



FINANCIAL PREPAREDNESS

"One of life's most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn't do our homework, that we are not prepared." ~ Merlin Olsen

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If you did not receive a previous issue, [let me know](#) I will resend it to you.

Goal-Free Living

I've been a personal planning and productivity aficionado since 1989, but for some reason, until a few years ago, I had never tried to set specific written goals.

For decades I helped my clients develop specific financial goals, in part because that is one of the steps of the financial planning process. But truth be told, the process always seemed to be formulaic, like I was just checking a box or obtaining inputs for an actuarial calculation.

I had always been very successful personally despite not having any written goals, but when I heard about personal productivity guru Michael Hyatt and his planner and system a few years ago, I decided to give them a try. His system and planner are goals-centric. You're supposed to come up with written annual and quarterly goals that are SMARTER-F: specific, measurable, actionable, risky (so aspirational that you might not achieve them), time-bound (they have a deadline), exciting, relevant (to you and your season of life) and fun. In his planner, you're supposed to list your motivations for achieving the goal, a reward for how you'll celebrate its achievement and a list of Next Steps, which get broken down further and become your daily tasks. You're supposed to review your goals (and

motivations) frequently—at least weekly, perhaps as often as daily.

So I got one of his planners and set eight or ten annual goals and assigned several goals to each quarter. After about a year of following this system, it was apparent that it was a failure (which made me feel like a failure). I had achieved few if any of the goals (which seemed arbitrary), I wasn't excited about them, the process seemed contrived, reviewing my goals seemed like a waste of time, and I didn't feel like celebrating something that I just expected of myself. How could I have been so successful in life but a failure at achieving specific, written goals? Why did this process not appeal to me?

Every so often I read a brilliant and profound book that explains one of the mysteries of the universe, or at least of my life. Goal-Free Living: How to Have the Life You Want Now! by Stephen Shapiro is one of those books. The dust jacket has a nice summary:

“We are taught from a young age that in order to achieve great success we must set and achieve our goals. However, in doing so, we become focused on where we are going rather than enjoying where we are right now. We sacrifice today in the hope that a better future will emerge, only to discover that achievement rarely leads to true joy. Goal-Free Living presents an alternative philosophy—that we can have an extraordinary life now, all without goals and detailed plans. By living for each moment, it's possible to have a successful life and follow your passions at the same time.

This amazing book shares the personal discovery of consultant Stephen Shapiro, who achieved professional success only to find that personal satisfaction remained elusive. He wanted to escape the treadmill of goal-chasing and find a way to make his life truly rewarding. So over 90 days, he drove 12,000 miles and interviewed 150 extraordinary people from all walks of life to learn how they lived fulfilling, happy lives. Along the way, he discovered the eight secrets to living life free from the constant pressure of goals:

1. Use a compass, not a map—have a sense of direction, and then let yourself wander and try new things on the way to fulfilling your aspirations.
2. Trust that you are never lost—every seemingly wrong turn is an opportunity to learn and experience new things.
3. Remember that opportunity knocks often, but sometimes softly—while blindly pursuing our goals, we often miss unexpected and wonderful possibilities.
4. Want what you have—measure your life by your own yardstick and appreciate who you are, what you do, and what you have . . . now.
5. Seek out adventure—treat your life like the one-time-only journey it is and revel in new and different experiences.

6. Become a people magnet—constantly seek, build, and nurture relationships with new people so that you always have the support and camaraderie of others.
7. Embrace your limits—transform your inadequacies and boundaries into unique qualities you can use to your advantage.
8. Remain detached—focus on the present, act with a commitment to the future, and avoid worrying about how things will turn out.”

Shapiro suggests that you allow life to unfold naturally before you instead of trying to force a certain (arbitrary) outcome. We can't do anything about the past and the future isn't guaranteed or even known (including whether you will even be alive), so the present is all we have. Each day is a gift and you should be fully present in each moment so you can savor it and remain open to new experiences, opportunities and possibilities.

