FINANCIAL PLANNING

Achieve your life goals and secure your familt's future for the everyday person.

Simple Finances

For Educational Purposes Only

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The act of financial planning consists of the long-term planning of your finances, which includes all the money you receive (whether you earn it, inherit it, win it, or otherwise), and how you fund your life goals from now until your death and even after your death – including planning for your family members' future by planning how your estate will be handled.

CHAPTER 1

STEPS TO PLANNING YOUR FINANCES

Chapter 1: Steps to Planning Your Finances

When you want to get serious about your finances, it’s time to engage in financial planning. Financial planning allows us to realize our goals and objectives by learning, organizing, and planning based on the reality of the current situation. You have to understand what is genuinely achievable and know the steps to make it happen to be successful with financial planning.

For most people, successful financial planning will include:

- Setting goals and objectives
- Determining your current situation
- Figuring your assets and liabilities
- Choosing your budget method
- Implementing and monitoring your plan

You do have to know where you are, where you want to go, and the steps that it takes to achieve that result, to be successful with any type of financial planning. But the good news is, anyone can get benefits from financial planning. Let’s look more closely at each of the steps involved with solid personal financial planning.

Step #1: Set Goals and Objectives

The personal financial goals and objectives you set for yourself should include both long- and short-term savings and expenditures. The goals you set should cover the goals you hope to achieve both today and throughout your life.

You’ll set goals for your entire life, including education, housing, and retirement. You’ll want to set goals that involve both short-term and long-term planning. For example, paying down debt, saving for a down payment for a house, saving for emergencies, saving for a vacation, affording health care, improving your career options, and of course, retirement planning.

Set goals for this year and set goals for the future for anything you want to do so that it makes it concrete. If you don’t set a goal for it and then set up a way to reach the goal, it’s unlikely to happen.

12 Financial Goals You May Want to Set

Let's look at some financial goals that you may not have thought about that you may want to actively plan for, to give you some ideas about what financial goals you may need to think about.

1. **Develop a Realistic Daily Budget** – The best way to get a handle on your situation is to have a realistic budget set up that involves paying your bills and meeting your daily needs, and keeping you to your future goals. If the budget is too tight, you won't stick to it, so it needs to be as realistic as possible.

2. **Create a Six-Month Emergency Fund** – One goal essential to all the other goals is having a backup emergency fund that you can get to right away when needed. This fund should include six months of needed funds to cover the basics. You'll need to know what that amount is to be successful.

3. **Get Out of Consumer Debt** – The biggest roadblock to success in financial planning is having consumer debt. Consumer debt involves unsecured credit card debt, payday loans, and the like. This type of debt can be useful at times but most of the time, it's a big mistake that you should try to pay off as fast as possible.

4. **Plan for Retirement** – It may seem far off, but this time of your life is closer than you think. Thus, it's vital that you fully understand how money works, including compounding interest and so forth. If you start planning now, you can even set up a number that you need to retire early.

5. **Ensure College Education for Kids or You** – College is a considerable expense, and it is not always going to be covered by scholarships, even if your child is super-smart. You cannot rely on that. Every state has plans you can start investing in today to use for your child's education in the future. If you want to go to school yourself, you'll need to plan for that as loans are also a dangerous proposition and may not help you get ahead.

6. **Tax Planning to Avoid Overpaying** – While most people don't need that much tax planning, it can help to talk to someone who knows how to help you avoid overpaying and best use your money.

7. **Develop More Income Streams** – They say that rich people tend to have more than seven income streams. You should also plan to have more than

one income stream if you want to meet your financial goals. Work, investments, and cash flow from side hustles can go a long way to ensuring you can achieve your goals.

8. **Buy the Right Insurance** – Everyone needs to buy insurance, but you want to make sure you never buy more insurance than you need. Most people need insurance on everything they own plus health and life insurance. A good agent can recommend what you need.

9. **Buy a Forever Home** – If you would like to stop renting and buy a home, setting a goal to save a 20 percent down payment is the first thing you should do. While you can buy homes without a down payment, most people will get better loan terms with a good one.

10. **Go on a Vacation** – Even things like going on a vacation, whether yearly or less often, need some form of financial planning. If you plan for it, you don't have to use credit, as this is not a good way to fund your vacation.

