PERSPECTIVES

SPRING 2017 EDITION

DECLUTTER YOUR DEBT

Ways to Reduce Your Liabilities in 2017

TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT YOUR GOALS

Top 5 House Items To **REFRESH FOR SPRING**

Easy Gardening Tips *to Make Your Yard Pop*

PLATINUM
TAX & WEALTH MANAGEMENT

Spring Welcome

Dear Client,

Spring is budding and bringing new life, fresh flowers, and the return of longer days.

The common trend for this time of year is spring-cleaning, which isn't necessarily fun, but is an essential way to remove clutter and bring in fresh air.

As you prepare for the emerging season, I am happy to share this newsletter with you, and I hope it offers insights that can help you declutter various aspects of your life. On the financial side, we provide guidance for addressing debt-reduction strategies and taking a fresh look at your goals. On the lifestyle side, we share tips for making your yard pop this spring. We will also discuss how to easily brighten and spruce up your home for the season.

No matter how you approach spring-cleaning in your personal or financial life, everyone at Platinum Tax and Wealth Management is ready to help you make the most of your goals and opportunities. If you would like to discuss any topics you read about in the newsletter, I am happy to talk. Until then, I hope you embrace the season with renewed clarity and focus for 2017 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Jeremy and Cindy Matranga

Jeremy M. Matranga, RFC
President & CEO

Cindy D. Matranga
Vice President of Operations

SUDOKU

	2		5	7	3	1		
		7					2	
6	4	1	2					7
	7			3				
						8		5
3					6	2		9
	1			8	7		4	
					2			
				1				3

SUDOKU

Sudoku or "single number" is a logic-based, number-placement puzzle. The objective is to fill a 9×9 grid with digits so that each column, each row, and each of the nine 3×3 sub-grids that compose the grid (boxes) contains all of the digits from 1 to 9 once.

6					9		4	5
	7		5	2				
	3							
	2					4	7	
		4	8		6			
5								8
	9	7		8	3	5		
			7		5		2	3
8			1	6	2			

Declutter YOUR DEBT

Ways to Reduce Your Liabilities in 2017

Debt in America is a real issue facing most people today. To date, 70% of Americans carry a debt burden. That means the vast majority of individuals are trying to navigate a tricky balancing act of financial wellness.[1] To help you get ahead in your financial life in 2017, and to set you on a path toward the prosperity you desire, take the time to look closely at your own liabilities.

30%

OF AMERICANS WITH DEBT HAVE NO PLAN FOR PAYING IT OFF.[2]

From analyzing your budget to addressing your credit card interest rates, you have a variety of approaches to help minimize your debt. Here are some key ways you can declutter your debt this spring and move closer to financial freedom.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOKS

Assess Your Budget

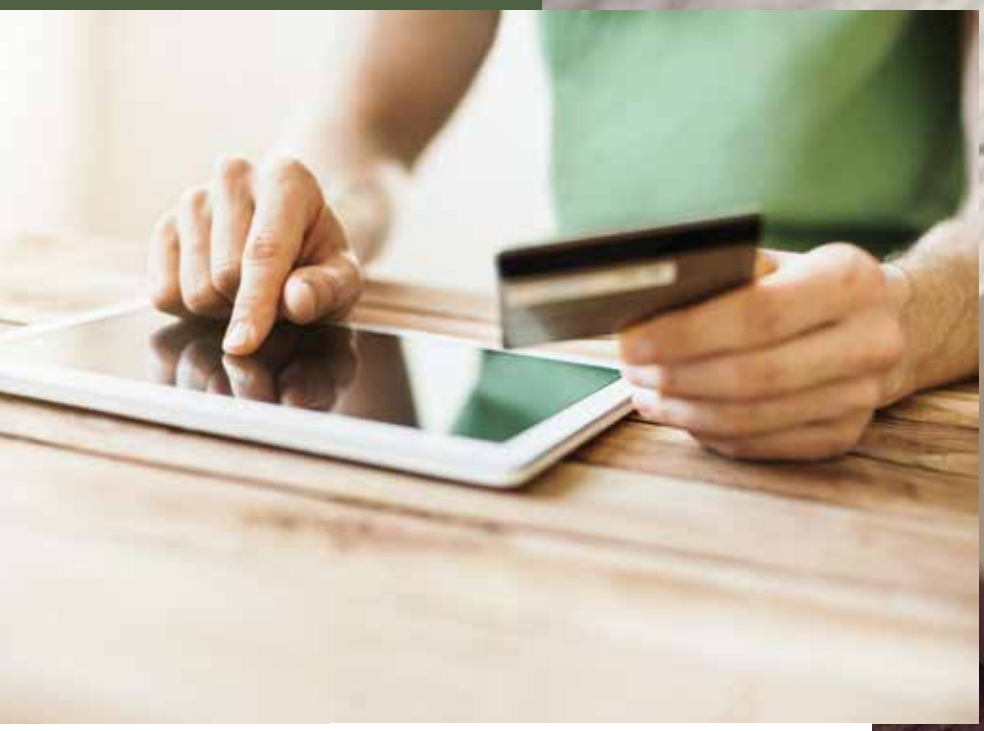
Creating a household budget is a great place to start when working to reduce your debt. Unfortunately, many Americans overlook this essential planning item. In fact, only 41% of Americans use a budget to manage their financial lives.[3] Without knowing how much you are spending versus how much money you are generating, you are left making blind financial decisions.

