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FINANCIAL AWARENESS: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

ALVIN HALL, FINANCIAL EDUCATOR, AUTHOR AND NYSE EURONEXT MONEY SENSE COMMITTEE MEMBER
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BY ALVIN HALL

How to live better financially--that's what this website aims to help you learn. We hope to bring you the kinds of ideas you both want and need, and to make them easy to comprehend and implement to suit your circumstances by explaining them in a down-to-earth style using simple, everyday illustrations. For example, to help you make a seemingly modest increase in your regular contributions to savings or retirement that can grow to a substantial amount of money over the long term, we'll help you learn how simple changes in your food shopping habits can save you money without diminishing your lifestyle.

We are not going to sell you anything.

We are giving away knowledge to help you empower yourself and to help you meet your unique needs. Your goals, your financial situation, and your emotional relationship with money won't be the same as even that of your closest sibling. With the information you learn at this site, you'll be able to develop a financial plan—alone or with the help of an advisor—tailored to your needs.

The information on this site will emphasize simplicity without being "dumbed down." Most people don't require an understanding of complex financial instruments, transactions, or strategies. After all, we have lives to live, jobs to succeed in, meals to prepare, children to raise and support, and relatives and friends to stay in touch with. Handling finances is just one part of the satisfying life each of us seeks

to live. Keeping your finances appropriately simplified and learning what you need to know for your current needs is one of the often-ignored keys to individual financial success. Of course, as circumstances change, individuals need to learn afresh and this site will provide you with the tools you need to manage your busy, dynamic life.

I like a "learn as you need to" approach because it keeps you from feeling overwhelmed and it allows you to build on information and—perhaps most important—experiences you know.

As a writer who also speaks publicly about the tools and techniques presented on this site, I try to anticipate the kinds of questions you're likely to have. Maybe there are times when you've hesitated to ask questions out of embarrassment or fear of being perceived as ignorant or financially undisciplined. Over time, it is my goal to turn this site into your secret reference source—a place where you can go without anxiety to gain the knowledge you need to ask the right questions for yourself and your goals. This is one key to financial self-empowerment.

Over the next year, I'll cover what I call "seasonal topics"—topics that affect everyone and their money: saving for retirement or unexpected emergencies; using credit wisely; setting financial goals; teaching the kids about money and saving for their college education and more. Under these topical umbrellas, I'll also create shorter articles about each subject that will allow you to drill down for details. I'll include examples, illustrations, and stories based on real-life situations that will enliven information in practical, easy-to-

understand, and easy-to-use ways .

For example, there's my friend Tony (not his real name). Tony stubbornly refused to contribute to his company's 401(k) plan, even though the company would match his contribution—quite a generous gift toward Tony's future retirement. His excuse? "I could die tomorrow," an attitude I've frequently encountered and that I like to call "fake fatalism."

Once I showed Tony how small, steady contributions to his 401(k) would add up over his working life, the numbers astonished him. "I never imagined I could be worth that much!" he declared. Tony's fake fatalism has been replaced by a proactive attitude in which he takes regular steps toward a comfortable retirement. Tony is already looking forward to becoming a "professional volunteer," supporting the good causes he doesn't have time to work for today.

The bottom line: Getting comfortable with the information you'll find at this financial literacy website should help you to live better, both today and for years to come. Is it possible for an average person to take command of his or her financial future? Absolutely! We'll show you how. **RTD**