11. **Plan a Wedding, Graduation, or Other Big Event** – These types of events traditionally end up on a credit card. This is not good planning. Instead, you know these events are coming, so why not start planning for them now?

12. **Death and Estate Planning** – Whether you like it or not, everyone gets old and dies. You can make everything simpler for your family by planning these events in advance. Plan your funeral and how you want your estate distributed with an attorney in advance.

Don't worry. You can work on every single one of these goals simultaneously once you have paid off your consumer debt. Sometimes you need to increase your income to make your goals possible. You won't really know unless you look at your situation honestly and thoroughly.

Step #2: Determine Your Current Situation

For many people, actually writing down everything to figure out what their current situation is, is very emotionally demanding. After all, sometimes you're in more debt than you think, or your savings are anemic, and you feel like you're much further away from the ability to retire than you thought. Your current financial situation can only be discovered through an honest reflection of the real current financial situation you're in.

What Is Your Net Worth?

This is simply a calculation of what you own minus your debts. It's not unusual for some people to have a negative net worth if they are early in the payment process for their home. Assets include investments, the equity in your home, stocks, and other valuables like vehicles and even jewelry.

What Is Your Debt Level?

Your debt level is everything you owe money on. Having said that, it's a good idea to separate secured debt from the unsecured debt you have. The unsecured debt should be paid off as fast as possible. Secured debt often comes with low-interest rates and can be considered an investment, but you do need to know what you owe in total too.

What Retirement Planning Do You Have So Far?

You need to know what type of retirement planning you are already doing. If you have a wage job, you may be investing in a 401K or other retirement accounts through work. If you work for yourself, you will need to set up these accounts yourself.

What Does Your Credit Report Say?

At least yearly, pull your credit report and look at it from all three credit reporting agencies. You'll get a real picture of what you owe and what you own by looking at this, and you also protect against mistakes or identity theft. You can use CreditKarma.com and monitor your credit all the time for free, but do ignore the ads regarding credit cards.

What Types of Savings Do You Have?

Make a list of everything you save and where. Whether it's short term, long term, cash, or other investments, do some future math to find out where you'll be 5, 10, 15, and 20 years down the road if you stay on the same track.

What Education Planning Have You Done?

If you have children, you probably need to be investing in and planning for their future education. Ideally, you'll want to start at birth but if you've not started yet, look into your state's 529 plans.

What Types of Insurance Do You Have?

Almost everyone needs insurance at some point. Some of the types you need are life, health, house, renters, automobile, and (depending on your situation) liability insurance.

What Investments Do You Have Now?

Separate your investments from your other savings to list what you have now. Calculate how your investments will be doing in the future if things stay the same.

What Income Opportunities Exist?

One way to improve your situation is to create more streams of income. Can you pinpoint any opportunities to increase your income through smart investments or a side gig?

You'll want to examine each aspect of your financial life to find the ways you're on the right track, as well as the ways you're not on the right track. The only way to do that is to be very realistic and write down every penny you have coming in and every penny you have going out, and to honestly acknowledge each situation where you have a shortfall so you can develop a plan for success.

Step #3: Figure Your Assets and Liabilities

As you work on your financial plans for today and the future, you'll want to know where you stand on the basics too. Knowing the true situation with your assets and liabilities is the first step toward knowing where you stand and where you're going.

Adding Up Your Assets

Your assets include cash, cash equivalents, certificates of deposits, checking accounts, savings accounts, money market accounts, physical cash, treasury bills, property, land, or anything that can be turned into cash very easily.

Adding Up Your Liabilities

Your liabilities include anything you owe to other people, including your mortgage, student loans, credit card debt, auto loans, income tax owed, interest payments, and other personal loans. If you owe it, it's a liability. If you owe it and it has a contract, it's a liability. If you owe it because you just want it, but you can cancel it with one phone call, you don't have to include it in this figure.

Your net worth is figured by subtracting your liabilities from your assets. Some people who owe a lot on their home may find out that their net worth is negative, which can be disturbing; but don't worry, you will improve over time.

The good point about figuring out your assets and liabilities is that you'll be able to find a few liabilities that you don't have to keep because there is no contract. For example, if you currently pay for a month-to-month gym membership, you can take that off your liability list, but it's still a monthly expense so don't get confused about that. The current liabilities you have should only include the must-pay items and not anything you can cancel during an emergency.