Your budget will help you gain a realistic perspective about every financial responsibility you have (such as mortgage payments) against all the money you bring in (such as rental income). Once you itemize every incoming and outgoing dollar, you might be surprised to find hidden expenses you did not realize were holding you back. This clear view of your financial obligations will help put you on the track toward creating short- and long-term, goal-based strategies. You will want to revisit your budget at least annually to keep a realistic outlook on your financial profile.

Create Forward-Looking Financial Strategies

Similar to creating a budget, developing your personalized financial strategies is a critical way to create and maintain financial wellness—and your plan should complement your budget. Yet most Americans don't even have a plan in place. According to a study by Financial Engines, 52% of middle-income earners and 44% of high-income earners have no financial plan.[4] For low-income earners, the number of Americans without a plan increases to 68% with no plan. As a result, many Americans have no financial structure for meeting their short- and long-term goals.

With customized financial strategies, you will be able to address your debt by constructing a clear picture of your various financial needs—and the specific actions you need to take to address them. Start by identifying all the life goals you hope to achieve, such as traveling the world in retirement and sending your children to college debt free. You'll then identify how your budget fits into your financial strategies. You will also prioritize your goals and financial decisions based on their respective importance, among other things. With this strategic road map in place, you can make healthier financial decisions that support your debt-reduction goals without sacrificing other priorities you care about.



CREDIT CARDS

Increase Your Credit Card Payments

Monthly credit card debt can be a real burden on your financial life, and Americans are holding an increasing amount of credit card debt.[5] Today, the average US credit card holder carries a $5,551 balance—and the average household has a balance of $16,048.[6] By comparison, in 2015, the average adult American between 18 and 65 years old held $4,717 in credit card debt.[7]

When it comes to paying down credit card debt, every extra dollar helps. In fact, an additional $10 per month can shave months off the time you have to pay your balance.[8] While paying off your debt in full is the ultimate way to minimize your obligations, even small increments can help move you closer to becoming debt free.

Transfer Credit Card Balances to 0% Interest

Many credit card companies offer enticing deals to move your debt to their credit cards with 0% interest on the transferred balance. To date, the average credit card interest rate is 18.76%, which can result in some hefty monthly fees.[9] And if you make only the minimum payment each month, you're further spreading your liability.

While no card will offer completely interest-free benefits, taking advantage of a 0% introductory period can help you save money each month—and pay off your credit cards more quickly.

PERSONAL LOANS

Pay Off School Loans

Taking on debt for education is increasingly common in America. In 2016, US student loans totaled $1.4 trillion.[10] And the average student loan debt in 2016 was $37,173—the highest debt yet.[11] Carrying that burden with you throughout your adult life can hamper your ability to build lasting financial stability. Considering that some private school loans can have interest rates of 18% or higher, those debt obligations become even heavier.[12]

To restructure how you're managing this debt, you might want to consider actions such as refinancing your loan to lower your rates. You can also call your provider to ensure your payments are hitting your principal first, rather than the interest. Taking actions today to minimize the time you take to pay your school loan will only help you better create the financial life you desire.

MANAGE YOUR MORTGAGE

For many Americans, owning a home—rather than renting—is a common financial obligation. As a result, mortgage payments comprise a large part of Americans' debt. To date, the average mortgage debt for American households is $172,806.[13] In total, mortgage debt comprises 70% of the country's household debt.[14] So, finding the best ways to manage your mortgage should be a priority.

