

Meeting Your Financial Goals

Life goals: To be as rich as can be, retire early and spend our days bouncing from vineyard to vineyard in the south of France. But before we can achieve all that, we have to get our financial ducks in a row. But where do you start? These easy—and straightforward—steps will help you start making moves now.

First: Spell Out What You Want

Financial goal setting starts with a pretty simple measure: You have to be crystal clear on what you're aiming to achieve. Knowing exactly what you're saving for—be it a college tuition fund for your kid or finally eliminating that credit card debt—will help you keep your eyes on the prize. Simply put pen to paper so you can really articulate the goals you're angling toward. (Don't hold back.)

Follow by, Digging Into the Numbers

Now that you've mapped out your financial objectives, take a hard look at the nitty-gritty numbers to really determine where you stand. This goes beyond knowing the balance in your checking and savings accounts. You need to calculate your overall financial picture—everything from how much money you're bringing in to your credit score and debt-to-income ratio. Like a Personal Financial Statement.

Do a Deep Dive Into Where Your Money Is Going

Once you have a grip on your net worth, it's time to start adjusting how much you spend so you can meet your financial goals. But first you'll need to dig in to uncover your biggest spending areas. That's Mint comes in: Simply link your bank accounts, credit cards and bills, and it will automatically categorize your purchases and then crunch the numbers so you can see exactly where you are spending, complete with color-coded insight on the obvious places you can trim.

Don't Forget to Set Aside Cash for Upcoming Expenses

When setting goals, it's essential to look at what you have, but you also need to take into account what you might owe down the road. Case in point: You know your car is going to need new tires early next year. It's all about taking a look at your entire financial picture and anticipating what might crop up on the path to your goals.

Reassess That Original List of Big-Picture Plans

With a firm grasp on what you want to achieve, plus a clear understanding of your finances overall, it's time to implement ways to measure your success. What is the time frame for achieving your goals? What do you have to accomplish each month (or day) to see progress? Be as precise as possible in laying this out—for example, spell out that you plan to save \$500 each month—but also allow yourself some

"Relationship is Everything"



wiggle room for unanticipated life things. (This is why padding a rainy-day fund is critical but life happens and its nice to be prepared).

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