Step #4: Choose Your Budget Method

Now that you have a picture of where you stand and some ideas about where you want to go, it's helpful to choose a budgeting method that works for you. There are two popular budgeting methods that you need to learn about before you choose the one you want.

The Zero-Based Budget Plan

Some people like using so-called zero-based budgeting, which means that each month, you set up your spending to zero out each of the budgeted actions you take. People who use zero budgeting like to put every dollar to work every month and don't carry over any money each month.

The 50/20/30 Budget Plan

Other people like using the 50/20/30 budgeting plan, which states that half your money is for all needs, 20 percent is for saving and investing, and 30 percent of your income is used for all your wants. Wants are defined as anything outside of a basic need. For example, if you cannot cover an expensive car under the needs portion of your income, you might take some from the wants to make up the difference.

Implementing a Zero-Based Budget Plan

To Implement a zero-based budget plan, follow these five steps:

1. **Write Down Your Monthly Income** – Only include income you can count on in this figure, such as your paycheck, gig income, residual income, and so forth. If you're bringing it in, you want to count it.

2. **Write Down Your Monthly Expenses** – Include everything, including

investments, phone, mortgage, food, shelter, etc. It's best to list all the needs first, and then list the items you want in order of importance going down the list.

3. **Write Down Seasonal Expenses** – One issue with zero-based budgeting is that sometimes one might forget seasonal expenses and forget to take a monthly amount out to pay that expense. For example, if you pay your property taxes every October, you'll want to set up your budget to have the full amount to remit when it's due in October, which will require that you move money to short-term savings for it.

4. **Subtract Your Expenses from Your Income** – When you are done and subtract your expenses from your income, it should equal zero. If your expenses are more than your income, you'll have to start cutting some of the expenses or make more money.

5. **Track Your Spending Every Month** – Don't leave everything up to chance. Track your spending every single month and even every single day if necessary, to make sure you don't overspend or add debt.

The drawbacks of this plan are that it requires a lot of monitoring and thought each and every month because you need to start over every month with a new plan based on the amount of income you have, putting every single dollar you bring in to work for you. The zero-based budget plan can be overwhelming for some people, but it works better if you have a lower income.

Implementing a 50/20/30 Budget Plan

To implement a 50/20/30 budget plan, follow these three steps:

1. **Add Up Your Living Expenses** – Include only the essential items you need each month to live – for example, shelter, food, utilities, and healthcare. You should not use more than half or 50% of your income to pay for these needed items.

2. **Add Up Your Savings and Investments** – 20 percent of your budget should go to your financial goals like your emergency fund, retirement accounts, college savings, and also paying down consumer credit.

3. **Set Up Your Discretionary Spending** – Finally, the remaining 30 percent of your budget is for your wants. For example, if you want a nice extra-

fancy car over the basic one that your budget above allows, some of your discretionary money can go to that. Plus, of course, anything else is a non-necessity, such as travel, entertainment, and expensive beauty treatments or lifestyle upgrades.

When you set up a 50/20/30 budget plan, one thing that becomes clear is that you don't have to think about the budget all the time. You know that you have a set dollar amount every month for your wants or discretionary spending and the rest is automated, so you don't have to review it constantly.

The plan you choose will be one that works for you in a way that you understand. You need to know what's going out, where it's going, why it's going there, and that you have the income to fund it – whatever it is. And, most notably, you need to know that an expense is not causing you to throw away your future.

Step #5: Implement and Monitor Your Plan

Once you set up your budget, it's essential to monitor it and track every action you take every single month. To ensure your success, you'll want to take the following steps every single month and year.

- **Check All Statements for All Accounts** – It might seem tedious but mistakes happen, as does theft. Keeping track of your accounts by looking at them online or studying the statements each month is critical. Check your interest rates, what's coming in and going out, and make sure it matches your records.

- **Keep Track of Your Expenses** – Even if you're on the 50/20/30 plan, you must track those expenses that aren't customarily tracked, such as your coffee shop purchase, your last-minute candy bar at the gas station, and so forth. Also, make it a habit to check up on auto subscriptions each month to ensure you're really using them.

- **Use Technology to Keep It Straight** – Today, there are all types of technologies that you can use to keep your finances in order, often right from your bank account. Budgeting tools, notifications, and even monitoring can be outsourced with technology to a point.

