, please contact one of our Certified Financial Planners® to see what is best for you. ■

	Buying	Leasing
Ownership	You own the vehicle and may keep it for as long as you want.	You do not own the car. You must return it when the lease is over unless you decide to buy the vehicle.
Monthly Payments	Monthly payments are typically higher because you are paying off the entire purchase price.	Payments are typically lower because you're paying only for the car's depreciation during the lease term. As long as you are leasing, there will always be car payments.
Mileage	Miles are not tracked and you may rack up as many miles as you please; however, higher miles typically mean lower trade-in sale.	Miles are tracked and you will pay a fee at the end of the lease if you exceed the mileage limit (typically 12k-15k miles per year.)
Customizing	You are free to make any customizations you see fit.	The leased car must be returned in its original condition, so any modifications must be removed before its returned or you will pay a fee to have it removed.
Excessive Wear & Tear	The car's value depreciates as soon as you drive it off the lot. You are free to use the car as you please, but excessive wear will lower the car's value when it's sold.	You are responsible for returning the car in precise condition or you will pay a fee if it is not in an acceptable condition.
End of Term	Once the car loan is repaid, you are free of future payments and you will have built equity on the car to help pay for the next vehicle.	The car must be returned and you will have to pay fees if you broke the lease. You may purchase the leased car or lease a new vehicle.
Vehicle Return	If you want to get a new car, you have to deal with trading it in or selling it on your own.	You return the vehicle at the end of the lease, pay any charges and walk away. You are not responsible for selling the car since you don't own it.

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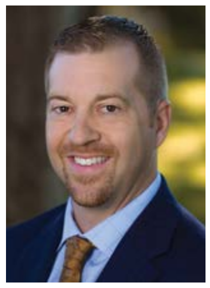

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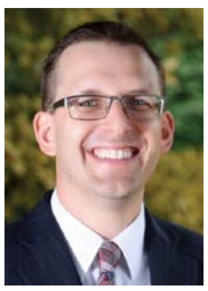

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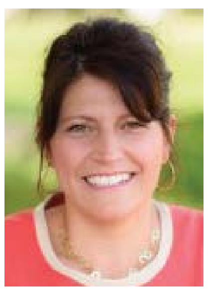

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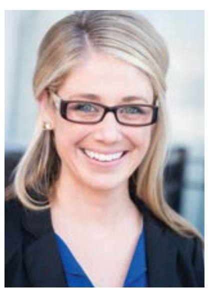

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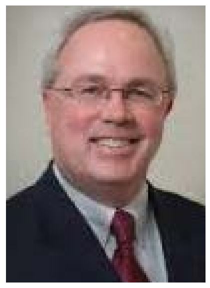

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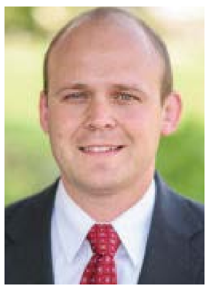

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Reverse Mortgage: What Is It? Is It Right For Me?

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A reverse mortgage is a special type of loan that allows the borrower to access the equity in their home. Unlike a traditional mortgage or home equity line of credit, the loan is not required to be repaid until the borrower no longer uses the home as their principal residence. The most commonly used reverse mortgage is the Home Equity Conversion Mortgage (HECM) offered by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).

Who Qualifies for a Reverse Mortgage?
One would use a reverse mortgage if they need to supplement their income to pay for daily living or medical expenses. In order to qualify for a reverse mortgage, the borrower must be at least 62 years of age. In addition, the home must be debt-free or have an existing mortgage with a very low balance. Finally, the borrower must live in the home as their primary residence, and be able to pay the ongoing real estate taxes and insurance on the property.

What Types of Homes are Eligible for a Reverse Mortgage
Generally, most single-family homes and 2-4 unit homes are eligible for a reverse mortgage, as long as the borrower lives in the home. In addition, manufactured homes and condominiums that are Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved and meet FHA requirements may be eligible.

How Much Money Can I Get out of My Home?
The amount of money that can be withdrawn using a reverse mortgage is based upon age (older is better), the appraised value of the home and the current interest rate.

