

COLLABORATIVE LIFE COACHING

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Storing Nuts for the Winter

Today I looked out my window and saw the annual pilgrimage of the voracious squirrels snatching the immature pecans from my back yard grove of 40 trees. They munched away to put on fat, then with bulging cheeks they scampered off to make deposits into their secret nut "bank". Sometimes when I am buying my own pecans for \$8/pound, I wonder why they don't leave the humans a few; in 20 years, they never have. How do these tiny-brained creatures know how many nuts to store when humans can't save money? Statistics say we save less each year. What can we learn from squirrels about the balance of living fully and saving for the future?

Young squirrels seem to do less of the storing than the older, larger squirrels. This seems true with humans as well. Young people seem to spend all (or more) that they make, as they go "nuts" with furniture, cars, and apartments. Most young adults don't save, trusting they will not have a sudden Winter storm like an accident, divorce, or job lay off. It is increasingly common for adults in their 20's and 30's to move back into their parent's homes when this plan fails. They could improve their financial wellness by establishing a savings account for emergencies.

I have noticed that like older squirrels, people between 40 and 55 people begin to think more about saving for the coming Winter. Unfortunately, in humans this competes with paying for cell phones for teens and moving to the "dream" house. Middle age, however, is the perfect time to become financially "well" by beginning to save at least 10% of each paycheck. The remaining 90% has enough room to be a kind parent, replace things, and live your life purpose. If you are in this age group, are you living on 90% or less of your income? Or are you spending 100%-- or more? If you answered 100% or more, it is likely you have a sick relationship with your money. Lynne Twist, in the book *The Soul of Money* (2006 Norton paperbacks) states that money is a challenge for us all... "The harder we try to get it, or even try to ignore it or rise above it, the tighter money's grip on us grows"... She points out that money has become the ultimate game score measuring our worth. I would highly recommend this book if you feel poor compared to your friends, or worry about money more than once a week. You might also consider coaching on this topic.

If you are over 40 and are off track about your finances, the following guidelines are in your control, and can help:

1. Pay your bills online or with checks immediately after each pay day, before you buy groceries or go to WalMart.

2. From what is left, write yourself a check for savings, or transfer money online into savings. Live on what is left.
3. Limit credit cards to one or two, and use them only for emergencies.
4. If you use a debit card, don't connect it to your savings so you can overdraw on impulse buys.
5. Model talk of savings around your children. Have them save regularly from their allowance or work pay, and open a bank account for important purchases or college.
6. If you are unhappy with your job and it's pay, consider a change. You have many years left to work.

From the mid- 50's to the mid- 60's, wellness should include a strong focus on cutting expenses and saving more. I am in this group and save at least 20% of my income every month, even if it means the vacation is shorter or the movie is a DVD. When the kids are grown, joy is not found in throwing money at unhappiness, but in forging strong interpersonal connections. and feeling useful in the world. Thriving comes from being intellectually, spiritually, physically, and emotionally balanced. It may be time to change your work life again. Health can be protected with good medical care, exercise, and diet. Financial planners can teach smart investments. If you are in this group, are you financially well? How much are you spending and saving?

In the Winter of retirement, the wise humans have shifted focus from earning and spending to living more simply and finding new sources of contentment. Healthy people realize the "things" they accumulated to be like the Jones family are meaningless. What matters is what sustains us. Wellness exists with living in the moment, remaining active and finding ways to contribute to the extended family or greater good. Financially-well retirees realize getting through the Winter is a matter of the quality of each day.

I hope you begin a path to greater financial wellness beginning this week, and begin to store for your own Winter. When you reach that Winter, I want for you to have stored enough funds so you can thrive, not just survive!

To your wellness!

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