- **Note Areas of Improvement or Change** – As you monitor, notice if your debts are going down or not and whether your investments and savings are performing as you wish.

- **Check Your Progress Yearly** – Always check your yearly progress for all your savings and investments to ensure that you're earning what you thought you would. By studying your progress and checking your goals, you may figure out new ideas you didn't think of before.

- **Pull Your Credit Reports Yearly** – Each year, you have a right to get a free credit report directly from the three major reporting agencies. Seeing what is on that report can help you keep your finances straight and avoid identity theft.

- **Reassess Your Goals Yearly** – Each year, you'll want to check up on all your accounts, take a look at your written goals, and ensure that you are progressing toward those goals as you thought.

- **Be Ready for Change** – As you monitor your success with sticking to your plans, be ready to switch it up. For example, with a lost job, you have to move down to your emergency budget, which will slow down your investments. But since you planned and have the cash savings, it should not cause you to build debt.

Even if everything doesn't go as planned, the fact is that with a plan, things will go more smoothly than without it. Sometimes the unexpected happens, but the longer you stick to your plan, the more likely you are to overcome a crisis should it occur.

CHAPTER 2

TOOLS, RESOURCES AND CHECKLISTS

Chapter 2: Tools, Resources, and Checklists

One way to ensure that you don't skip over any step in creating, implementing, and managing your financial planning is to use tools, resources, and checklists to help get yourself and keep yourself organized and on track.

Tools to Use for Financial Planning

Your bank account probably offers impressive tools that you can use, so check there first. For example, if you bank with USAA.com, they offer many of the tools mentioned here for free to their account holders.

Most credit unions and banks today offer some measure of budgeting and financial planning information. They might even offer free financial planners to help you make decisions, so don't be afraid to call and ask.

In the meantime, here are two cloud-based options to use for budgeting and financial planning:

- **Mint.com** – Mint is an inexpensive option for managing your budget online. You can use their free budget tracker to plan your 50/30/20 budget or to set up a zero-based budget. It's up to you. It connects with your bank account, credit cards, and other accounts so you can do most things through one dashboard. Setting up takes some time, but it will make everything simpler as it's all in one place.

- **YNAB.com** – This software is free to try for 34 days and helps you avoid hand- to-mouth paycheck to paycheck so that you can get out of debt. This software works best for those who want to use a zero-based budget method. It offers goal tracking, reports, and even personal support through free online workshops.

These two solutions will work for almost anyone and any needs. They are full-fledged financial software systems that you can use, no matter how complicated your financial situation is.

Resources to Use for Financial Planning

The primary financial planning tool that you should look at right now is via the website Investor.gov. This website is part of the United States Government, so if you live in another area, you may need to find out if your country has something similar as some of the info might not be the same – especially when it comes to tax planning and healthcare concerns.

On this site, they offer various financial calculators like the compound interest and savings calculator, retirement estimator, and so forth. They even have an excellent section for youth education, which is sorely missing in today's educational systems.

This website can help you find useful resources for financial planning and education about financial planning, including avoiding scams and investing.

Checklists, Templates, and Cheat Sheets You Can Use for Financial Planning

Sometimes it's a good idea to have access to easy checklists and templates to help you plan your finances. One of the best websites for finding these aside from your bank and looking on the Microsoft Office site for templates, is to join and use a site like Everplans.com.

Everplans.com helps you get all your documents together, from insurance to bank accounts and more. It's a great way to get things organized in such a way that makes it accessible for you and your family if and when needed. You can even use their system to get your work history organized. At only 75 dollars per year right now, it is a steal.

Another good place to find checklists, templates, and cheat sheets for personal financial planning is Smartsheet.com. Some templates are free to use with your current software like MS Excel and MS Word for budgeting and financial planning, and some you need to pay for.

The other place to check out is Templatelab.com. Here you can find dozens of professional financial plan templates that you can use. You can get a checkbook register, a bill pay checklist, and other financial planning templates that are super-useful and helpful. When it comes to developing your personal financial plan, getting the education and professional advice that you need is imperative.

While you can do it on your own, there is a lot to learn. You can benefit from using a financial professional to help you get ahead of the game and learn more a lot faster than if you do it on your own. One reason for this is that you don't know what you don't know, so you may not think of the right questions to ask or know what to look up to educate yourself. Working with a professional helps eliminate that problem so that you can learn the things you don’t even realize you need to learn.