How Are Payments Received?
The cash may be taken in any of the following ways:

- Lump sum of cash
- Monthly payments for the life of the loan
- Monthly payments for a certain number of years
- Drawn on as a line of credit as needed

Other Considerations
Some other characteristics of a reverse mortgage that should be considered are:

- Interest on the loan is not tax deductible
- There are fees and other expenses associated with the loan, both initially and during the term
- You must still have the funds to pay ongoing property taxes and insurance on the home
- Within six months of the last borrower moving out of the home (or passing away), the loan must be repaid. Note that the debt is non-recourse, i.e., if there is not sufficient equity in the home to repay the loan, the borrower (or heir) is not responsible to make up the difference.

As with any planning strategy, it is important to be aware of both the benefits and risks of its use. Please contact us to see how our Certified Financial Planners™ can help you.

Do Investment Fees Matter?

Matthew Stewart
CFP®,ChFC®
President, Forestview Financial Partners, LLC

After 20 years of being an advisor, I'm still shocked at how many people still don't pay attention to the fees associated with the management of their investments. When I ask how much their current advisor charges, if they don't stare blankly back at me, they usually say something like "Well, I should really know that, but I don't have a clue". Worse, some people not only don't know, but don't care. But should they? If they care about securing a stronger financial future for themselves and their loved ones, then the answer is a resounding yes.

Many industry experts argue that cost is the strongest determining factor affecting an investor's long-term investment returns – even more important than asset allocation, market timing and security selection. Famous investors such as Benjamin Graham, Warren Buffett, Jack Meyer and John Bogle all agree on this point.

There's nothing to argue about, really. It's a fact that the costs incurred while investing reduce investment returns – it's simple subtraction. When it comes to professional investors (investment advisors like me, or mutual fund managers), the greatest hindrance to our long-term performance is the fee we charge. The more an advisor charges for its services, the more difficult it is for them to earn that back for their client and ultimately justify the fee. Consequently, on average, the best investment return performances are earned by those managers who are able and willing to charge less and they use investment vehicles that have no or low "costs to hold". Which is the exact opposite of that old adage "you get what you pay for" that so many marketing slogans are based on.

Look at the stellar performance and success of The Vanguard Group. It's founder, John "Jack" Bogle (who created the world's first index mutual fund in 1975) has said: "The grim irony of investing is that we investors as a group not only don't get what we pay for, we get precisely what we don't pay for. So, if we pay for nothing, we get everything."

To illustrate the significance of even a ½% annual difference over a long period of time, let's take 2 different investors, Jim and Susan. They are both aged 60 and each is retiring with a $2,000,000 nest egg. They need to withdraw $80,000 in the first year and increase this amount by 3% in each subsequent year to account for inflation. They both invest in the same investments at the same time. They are both able to achieve a "gross" average annual return over the next 30 years of 6%, however Jim incurs total costs of 1% per year, and Susan incurs only 0.50% per year. At the end of 30 years, Jim is left with $315,935 to pass on to his heirs, whereas Susan has $1,004,392 to pass on to hers– an increase of 218%!
But don't forget, it's not just the advisor's management fee you should pay attention to, but the costs associated with trading and holding the investments in your portfolio. There are other "costs" that investors face, such as taxes on investments as well as investor behavior (i.e. making dumb mistakes), but that is outside the scope of this article.

Here are three rules to follow to be a more successful investor: 1) Get and stay diversified over a lot of different asset classes; 2) Keep your "all-in" fees as low as possible. This will be easier to do if you are a "do it yourself investor". But, if you need help and want to hire a professional advisor, you owe it to yourself to make sure that advisor adheres to this philosophy and their fee structure reflects that; and 3) Invest for the long-term. If you need the money back in just a couple of years or less, keep it in cash.

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What is financial planning and why does it matter?

