

Small Steps to Health and Wealth Five Themes for Success

As we review health and wealth connections, it is important to note that poor health and wealth behaviors generally take time to reach critical proportions. It is a long road of small steps that gets us to the critical spot where we realize we need to make changes. For instance, as I read the Small Steps to Health and Wealth workbook, I was surprised to learn that a typical woman gains 26 pounds from age 20 to 50 and a man gains about 18 pounds between the same ages. A year ago, when I read that statement I did the math. I wrote down my weight at age 20 and my weight that day. Eerily, the equation gave the result of precisely a 26 pound weight gain since my 20s – exactly the average gain for women between ages of 20 and 50. It stinks to be average! But I guess in this case, it beats being above average.

It seems that the changes in our health and wealth come on slowly. We don't notice that extra couple of pounds or we blame an increased pants size to changes in styles or brands. For me, when I realized that I weighed nearly 30 pounds more than when I was 20, I knew it was time to do something about it.

But how does one go about reversing these changes that have come on so slowly? As you look at improving your health and finances, there will be five overall themes in approaching those improvements. Those five themes have to do with time, control, knowledge/awareness, automation and environment.

Time is a key factor because it takes time to reverse the damage through a change to more positive habits. Control is huge, as many people take a back-seat role in planning anything to do with their health and wealth. Knowledge and awareness are critical to the process of any change. Automation of habits is one of the most successful strategies – from automating payments, to automatic

deposits to savings to automating when you go for a walk each day or automatically eating breakfast – all of the automatic habits can bring about positive results. We must also set up our environment to help us achieve our goals.

For instance, once I calculated my own weight gain I felt I needed an environmental change. I decided that my home would become a no-baking zone. For over a year, I have been able to stick to my plan, baking very few desserts and sweets. I set up my home environment to eliminate baked goodies that were not needed. Not baking saved both on calorie consumption and food costs – health and wealth. I also set up my environment to have a portion-controlled serving of sweets available when I got a craving. I bought a few bags of Junior Mint candies, already portion-controlled in small boxes. I believe one box has about 75 calories, plus several pieces that can be eaten individually and slowly. I put the bags out of sight, in brown paper bag in the refrigerator in the garage. I had to really want a sweet fix to remember and retrieve those mints. These environmental controls were a flexible compromise, not rigid dieting mentality, and they worked.

There are likely many environmental changes that you can think of in your own household that could encourage small steps toward behavior changes for both your health and wealth.

I challenge you to give yourself a high five – time, control, knowledge/awareness, automation and environment – and make one small change in each of these five areas to improve your health and wealth.

If you want more tips, consider purchasing *Small Steps to Health and Wealth* for \$10 -- available at a county extension office near you.