One route is to focus on paying down your principal by making additional payments, which will help you minimize the amount of total interest you pay.[15] You can also consider refinancing your loan, which could help you generate either a better interest rate or shorter payment terms.[16]

When it comes to your liabilities, remember that every dollar you pay toward debt is a dollar you can't invest in building your wealth. So, reducing your liabilities can be an important tool for pursuing the future you desire. Of course, your unique financial needs and goals will drive what debt reduction strategies work best for you, so be sure to consult with a professional before making any major financial decisions. By starting to address these items today—and working closely with a financial representative to help guide you—you can create a strategy for truly becoming debt free. In return, you will be better prepared to enjoy the life you imagine.

[1] http://finance.yahoo.com/news/thirty-percent-americans-no-plan-120600028.html
[2] http://finance.yahoo.com/news/thirty-percent-americans-no-plan-120600028.html
[3] http://money.cnn.com/2016/10/24/pf/financial-mistake-budget/
[4] https://financialengines.com/~/media/resources/beyond-retirement-advice-financial-engines-2016.pdf "Beyond Retirement Advice." Financial Engines. Accessed February 1, 2017 (PDF)
[5] http://www.cnbc.com/2016/12/13/us-households-now-have-over-16k-in-credit-card-debt.html
[6] http://www.forbes.com/sites/moneybuilder/2017/01/27/this-week-in-credit-card-news-how-2017-credit-card-trends-affect-you-apple-pay-grew-50-last-year/#b33a749586fd
[7] http://time.com/money/4213757/average-american-credit-card-debt/
[8] http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/my-money/articles/2017-01-09/17-ways-to-reduce-credit-card-debt-in-2017
[9] http://www.cnbc.com/2016/12/13/us-households-now-have-over-16k-in-credit-card-debt.html
[10] https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/current/#fn11b
[11] http://www.cbsnews.com/news/congrats-class-of-2016-youre-the-most-indebted-yet/
[12] https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans/federal-vs-private
[13] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-15/average-credit-card-debt-16k-total-debt-133k-where-do-you-fit-in
[14] http://www.nasdaq.com/article/7-surprising-ways-you-could-be-putting-yourself-in-debt-cm668279
[15] http://money.usnews.com/investing/articles/2016-12-30/how-to-pay-off-a-mortgage-early
[16] https://www.capitalone.com/home-loans/learn/mortgage/how-to-pay-off-your-mortgage-early

TAKE A FRESH LOOK AT YOUR Goals

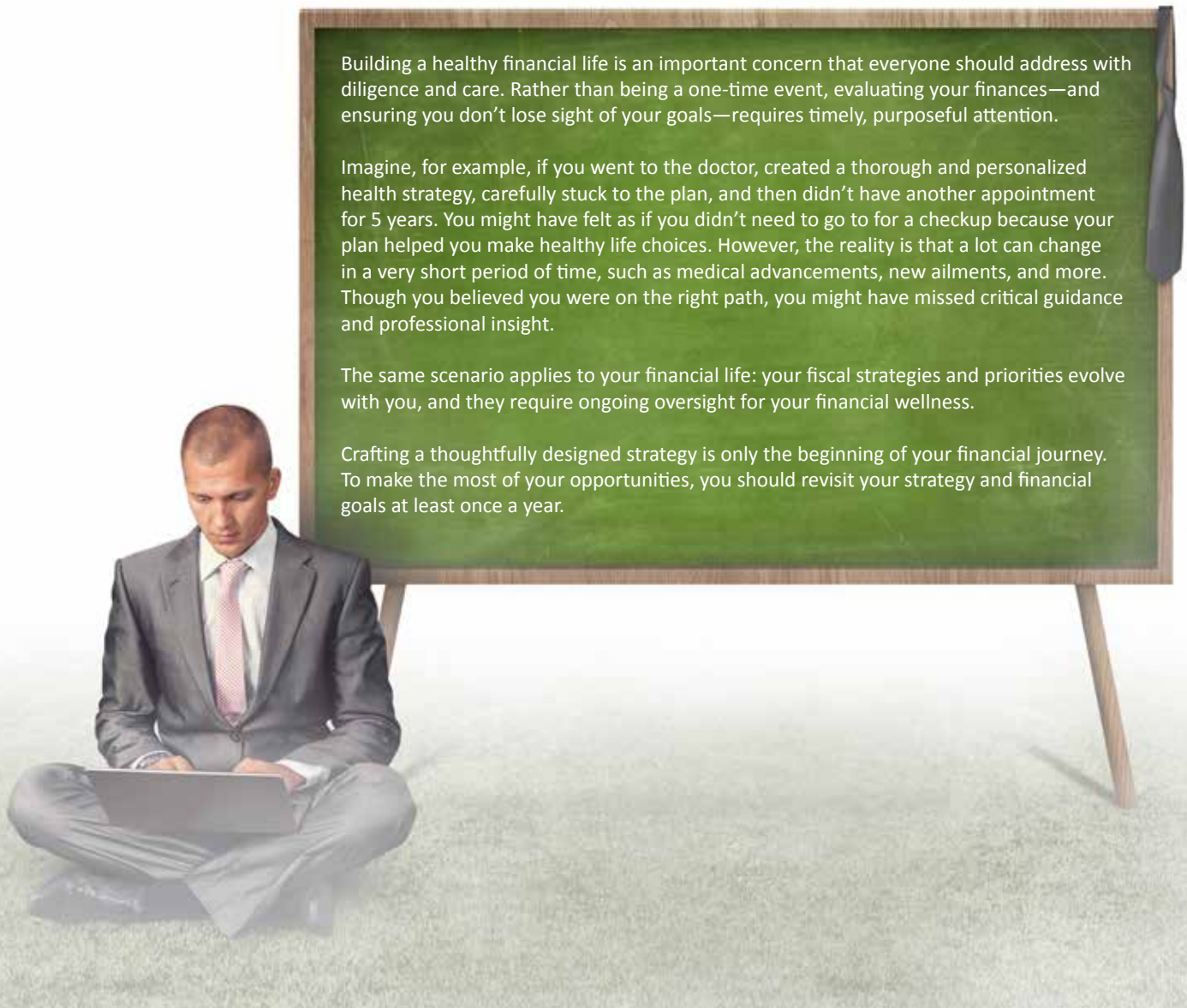
Revisit Your Fiscal and Financial Priorities Each Year