Ben Murray
FPA of Central Ohio President-elect
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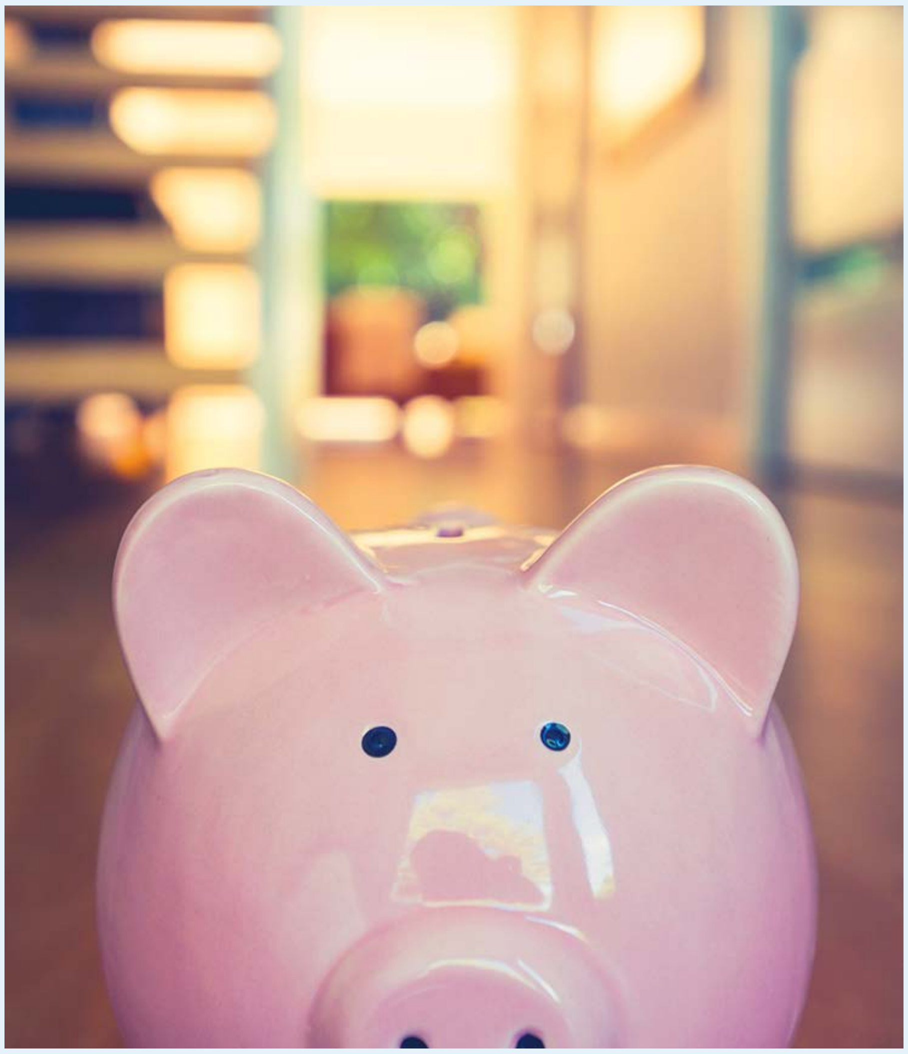
When you hear the phrase "financial planning", you may think primarily of investing – and the media would certainly have you believe your decisions relative to the stock market are the most important aspect of your financial wellbeing. Financial planning, however, does not exist for the sole purpose of providing investment advice. Rather, financial planning is a comprehensive process which has been formally defined by the CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ Board of Standards and is practiced daily by hundreds of thousands of professionals around the world. It's a means to an end, used by planners working to improve their clients' lives and aimed at identifying and then crafting steps to help them achieve their unique goals.

Broadly defined, financial planning is the coordinated management of issues impacting your financial future, including investments, insurance, taxes, estate planning, employee benefits, retirement, and education savings. It includes an assessment of your current financial situation, discussions about your short and long-term goals, and suggested actions designed to move you towards those goals. The formal process begins with the establishment of a relationship, proceeds into the gathering of data, and is then followed by the analysis and evaluation of alternatives, prior to the development, implementation, and monitoring of the recommendations. Naturally, the execution of these steps will vary from one provider to the next, but without question, they form the foundation for building a successful partnership.

Whether you're looking to work your way out of debt, save for a home or college, navigate towards your new normal in retirement, or just make sure you're financially on the right track wherever you happen to be in life, financial planners have the education and experience necessary to answer your questions. If you've ever wondered about these topics, then you should consider meeting with a planner for a discussion. There's plenty out there who are happy to help.