CHAPTER 3

PROFESSIONALS THAT CAN HELP

Chapter 3: Professionals That Can Help

There are numerous professionals that you can hire to help you with your financial planning. Different professionals help with different areas, but it's always a good idea to rely on a professional to help, at least when you first get started.

A good professional will:

- **Get to Know You and Understand Your Wants and Needs** – They'll take stock of where you are now. They will also recognize where you want to go based on conversations with you. Make sure to be clear with them about how you would like your future to look, while also dealing with your present.
- **Help Clarify Your Goals** – As you work with the professional, they'll help you realize goals that you may not have considered, or help you visualize the goals you have considered.
- **Understand Your Current Resources** – They'll go over your current situation and make recommendations about how to improve as time moves forward based on the reality of where you are now.
- **Make Goals and Move You Toward Reaching Those Goals** – Once you figure out your starting place and compare it to where you want to go financially, you'll start moving toward those goals. The professional will check up on you periodically to help ensure you're still on track. Plus, you can call on them whenever you have a question before you decide.

Once you start working with a financial professional, you'll be surprised at how much better you plan and deal with your finances throughout your life. Even if you hire someone to help you get started, it's going to make a massive difference in your present and your future.

Tips for Choosing the Right Financial Professionals

Financial professionals are available for hire to help you with your financial planning. For some people, learning about everything themselves is best but for others, hiring someone is best. If you choose to hire someone, make sure you know what to look for to choose the right financial professionals.

Types of Financial Professionals include:

- **Personal Financial Planners** – This is a professional who works with you on a long-term basis, helping you and teaching you to reach and meet your long-term and short-term financial goals in all aspects of your life. Some advisors work on commission and some work for a set hourly rate.

- **Financial Advisor** – A financial advisor works with someone short term to help make certain types of investments or open other types of accounts. These days people who call themselves planners versus advisors are often the same, so you'll want to ask them what they do.

- **Accountants** – Many people think only business owners need accountants, but an accountant can help you with more than just your business. They can also help you do your taxes and do some tax planning (if they have a CPA) so that you save money on taxes while meeting your goals. Look for bookkeepers, CPAs, or enrolled agents depending on what type of help you need.

- **Insurance Agents** – Depending on the type of insurance agent you work with, some can advise on all types of insurance, including life, rental, car, and so on. They will help you find the right insurance to protect your family, your business, and your lifestyle as much as possible.

- **Attorneys** – There are many reasons an average person needs an attorney on occasion. When it comes to finances, the main reason you may need an attorney is to set up your will, a living trust, buy property, and things like that. It's best to find a specialized attorney for your needs. Sometimes you may need an attorney to help you reorganize your finances through bankruptcy too.

- **Investment Advisors** – You'll need this professional if you are confused about investing your money, to make it perform best for you and your needs. Some financial institutions offer investment advisors as part of their services.

- **Debt Counselors** – If you ever find yourself in too much debt to the point you cannot manage it yourself, you may want to hire a debt counselor or go to a service that will help you. This really should be a last-ditch effort, though, because there are faster ways to fix your finances than debt counseling.

- **Money Coach** – People like Dave Ramsey and Susie Orman are money coaches that advise individuals to use their money more wisely. A personal coach can help you get your finances in order and plan for the future by providing education, information, and motivation.

When choosing financial experts to work with, you'll want to ensure that they meet all legal requirements and that they can ethically help you with your finances before you go ahead. Also, you need to ensure that they are the right person to help you based on what they do. Interview multiple people to get the right person to help and always check up on their credentials to make sure they are following all the legal requirements and ethical requirements. Remember, if they tell you something that seems too good to be true, it probably is.

CHAPTER 4

WHY SOME PLANS FAIL: WHAT TO DO WHEN IS GO WRONG

Chapter 4: Why Some Plans Fail: What to Do When It Goes Wrong

When it comes to finances, things will go wrong sometimes. No matter how much you plan and think positively about the future, sometimes things are outside your ability to do anything about it. Jobs are lost, medical emergencies happen, and it can seem like you're always running uphill both ways as you try to dig your way out of the problem.

The good news is, with solid financial planning, you can weather a downturn in the economy, being laid off, or a medical emergency (yours or loved ones) because you've planned for these problems in advance. Once you get through the problem, you can brush yourself off and start over.