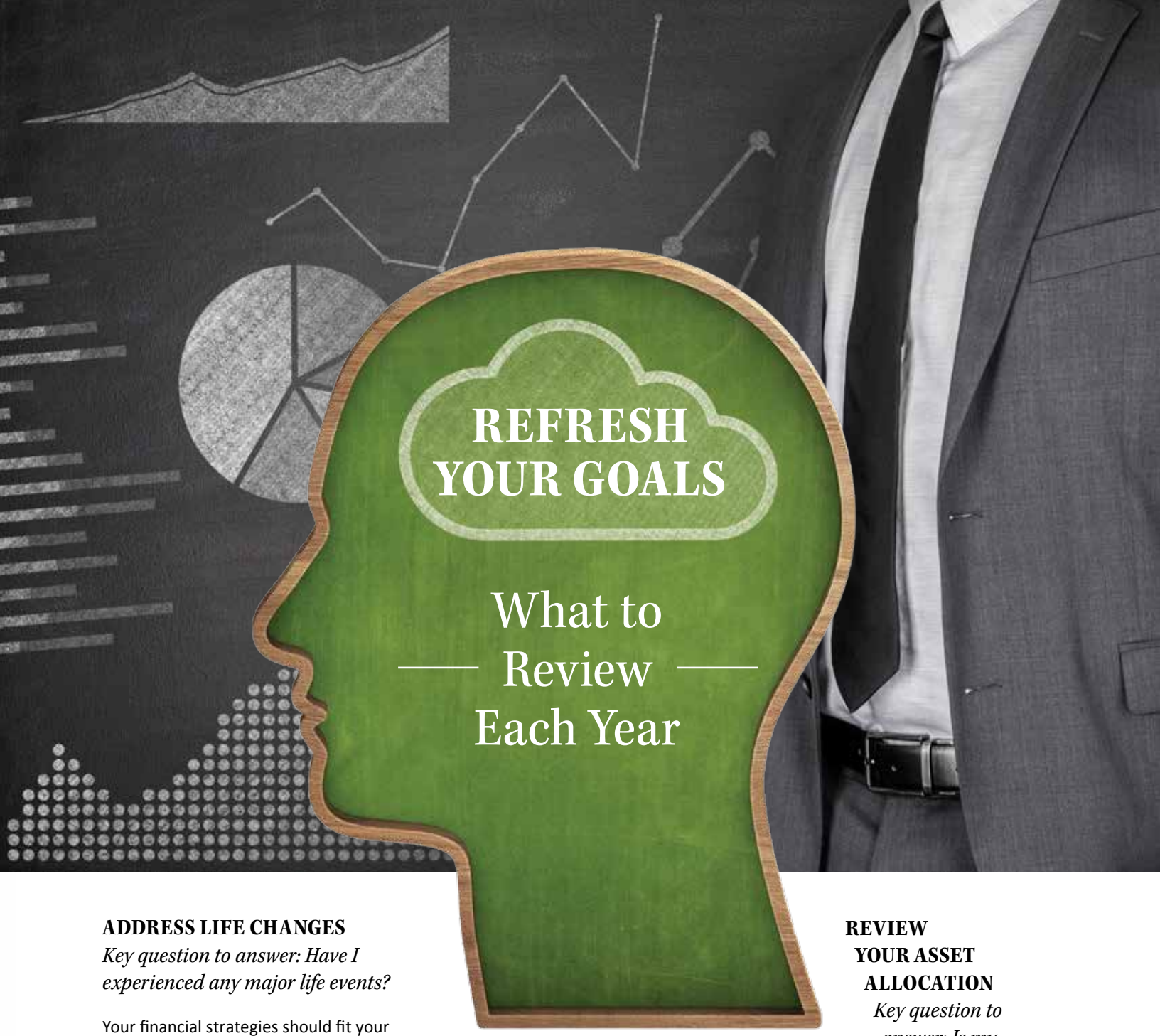
Building a healthy financial life is an important concern that everyone should address with diligence and care. Rather than being a one-time event, evaluating your finances—and ensuring you don't lose sight of your goals—requires timely, purposeful attention.