Measuring the Value of a Financial Advisor

While the majority of financial advisors deliver an honest, necessary, and valuable service to their clients, institutions like Lehman Brothers and criminals like Bernie Madoff have unfortunately tainted the reputations of many associated with the financial services industry. For some, this has created a guilty-until-proven-innocent picture of advisors, making it difficult to build the trust essential for relationships to flourish and challenging to communicate the value of the services provided.

While it can be tough to quantify the value of working with a financial advisor (setting investment performance aside), the worth of a well-coordinated strategy encompassing cash flow, investments, insurance, taxes, and estate planning not only provides broad peace of mind that your financial house is in order, but, more specifically, can produce greater tax efficiencies, more disciplined investing behavior, optimal insurance coverage, and improved estate plans. Each of these, in turn, can result in more money in your pocket to increase your long-term financial security.

Adding to the discussion on the value delivered by advisors, Mitch Anthony, a well-known industry speaker, author, and planner, outlines six key value propositions that financial advisors provide: Organization, Accountability, Objectivity, Proactivity, Education, and Partnership.

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Expanding on just a few of Anthony's value propositions, have you ever stopped to wonder how your financial life would be today if you had behaved differently in 2008? Depending on your actions at the time, it's possible that following a clearly defined strategy designed by an objective advisor who held you accountable might have changed things a bit. Additionally, have you ever been curious if you could benefit from coordinating your investments, insurance, tax, and estate planning? Comprehensive financial advisors help design a customized strategy and collaborate with experts in related fields, including insurance agents, accountants, attorneys, and others, to help ensure each aspect of a client's financial life aligns with their goals.

Much like working with a personal trainer or music teacher, the benefits of hiring a financial advisor become more apparent over time. The small changes along the way, however difficult to measure or define, can compound, and truly make a meaningful difference for clients and their families. ■

4 Simple Tips To Improve Your Financial Literacy

The Center for Financial Literacy at Champlain College recently published its 2016 National Report Card on Adult Financial Literacy, and the results indicate there is much room for improvement. 59 state-specific data points were used from 18 recognized organizations to formulate a report card grade for each state. Unfortunately, no state received a grade of A+ or A. Only 22 states received a grade of B- or better.

Everyday we make financial decisions, which impact us and our families. Yet, do we possess the requisite skills to make such decisions? The 2016 National Report card on Adult Financial Literacy suggests many individuals need to make significant progress.

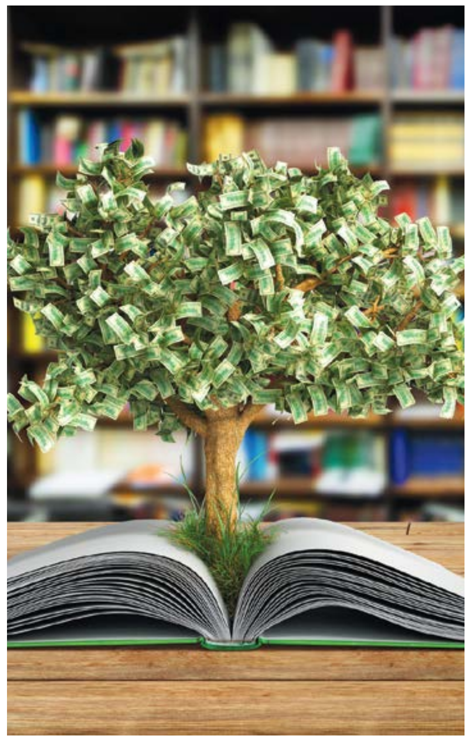
The knowledge and skills attained through financial literacy help limit poor financial decisions and assist in alleviating difficult financial circumstances. It is necessary for individuals to obtain such skills in order to best position themselves and their family for financial success. Financial literacy is more than merely balancing a checkbook. It is the comprehension of how today's decision will impact long-term goals.

Donald Laackman, President of Champlain College, says financial literacy is an urgent need for people of all ages, economic situations and backgrounds to better understand how to manage their money and develop lifelong habits necessary for a healthy financial life.

