

Wealth Watch

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Education Still Worth the Cost

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The cost of higher education is high and going higher. Some parents and students wonder whether it's worth the price. The U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that it is.

Workers who hold at least an associate degree will earn more each year in their working lifetime. In 2004, the median income for a worker without a high school diploma or GED was \$23,176. Those with a high school diploma earned \$31,875.

Workers with a bachelor's degree netted \$50,394, while those with a master's degree earned an average of \$60,514.

Income potential is higher for those who earn an associate degree (\$38,597) than for those who pursue a four-year degree but don't graduate (\$36,381).

Raising Parents - Raising Kids

by Mary Grace Musuneggi, CLU, ChFC, CFS, RFC

Have you ever noticed that in a family of five brothers and one sister, that when the time comes to be the caretaker for mom and dad, the most likely choice will be the sister? It really doesn't matter if she is a single parent with three children of her own, has a full-time job, and that she baby-sits her youngest brother's children on the weekends, when he has to work. And if the sister is by chance single, with no children, then she is the ultimate choice. (After all, she "doesn't really have anything going on in her life anyway.")

Now in all fairness to our male counterparts, and because sometimes tradition dictates, the caregiver can be the eldest sibling, just by nature of the birth order; or the youngest, as he or she was the last to leave home and so has a closer relationship with the parents.

Living out of state, or already taking care of your elderly in-laws, usually takes one out of the running. But being the only child means you are "it" no matter how, no matter what, no matter where.

And yet I am grateful that personally I know of no children who wouldn't willingly want to care for their parents if the time and need arose. A way of saying "thank you" for all the parents have done for the children. A way of giving back. The hope that when their time comes, that someone will be there to take care of them.

But "willing" is not always "able." And when the time comes, it is one awesome task. There are financial, ethical and sometimes even, legal and moral dilemmas that arise. Decisions to be made.

Tack on to this, if someone is part of the "sandwich generation," that person is trying to care for the parents, put the kids through college, plan for your retirement, and somehow pursue what dreams he or she may have for your own life.

So where does one begin? If you are raising children, you need to begin by starting early to take care of your children's education. The sooner you have made plans financially, the more secure this will be if the time comes to take on the role of raising parents. And as a parent, do your children the favor of planning well for your later years. Save for retirement; do your estate planning; pre-plan funeral arrangements; get a living will and other documents, to make the process of taking care of you an easier one. One of the greatest gifts I received from my mother was her making all her final arrangements long before it was needed, so that the day she passed away, our family had nothing to do, but deal with our loss and share great memories.

If you are raising parents, keep the lines of communication open. Know what planning they have done so far. Get an understanding of their finances; meet with an elder law attorney. Understand your rights as the caretaker, but more importantly, your obligations. Spend time with a family counselor or a life coach, to learn techniques for balancing all the roles you have to play.

Whether we are male or female, first-born or last, our life's journey, involves many paths, each with its own destination. Getting help along the way makes these paths easier to travel.

The Emotion of Financial Choices

by **Patty Kreamer, Certified Professional Organizer**

Do you:

- **Fear missing out on a sale?**
- **Hate to let a coupon expire?**
- **Compete with others in possession comparison?**
- **Experience joy upon purchasing something new?**
- **Turn jealous when someone else has a new purchase?**
- **Find yourself in debt and struggling with finances every day?**

For most people, money and finances are more difficult to talk about than sex. Let the record reflect that I am neither a financial planner nor a sex therapist, but I am what you might call frugal (not to be confused with cheap).

How do you view money? Do you see it as something to spend? If so, read this carefully: Money is NOT to be spent; money is to be managed. Of course you spend it, but before you do, you need to be sure that you are allocating it for items that will bring joy to your life, not misery.

Financial woes are often the result of living beyond your means. In other words, you spend more than you make. Often, financial choices are based on the need for instant gratification, which really boils down to an impulse, not a conscious choice. Typically, there is little or no thought given to the future consequences of instant gratification, such as huge credit card balances and unsecured debt.

Sadly, retailers rely on this weakness. Rarely do we have to wait to buy anything since retailers are so accommodating with instant credit at zero percent interest for three years. The temptations are hard to resist, but you must.

Financial choices are prime candidates for the NEED vs. WANT filter. If you "pause" long enough to run financial decisions through this filter, you will soon realize that you don't really want all of the irritants that come with the purchase. Sure, buying new stuff is exciting and liberating; but then you have to live with it, maintain it, pay for it, and stress over it for the next decade. Is that what you really want?

Emotions play a key role in financial choices. Fear surfaces at the thought of missing out on a sale or letting a coupon expire. Competition flares when you compare your possessions with those of your family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. Joy kicks in when you think of acquiring something new. Jealousy sparks when you see someone with something you wish you had. These are powerful emotions, to say the least.

Logic must be engaged when it comes to finances. You can't let your emotions run away with your money. If you do, you will soon find yourself deep in debt.

Financial freedom can be the cornerstone of simplifying your life. Without the burden of financial worries, you can soar!

"Takin' Care of Business" Small Business Owners Luncheon Series

The "Takin' Care of Business" Small Business Owners Luncheon Series is designed to educate small business owners, or those who want to own a business, on a variety of important subjects. In the past, there have been discussions on office organization, marketing strategies, benefits programs, and much more.

Our Upcoming Events include:

"Business Planning for 2009"

*Presented by Barbara Schwarck PCC, CPCC, MPIA, MSP
President & CEO, Clear Intentions, Inc.*

September 4, 2008

"Business Planning for 2009" will yield your best crop ever by allowing you to establish exactly what goals you will accomplish in 2009.

"Millionaire Mind Mentality"

Presented by Alexa Nayman, President of Sandler Training

October 2, 2008

Tired of not getting in front of enough qualified prospects? Frustrated because you're networking, making cold calls and marketing yourself, but not getting anywhere? Sick of feeling like you're not reaching your fullest potential? Come learn how to take your business to the next level.

"We Have to Stop Meeting Like This"

Presented by Patty Kreamer, President of Kreamer Connect,

November 6, 2008

Are you tired of meeting after meeting and feeling like nothing is accomplished? The cost of meeting is astronomical, and it seriously impacts the bottom line - not arriving on time; people not showing up at all; meetings not starting on time; not ending on time; meetings that are boring where nothing is resolved and there is no follow through.

To make meetings more effective and worthwhile, this program is a must! (A one-hour program that starts and ends on time)

Each of these events takes place at the Single Steps Strategies Conference Center (1738 North Highland Road, Ste. G-102) from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The fee of \$20 (in advance) or \$25 (at the door) includes a delicious lunch provided by Linguini's Italian Grill. For more information or to register, log onto www.singlestepsstrategies.com or call 412-833-2888 x 5