Imagine, for example, if you went to the doctor, created a thorough and personalized health strategy, carefully stuck to the plan, and then didn't have another appointment for 5 years. You might have felt as if you didn't need to go to for a checkup because your plan helped you make healthy life choices. However, the reality is that a lot can change in a very short period of time, such as medical advancements, new ailments, and more. Though you believed you were on the right path, you might have missed critical guidance and professional insight.

The same scenario applies to your financial life: your fiscal strategies and priorities evolve with you, and they require ongoing oversight for your financial wellness.

Crafting a thoughtfully designed strategy is only the beginning of your financial journey. To make the most of your opportunities, you should revisit your strategy and financial goals at least once a year.





REFRESH YOUR GOALS

What to Review Each Year

ADDRESS LIFE CHANGES

Key question to answer: Have I experienced any major life events?

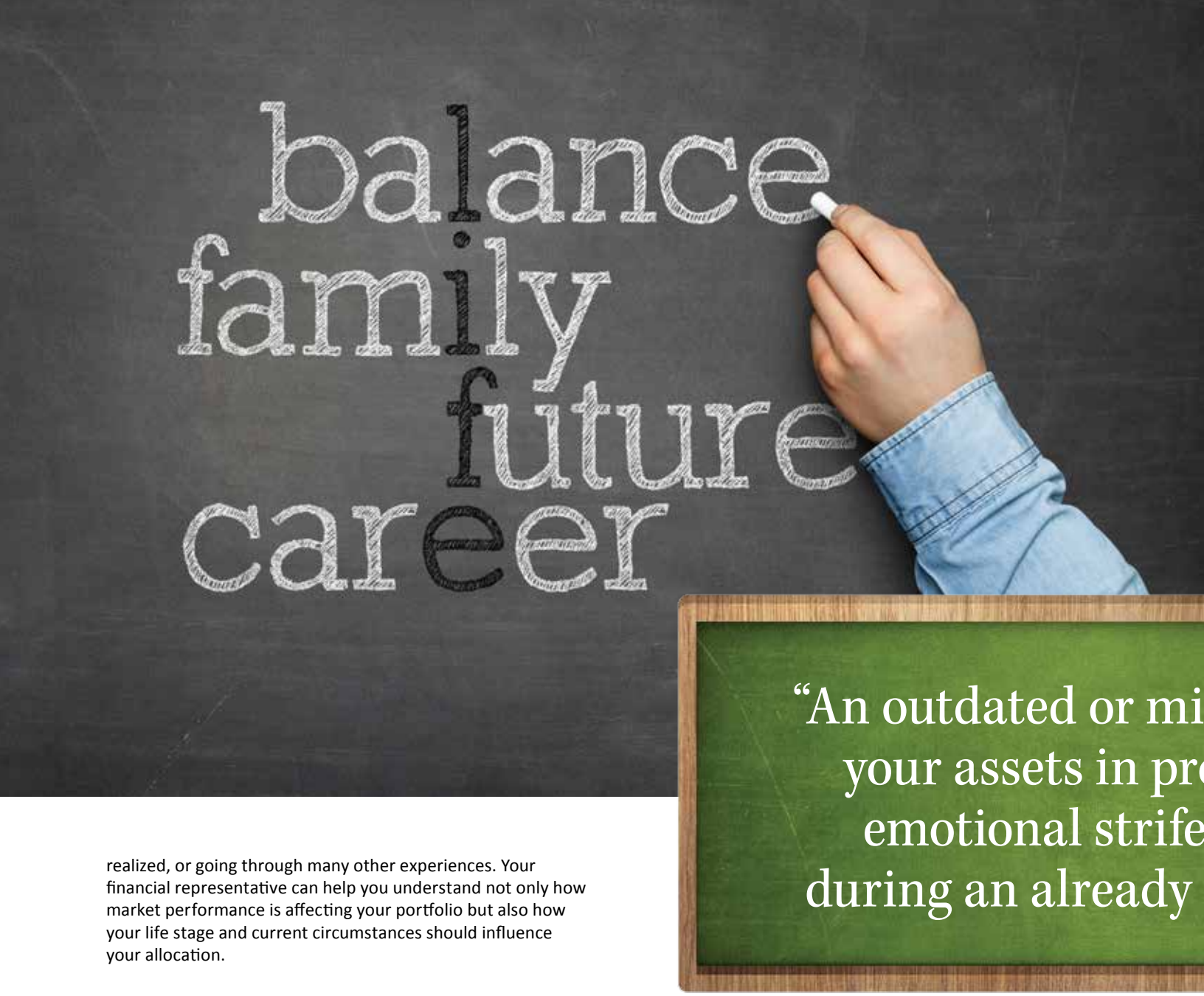
Your financial strategies should fit your life. So, if your life changes, your finances should change, too. Look back on your experiences since you last updated your fiscal strategy, and uncover any life events you have gone through. Common changes include starting a family, getting married or divorced, switching jobs, and buying or selling a home. However, the list can go much deeper and bring additional complexities to address. We recommend you talk to your financial representative about any events or experiences that might affect your financial priorities whenever they occur.

REVIEW YOUR ASSET ALLOCATION

Key question to answer: Is my portfolio correctly diversified to pursue my goals?

A diversified portfolio can help you capture gains when certain asset classes perform well—and protect against losses when others miss the mark.[1] As your life and the markets change, though, your asset allocation needs to evolve as well. You might be closing in on retirement, exceeding your savings goals, facing employment changes, taking more risk than you

Diversification and asset allocation do not guarantee positive results. Loss, including loss of principal may result.