Here are 4 simple, yet effective tips to immediately improve your financial literacy:

Review & Understand Financial Statements
When your statements (e.g., bank, investments, pensions, mortgage, credit card, etc.) arrive in your mail, do you quickly glance at it and discard? Instead, challenge yourself to review your statements and test your understanding. You should be able to articulate what is being reported and understand the acronyms.

Know Your Cash Flow Needs
Many of us can recall our annual salary off the top of our head; however, our household budgets usually operate in shorter frequency (e.g., quarterly, monthly, etc.) Many tend to construct their budget based on their gross salary. These factors often led to misunderstandings of cash flow. Are you aware of your available cash flow after taxes and savings? If not, it is necessary to familiarize yourself with cash inflows and outflows. Additionally, a firm grasp of expenses is critical – one should know the amount money is needed to operate the household.



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Are You Maximizing Employer Benefits?
Employer benefits are an important component to our compensation package. But have you thoroughly reviewed them since you first accepted your job? Benefit offerings do change, and as your career continues to develop more benefits may become available to you. Also, keep in mind your personal circumstances may have changed since the last time you made decisions. Often employer benefits are under utilized and need to be routinely reviewed.

Rely On Your Advisors
The professional advisors you depend on should be your advocate. As such, they should welcome questions and the opportunity to help you improve your financial literacy. If they are not inclined to help, then maybe it is time to find a replacement. Advisors recognize a more financially literate client can lead to more impactful discussions. If you are only leveraging your advisor to improve your circumstances and not your knowledge, you should make it a priority.

The world of finance is becoming more complex by the day. While you may never become expert, you can strengthen knowledge and skills. Like other aspects of our lives, those who experience the most success have the discipline to turn knowledge into action. ■

Do I Need An Ethical Will?

Assuming you have recently reviewed your estate documents with your attorney and family, is there anything else you can do to ensure you have adequately planned for the transfer of your assets? How about your non-material assets? Perhaps those lessons in life that you want to share with your yet-to-be born grandchildren?

The ethical will is a non-binding non-legal document that can be prepared by anyone that can be shared at your death with whomever you select. Many people choose to share their ethical wills while they are alive. There is no universal format for such a document which can either be written or videotaped.

The origin of the ethical will can be traced to the Bible where often it was communicated as an oral tradition when death was imminent. Today, many parents write an ethical will to be shared with their children in the event they are not there when the child graduates from college, marries or begins a family. Think of it as a way to impart

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life's lessons in case you are not around to share them in person. This can be especially relevant for a grandparent who may not be there when the grandchild experiences these moments.

You don't have to wait until you are in your 90's to begin writing an ethical will. In fact, waiting until are older will likely mean you will never get around to it or suffer a malady that makes you incapable of completing the task. You can write an ethical will anytime but many people find it more natural to create their first version around a life event such as a birth, confirmation, high school graduation, wedding, health scare or death of a loved one.

Columbus based Vistage Chair and Executive Coach Artie Isaac recommends beginning an ethical will by first imagining what questions you would ask a deceased relative that you never had the chance to meet in person. Make a list of those questions and then start answering those questions yourself. Examples might include, "What was your typical day like?" or "What was the greatest challenge you had to overcome?".

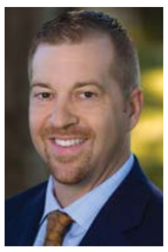
Since writing an ethical will is such a heavy subject and not everyone is a natural writer, there are many resources available on the internet or at book stores to assist you in this effort. A couple books I recommend are "Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper" by Barry Baines and "So That Your Values Live On" by Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampfer.

The Baines book contains many suggestions for writing an ethical will and can also be ordered with a workbook to get you started with the process. The Riemer and Stampfer book contains a treasure trove of over a 100 ethical wills from the 18th century to today. This book will appeal to those who have an appreciation for the historical aspect of the ethical will. ■

Planning for your Retirement Right out of College

Imagine you just finished college and have a job lined up, but no one to help tell you what to do with your first paycheck. Orientation may be an hour or a day and then you have a boss telling you what to do, so you focus on what is good for the company but forget about yourself and the money you will work hard to earn. Ninety days later you get an email notification about signing up for the 401(k) plan that you heard is important but do not understand it. You get back to work and forget about the email until you are forced to wait six more months to sign up. Then it becomes three years before you actually sign up but have no idea how to choose your investments, so you ask a co-worker and do what they did. Ten years later, you realize you were too conservative based on your age and you didn't earn much, but you saved money and that was better than nothing. Imagine if you started the first day you were eligible and earned a better rate of return. Time is money and you can't get it back.