Here are some common reasons why plans fail:

- **You Don't Know What You Don't Know** – Sometimes, a plan fails because you didn't do enough research or get enough education. The problem is that sometimes a situation is so complicated that only an expert can understand the right questions to ask. If you have not gotten any expert help, you may not even know how to ask for what you need or want in order to do the research.

- **You Aren't Monitoring Your Finances Regularly** – Time can get away from us as we raise kids, work jobs, or take care of our parents or a sick pet. Life can pass by in years rather than days in the blink of an eye. It's imperative that no matter what is happening in life, you make it a priority to monitor your finances.

- **You Keep Putting It Off for Later** – It's that time thing again. Your senior years are much closer than you think they are. When you live your life, it can seem as if time has no real meaning, but when you look back, you can see how fast it was. A good financial plan has to be implemented now and forever and not later.

- **You Lack Self-Discipline** – If you have a hard time not getting that triple mocha frozen coffee drink every single day, you may have a hard time sticking to a financial plan if it's too restrictive. Be honest about where you are disciplined and where you aren't so you can work around that.

- **You Are Expecting Too Much from Too Little** – The plain fact is, if you aren't making enough money to pay for the basics, you won't really be able to plan your financial future because you can't even feed yourself, put a roof over your own head, or take care of your basic needs. Tackle how you'll make money before you concern yourself with what you'll do with it. Of course, knowing what type of lifestyle you want and your goals for the future will help immensely as you figure out what you want to do to earn that money.

- **You Save Too Much** – Some people are really great with self-discipline to the point that they're really saving so much that they're not enjoying their life at all. It's great to save for a reason, but there is no reason to overdo it and ignore your immediate needs.

- **You Spend Too Much** – If you aren't paying attention to your expenditures according to your income, you may be spending too much. What is a fair amount to spend on rent at your income level? Is that realistic? Do you need to make more income, or can you find something in that budget?

- **You're Not Focused on Long-Term Achievements** – All goals must include long-term goals and objectives because it's the only way to properly save enough for retirement. Compounding interest will save you, but without the long term to build that savings, you cannot achieve it.

- **You're Not Focused on Short-Term Needs and Wants** – You have a right to enjoy your life as your life is now, and not just save for future needs. If you want to see one movie a month, go out to dinner, or participate in your hobby, you should find a way to do it within your budget.

- **You Lack SMART Goals** – When you set up your goals and objectives, use the SMART goal-setting technique. This means every goal needs to be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.

- **You Work with Criminals** – One thing to avoid is working with financial planners or other experts who are just criminals. Remember, if you're getting a crazy windfall from an investment, it might be too good to be true. Check out anyone you plan to work with to ensure they are above board, and don't just take your friend's or brother's word for it. Often scammers get entire families involved.

The main thing to know if you want to be successful with your financial planning is to ensure it matches your personality, your desires, and your goals, along with the realistic understanding of how much money it takes to do what you want to do. What other people want is what they want. What you want is what's important. Know what you want and know how you're going to get it, and you will be successful if you follow your plan.

CHAPTER 5

GETTING STARTED

Chapter 5: Getting Started

Now that we've gone over how important financial planning is, you'll want to get started as soon as possible. After all, the sooner you set up and start implementing your plan, the sooner you'll start to experience the rewards of the plan. Who knows; with the right plan, you might end up retiring early and living abroad. Whatever your desires are can be reached if you set up a plan and follow it.

Figure Out Where You Stand

How much do you have coming in and going out? What can you eliminate that's going out, and what do you need to do to ensure you have enough coming in later?

Know Where You Want to Go

Most people don't start on third base, so you need to realize where you want to go. Where do you see yourself on the day you retire? Knowing what will make you happy, and figuring out how to get there is the goal.

Find Experts to Help Educate You and Motivate You

Listening to and working with experts who really know what they're talking about is the most important thing you can do when it comes to personal financial planning. A lot of the information is complicated, but it's not impossible to learn if you know what to ask.

Get It Done

Finally, once you know what you have, what you need, and how you're going to do it all, you'll want to actually do it. Time passes so much faster than you think it will, so don't put it off. Start now.

That's really all there is to it. Learning where you are and what it will take to get to where you want to go and then checking up on your progress periodically will help you achieve your desired results.