realized, or going through many other experiences. Your financial representative can help you understand not only how market performance is affecting your portfolio but also how your life stage and current circumstances should influence your allocation.

REVISIT YOUR ESTATE PLAN

Key question to answer: Does my estate plan thoroughly and accurately reflect my wishes?

Creating a clear, airtight estate plan is a powerful gift you can give your family. However, one survey found that 63% of Americans do not have a will at all, and only half of seniors age 65 and older have updated their wills.[2] An outdated or missing will can land your assets in probate and create emotional strife for your family during an already challenging time.[3] Avoid these challenges by revisiting your estate plan once a year to make sure you have clearly shared your wishes, designated your beneficiaries, and protected your assets.

ANALYZE YOUR TAX LIABILITIES

Key question to answer: Have changes to tax laws or personal circumstances affected my tax liabilities?

From deduction limits to income brackets to personal exemptions and beyond, tax laws change regularly.[4]

"An outdated or mi
your assets in pr
emotional strife
during an already

In addition, changes in your life, such as a different income or number of dependents, can affect your tax liabilities. Even the most tax-efficient, financial strategy still needs regular review to ensure it reflects current laws and your evolving life. By keeping up with the changing tax momentum—and revising your strategies as needed—you can help mitigate unnecessary tax liabilities and better preserve your assets.

CHECK YOUR INSURANCE

Key question to answer: Do I have adequate coverage for my current and future needs?

With 5,926 insurance companies in the United States and its territories, choosing the right insurance for your unique life can be a challenging endeavor.[5] However, if you want to gain the benefits insurance can provide—such as passing wealth to future generations or preparing for high health-care costs later in life—you need to review what you own today and what

you need for tomorrow. You will also want to make sure your beneficiaries are up to date and reflect your current financial priorities.

REVIEW YOUR RETIREMENT SAVINGS

Key question to answer: Am I saving enough to comfortably retire when I desire?