This is a common problem for most 401(k) plans; lack of education for employees. It is a nice benefit to offer but if very few understand or know who to talk to for help, it is not used properly. There are responsibilities for the owner to offer education to those participants or a good resource to answer questions who is licensed and understands what they are talking about to help those. Imagine how many employees would thank you years from now when they retire if they truly took full advantage of the financial education and benefits of what you offer as an owner with a 401(k) plan. There are owners that strive for this satisfaction and



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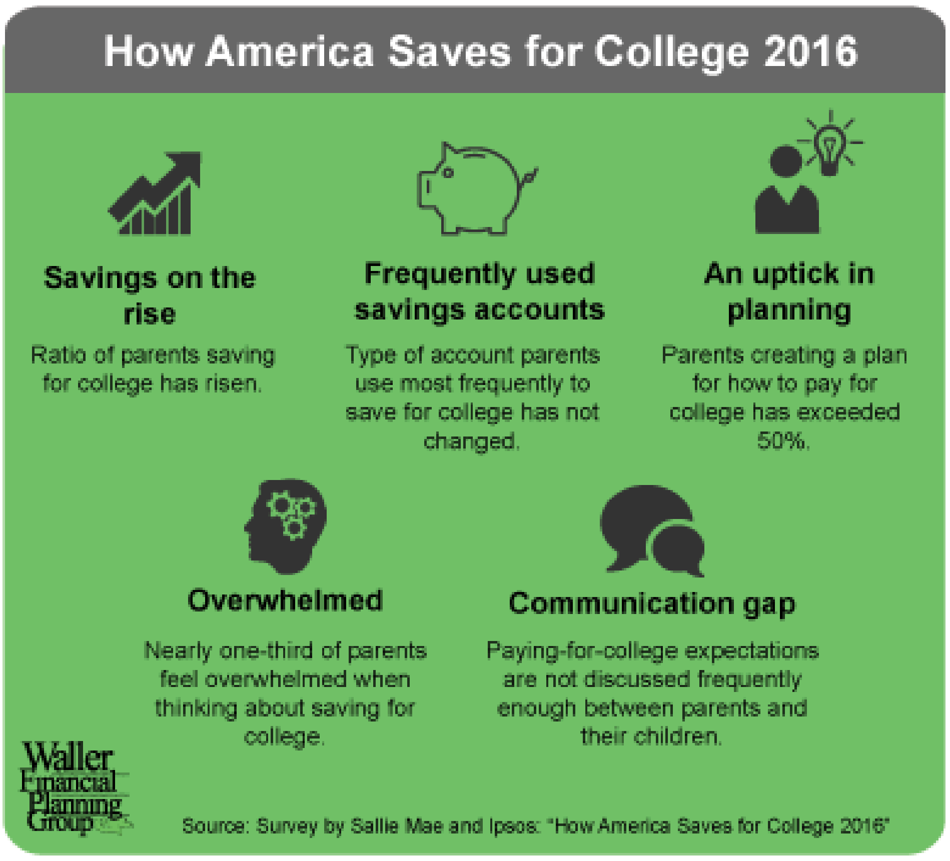
their employees work harder because of less stress about money. Employees are more motivated when there is potential for a profit sharing within the company if they do well.

General financial education is starting in some schools but the most important time to learn it is when you start having a real paycheck and other bills so you are making the right decisions early in life and not stuck starting over with twenty years until you want to retire. Many people will live as long in retirement as they did years working. The easiest way to make sure you do not run out of money after retirement is to have enough before you stop working. Seek help and start planning early to allow flexibility in your future plans for various life changes during and after your career. ■



The City of Columbus and the Financial Planning Association of Central Ohio support the community with our pro-bono work in support of **Columbus Financial Planning Day.**

Date: October 4, 2017
Time: 3:00pm – 7:00pm
Place: Columbus State Conference Center

For more information or to register, see:
http://financialplanningdays.org/event/columbus-financial-planning-day