In some ways, this is the approach I have used during my adult life. After my freshman year of college, I switched my major from Pre-dentistry to Political Science. I had no idea what I wanted to do when I graduated, so thankfully the Army wanted me to serve on active duty. In 1991, I happened to read an article about financial planning in a magazine and decided that I was going to become a financial planner. Since moving to metro Atlanta in 1994, I have lived in five different places. I have never been afraid to pivot, make major changes and try new things. This newsletter is yet another experiment.

Pursuing goals seems like it could tend to cause you to focus on obtaining material possessions, and from my study of behavioral finance, not only will that not make you happier (the happiness you receive from buying something quickly wears off because owning and using it just becomes part of your normal life), but the stress that you put yourself through so that you can earn the money to buy those things often makes you less happy and shortens your life- or healthspan. If you want to buy happiness, spend money on experiences with others that will create nice memories, such as family vacations.

Most people believe that their ultimate goal is to be happy, and advertisers and perhaps society has convinced them that they will be happy once they buy or have X. Even The Declaration of Independence mentions the right to the pursuit of happiness. But happiness is elusive because it's not something you can pursue but an end result. The more you chase after it, the more it will elude you. If you really want to be happy, change your attitude and be grateful for what you have (Secret #4). Practicing gratitude is a real game-changer, and it's free and takes only a moment each day.

Although happiness is sublime, as Viktor Frankl observed in Man's Search For Meaning, what really fulfills people is not happiness but meaning, which can be

found even in the horrors of a concentration camp. Meaning can be found in work (which is the primary reason you should consider never retiring), in helping others and in being part of something larger than yourself.

Secret #5 (seek out adventure) reminds me of this quote, which I have on my financial planning website: “Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention to arrive safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming: Wow!! What a ride!”

Secret #8 (remain detached to the outcome) is something I've been working on when I play sports. It allows me to play looser, to be fully present (which gives me greater focus and clarity), to get into flow and to keep my ego in check. It reminds me of that counterintuitive saying (and song), “If you love someone, set them free.”

I think life is about the journey, not a particular destination. There are too many unknowns (including what you don't know yet), too many surprises (good and bad), too much randomness, too much serendipity, too many unpredictable opportunities to plan everything out and stick to that plan for your entire life. Just take a few minutes to read [this biography](#) of Steve Jobs. Do you think he could have predicted or planned how his life turned out? Do you think there was any randomness, luck or serendipity involved?

Several years ago I heard about the idea of coming up with a one-word (or several words) theme that you will focus on during the coming year, and I've been doing that each year. My word(s) for this year are “read and write,” and so far I've finished reading 31 books and have written 15 newsletters.

Shapiro says that people who are “judgers” (i.e., those whose Myers-Briggs personality type ends with J instead of P) are most likely to be goal-oriented, while “perceivers” prefer a more spontaneous and flexible lifestyle. I was an ISTJ when I took the test decades ago, but I think I am now more open to new experiences and adventures, spontaneity, and serendipity (when we walk through our neighborhood, the best result is to have a “serendipitous” walk where we meet someone new and interesting). Apparently, although your Myers-Briggs personality type doesn't change, [the way you express it does \(or should\) change](#) as you go through life.

Preparedness News

Mystery (AKA Havana) Syndrome by Arthur Bradley, Disasterpreparer LLC

If you've been watching the news, you've likely seen talk of the “Mystery Syndrome” affecting U.S. diplomats and officials. They date back to a number of attacks in Cuba starting in 2016, and have been experienced by our officials in Cuba, China, and on U.S. soil. Most recently, attacks have been reported very close to the White House, which has understandably raised alarm.

Symptoms include headache, hearing loss, confusion, nausea. Based on these symptoms, many believe that the attacks are some type of directional energy weapon (likely pulsed RF microwave), although that has not been confirmed. Other theories are that it's not a weapon at all but an attempt to snoop, perhaps to extract cell phone data, with an undesired side effect of harming those in the direct path.

If such attacks continue, it seems likely that investigators will ultimately identify the cause, if not the culprit. Even after doing so, however, it might be very difficult to prevent them. Such attacks are invisible, leave no trail when turned off, and might require a relatively small instrument to initiate.

