



MAKING CENTS

SET FINANCIAL GOALS NOW FOR FUTURE

-John P. Napolitano, CFP®, CPA, PFS, MST, RLP®



It is commonly said in the financial planning world that if you don't know where you want to go, any road will do.

In the past we've addressed budget creation, retirement preparation and have touched on the importance of what I call "life planning." What I hear from some readers is that they understand clearly the need to prepare for the future through employer-sponsored retirement programs, money markets, investments, wills, insurance, etc. but have some difficulty in establishing what their financial goals are.

Inasmuch as financial goals are as individual as fingerprints, you need to have an honest talk with yourself to identify both short- and long-term objectives. Maybe it's being able to send your kids off to college without having to resort to eating packaged macaroni and cheese for four years. Or it could be paying off debts, buying a different house or taking early retirement, whatever mix of financial goals are yours, get them down on paper in complete sentences.

While that sounds easy, it may take you longer than you think to come up with answers that really get you fired up. Next you should look at each goal individually and decide where it fits into your life plan. You'll

probably find there are a couple that are short-term, say less than a couple of years, and others that are five-year-plus long-term objectives, and several that fall in between.

Regardless of when you want to these reach goals, you will need to do more than merely hope for the best. Self-education and good advice from a qualified professional planner are your two best tools to achieving these

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aims. A professional can help guide you through the many options available for financial self-control and growth, but you should take some responsibility by participating in all financial deci-

sions and genuinely understand the hows and whys of the many options available to help accomplish your goals.

Once you have a plan in place, do not think that your work is done. Keep a close eye on your progress and an open mind about changes to your short-and long-term financial plans. Like the bumper sticker says, stuff happens, and you will almost always need to modify or change even the most solid of plans. You may find you need more time to fulfill some of those goals or that some of today's goals are suddenly not important to you anymore.

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