Pursuing a satisfying, financially secure retirement is an important goal for many investors. However, staying on track toward that retirement can be hard. In fact, a recent PwC survey found that 28% of employees were saving less for retirement in 2016 than in 2015.[6] When you consider that the average 65-year-old couple who retired in 2016 will spend $260,000 on health care alone, keeping ahead of your retirement savings is critical.[7] Each year, you should review your fiscal strategy and retirement plan to determine if you are positioning yourself for the retirement you desire—or if you need to make adjustments to get back on track.

Just like an annual checkup with your doctor, an annual review of your financial goals, priorities, and strategies is part of a healthy financial life. With this regular review, you'll better keep your financial wellness in check and catch any problems before they become more serious pitfalls. This can help you—no matter what life stage you're in.

ssing will can land
obate and create
for your family
challenging time."

Sources:

[1] http://www.investopedia.com/articles/03/032603.asp

[2] http://www.forbes.com/sites/kateashford/2016/06/30/no-will/#67b4684b5418

[3] http://www.forbes.com/sites/kateashford/2016/06/30/no-will/#67b4684b5418

[4] https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/rp-16-55.pdf; https://taxfoundation.org/2017-tax-brackets

[5] http://www.iii.org/fact-statistic/industry-overview

[6] http://www.pwc.com/us/en/press-releases/2016/pwc-financial-wellness-survey-press-release.html

[7] https://www.fidelity.com/about-fidelity/employer-services/health-care-costs-for-couples-in-retirement-rise

TOP 5 HOUSE ITEMS TO REFRESH for Spring

As winter winds down and new plant life pops up around us, now is the perfect time to rejuvenate the inside of your home. You might have spring-cleaning on your agenda, but a true refresh goes beyond scrubbing. With a few updates to your living spaces, you can reinvigorate your environment, please your senses, and create a more inviting space for everyone.

What to Refresh...

YOUR FRONT DOOR

As the gateway to your home, the front door sets the stage for what visitors will find inside. So, why not make the most of this design canvas? Forget the predictable styles and stuck-in-a-rut decorations that are too easy to copy. Tweaking your door to match your personality and style can create an entrance that wows guests and ups your home's curb appeal.

Ideas to consider:

- Choose a front door style that better matches your home's architecture.
- Repaint your existing door a fun, fresh color.
- Add an attractive storm door to let the light in on sunny days.
- Install new knob hardware, house numbers, and door knocker.

ARTWORK AND PHOTOS

Want to revive a room that's starting to feel boring or stale? Bring in new artwork and photos. Over time, we can easily become so accustomed to our wall hangings that we hardly notice them anymore. With a few updated pictures, though, you'll have different views to engage you. You can even swap out your choices with the seasons.

Ideas to consider:

- Print and frame photos hiding on your phone or camera.
- Hang seasonal artwork that celebrates spring.
- Move pictures from one room to another to mix up your decor.
- Corral children's artwork into a dedicated space.

SOFT FURNISHINGS

Unlike dressers, tables, and other furniture pieces that quickly show dust and dirt, the soft furnishings in your home can hide when they need washing. They might look clean, but germs and dander could be lurking, leaving your home less pristine than you imagine. Spring is the perfect time to refresh curtains, slipcovers, rugs, and more. This makes your whole house feel brighter and cleaner.

Ideas to consider:

- Launder, iron, and rehang curtains.
- Clean sofas and slipcovers.
- Put out new seasonal pillows.
- Have rugs professionally cleaned.

WINDOWS

Few activities can be more rejuvenating than looking out the window in springtime to see flowers and trees bursting with new life. However, if your windows still show winter's grime or overly heavy drapes envelop them, then the colorful view and sunshine won't be nearly as enjoyable. Refreshing your drapes and windows can do wonders for brightening what you see out your window.

Ideas to consider:

- Wash the inside and outside of all windowpanes.
- Repair any cracked or aging windows.
- Replace any damaged or unsightly screens and storm windows.
- Update heavy or dated drapery with lighter styles.

MANTELS AND SHELVING

Many people give great thought and attention to decorating their mantels and shelves during the holidays—and then forget them again come the New Year. However, what better way to celebrate spring than with welcoming displays that highlight the season or bring attention to cherished belongings?

Ideas to consider:

- Add blooming plants and seasonal decorations to your mantel.
- Rearrange bookshelves by color, theme, or style.
- Display collections on a single shelf, or fill a bookshelf with larger pieces.
- Add light with candles or lamps.

