



Achieving Your Dreams in the New Millennium

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With the new millennium just around the corner, this could be the year for you to really take hold of your financial future. Don't worry, this isn't going to be a lesson about budgeting. Budgeting is fairly meaningless unless you know where you want to go. Good budgets support good goals. If you have the feeling that you keep spending your money on the same things year after year, this may be the reason you are not getting anywhere. Without meaningful goals, you are unlikely to improve your spending habits or your progress.

Think big. It is commonly perceived that people without hope of getting what they really want tend to fritter away their money on lesser goals. If home ownership seems unattainable, they may spend their extra dollars on household gadgets, electronic equipment, flashy cars, and costly entertainment. These things not only eat up extra income and escalate debt but they may also fail to provide lasting satisfaction. Nobody wants to live on a starvation diet, and you don't have to, to get ahead. But you do have to have meaningful goals and the determination to reach them.

When I was a child my parents made a decision that I'm sure changed my life dramatically. We lived in a fairly nice but tough neighborhood. It was the kind of place where children could easily get into trouble, and it was becoming worse. My Dad worked for a large company within walking distance of our house. His was our only income and, with three children, even soda was considered a holiday treat. Mom and Dad scrimped and saved until we could afford a modest house in a much better neighborhood. Today I can look back with pride at what my parents achieved. They didn't really believe they could do it and had misgivings about taking on what was a big mortgage for them. But they did it, and it made all the difference in the world.

When I look at many of today's young families, I see some of the same aspirations mixed with doubts and despair. The old saying is that if you think you can't do it, you can't. The only way to get what you really want is to



go for it. But you can't get where you want to go by building debt instead of savings or by spending on momentary pleasures instead of lifelong dreams.

Often it takes daring imagination and heroic effort to make dreams come true. A single mom may have trouble just keeping food on the table. But she can dream and in time make her dreams come true. Maybe getting her children a better life means a rent increase of \$200 a month. But isn't it worth it? Regardless of the dream, the means are the same—building savings, avoiding debt, and making every dollar count. It won't be easy. It never is.

The start of a new millennium reminds us that the world that we enjoy today was created by people who dared to dream big and worked hard to fulfill those dreams. Those who stayed on the sidelines waiting for things to happen may be still waiting. One way to begin the pursuit of your dreams is to begin by making a chart of what you really want out of life. Cluster your goals to get a better look at them. What do you want regarding health and fitness, housing and community, income and employment, family and friends, leisure and entertainment, etc.? You have to be realistic; you can't get everything you want. But in time you may be able to get everything that is really important to you.

Once you know what you want, go for it. Make a plan, develop a budget, keep good tabs on your spending, make every dollar count, decrease your debt, build your savings, and direct your finances to the achievement of your most heart-felt goals. Others before you have done it, and you can too. Now may be the best time of all to take the many little steps that might be needed to achieve your biggest dreams. If you need help in making a plan to reach your goals, you might seek financial counseling or planning services. You might also read books that can help you to uncover your real goals and plan your finances. One you might enjoy is titled *Invest in Yourself: Six Secrets to a Rich Life* by Marc Eisenson, Gerri Detweiler, and Nancy Castleman.