Just as unmanned systems greatly changed the battlefield, growing cyber threats on our infrastructures and invisible energy attacks on our officials may well usher the US into a new era of clandestine warfare.

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From Forward Observer: "The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a follow-up to a 2019 report on the cybersecurity vulnerabilities of electrical generation and transmission systems. The GAO specifically mentions that "electric vehicles and charging stations, and smart inverters ... are vulnerable to cyberattacks, including those involving malware that attackers could leverage in a cyberattack impacting the grid." The GAO admonished the Department of Energy for not fully addressing risks to grid distribution systems from cyberattacks in its security plans, which is in violation of federal policy."

Quotes of the Week

"But [the Internet] depends on another system, which is not resilient at all: the electric grid. In the U.S., the grid is a creaking, aging system that now exhibits an exponentially increasing rate of failure. It is susceptible to the phenomenon of cascaded failure, where small faults are magnified throughout the system. Since the money needed to upgrade the system no longer exists, blackouts will continue to proliferate. As the grid goes down, Internet access will be lost. Cell phone access is more likely to remain, but without the grid most people will lose the ability to recharge their mobile devices....

Moving forward, the amount of time the electric grid is available in any given place will dwindle, and with it the amount of Internet access. As the electric grid goes down, there will be a great deal of economic disruption....people will cease to be docile. What keeps people docile is access to the magic shiny world of television and the Internet. Their own lives might be dull, grey, hopeless and filled with drudgery, but as long as they can periodically catch a glimpse of heaven inhabited by smooth-skinned celebrities with toned muscles sporting the latest fashions, listen to their favorite noise, watch a football game and distract themselves with video games, blogs or cute animals on Reddit's /r/aww, they can at least dream. Once they wake up from that dream they will look around, then look around some more, and then they will become seriously angry. This is why the many countries and regions that at one time or another ran short of energy...always tried to provide at least a few hours of electricity every day, usually in the evenings during "prime

time,” so that the populace could get its daily dose of fiction, because this was cheaper than containing a seriously angry populace by imposing curfews and maintaining around-the-clock military patrols and checkpoints.”

~ The Five Stages of Collapse by Dmitry Orlov

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“Information encoded in the form of microscopic magnetization spots or laser-etched pits on bits of plastic is not particularly durable, and untold reams of 'knowledge' have disappeared without a trace because the media on which they were recorded can no longer be read. Even when the data are intact, there is an even bigger problem: information technology is a very power-hungry beast....It relies on scarce and quickly depleting ores...and depends on a steady supply of electricity....It is also vulnerable to a very unpredictable but recurring sort of disruption: we are one large solar flare away from having our collective memory erased.

There is a danger that the long road from oral culture to written culture to digital culture will end with groups of humans helplessly clutching their dead smartphones, no longer knowing where they are, who anyone is or even where to have lunch. They have learned to cope with being bombarded with millions of bits of information every day, much of it meaningless or irrelevant, but remembering almost none of it, because, you see, there was no need....”

~ Ibid. This is why I recommend you have a hard copy library (including a “survival library”). In a grid down world, it would be like having the Library of Alexandria in your home.

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“One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It's simply too painful to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we've been taken.” ~ Carl Sagan

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“My own view is that this planet is used as a penal colony, lunatic asylum and dumping ground by a superior civilization, to get rid of the undesirable and unfit. I can't prove it, but can't disprove it either.” ~ Christopher Hitchens

What You Should Be Doing Now

I plan to cover the why and how of these in future issues (if I haven't already), but here are some actions I recommend you take (or at least start thinking about) now:

1. If trying to achieve arbitrary, written goals isn't working for you, try adopting a goal-free lifestyle.

2. Books to read: Goal-Free Living: How to Have the Life You Want Now! by Stephen Shapiro

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I would love to hear from you! I thrive on feedback from readers. If you have any comments, suggestions, insight/wisdom, or you'd like to share a link to a great article, please [email me](#).

Generally, I don't have time to answer questions about your specific situation, but if you have a general question that I think other readers also have, [let me know](#) and I will provide an answer in a future issue.

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