Whether you tackle every idea listed here or focus on a few small changes, your spring refresh can help you welcome the new season. Beyond having a brighter house and view, you'll awaken your own energy with an environment that celebrates spring's renewal. You just might motivate yourself to tackle spring-cleaning in the process, too!

EASY GARDE
TO MAKE YO

Beautiful lawns and flower beds are key to showcasing a home that is cared for and welcoming. However, without the proper knowledge of how to keep your yard and foliage healthy, maintaining lush grass and healthy plants becomes an annual challenge. Fortunately, you can take steps now to encourage growth and to promote proper nutrition for your plants. To get started, follow these simple gardening tips today to make your yard pop in the spring.

ENING TIPS UR YARD POP

TEST YOUR YARD SOIL

A great lawn starts with healthy soil. You can do all the yard care you want to create a beautiful landscape, but if the soil is lacking, your efforts will be futile. To judge the quality of your soil, you should test the pH. You can do so with a basic soil test kit. Before using the kit, you will need to collect 3 to 5 samples from around different parts of your yard. Once you do, remove debris and grass, and let the soil dry out before using your test kit. A healthy lawn should have soil with a pH level of about 6.5 or 7. To balance your soil, add the appropriate levels of alkaline or acidic components.

IMPROVE AIR SUPPLY

Believe it or not, your grass needs a healthy flow of oxygen to grow healthy and lush. When grass grows thick and compacts too heavily, the nutrients can't get to the roots. This deprives grass of essential food. To fix this problem, aerate your yard by poking holes into your soil to let oxygen better travel to the roots. You can do this with an aeration garden tool—or even by walking in your yard with spiked shoes. The point is to create holes in the soil, which is a fairly simple process.

MULCH TREES REGULARLY

Trees add lovely pops of green and shade coverage to yards. Overall, trees require little maintenance, beyond trimming dead branches, to keep them healthy. However, you can boost the health of your trees by mulching them regularly throughout the year. Mulch provides a variety of benefits to your trees. It insulates soil to protect from hot and cold temperatures, holds water for moist roots, combats weeds, prevents soil from compacting, and more. To apply the mulch, start 1 to 2 inches away from the tree's base. Extend at least 3 feet outward. Make sure the layer is about 1 to 4 inches thick.

PREPARE FLOWER BEDS

Flowering beds are a bedrock of spring, but you can't ensure bountiful bulbs and blooms without preparing the beds for growth. Your yard needs healthy soil to grow beautiful grass, and your flower beds need great soil to encourage healthy flowers. To prep the soil, you'll want to loosen it first to at least 6 inches deep and then add organic matter, such as peat moss or compost, to the loosened soil. Mix the matter well into the soil until thoroughly combined, and then rake the top level flat.

TRIM BUSHES AND SHRUBS

Preparing your yard also means taking care of your bushes and shrubs. You can trim certain plants in the winter and early spring to prepare them for new growth. For semi-woody perennials, such as butterfly bushes, you'll want to trim them back about 4 inches every time throughout early winter or early spring. This pruning will promote optimal flower display with the season's new growth. If you own broad-leaved evergreens, such as boxwoods, you'll want to trim these plants in the later part of the early spring season. Focus on removing stems and branches with winter damage.

Ultimately, maintaining a beautiful yard as you enter the spring season means paying attention to its health now. By following these simple tips, you'll be able to focus on key tasks you can complete in the off-season that will keep your yard and gardens healthy year round.

Sources:

[1] http://gardenclub.homedepot.com/test-soil-lawn-ph/

[2] https://www.arborday.org/trees/tips/mulching.cfm

http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/gardening/advice/g60/pruning-tips-0307/?slide=2

2002 Timberloch Place
Suite 525
The Woodlands, TX 77380

Securities and advisory services offered through Cetera Advisors LLC, member FINRA, SIPC.

Cetera is under separate ownership from any other named entity.

2002 Timberloch Place, Suite 525, The Woodlands, TX 77380 (281) 362-1444

These are the views of Platinum Advisor Marketing Strategies, LLC, and not necessarily those of the named representative, Broker Dealer or Investment Advisor, and should not be construed as investment advice. Neither the named representative nor the named Broker Dealer or Investment Advisor gives tax or legal advice. All information is believed to be from reliable sources; however, we make no representation as to its completeness or accuracy. Please consult your financial advisor for further information.

PLATINUM

TAX & WEALTH MANAGEMENT