

It's Time to Get Off Your "But"

By Neal Frankle, CFP®



Have you ever loved someone who made you hopping mad every time you got together? Me, too. Let me introduce you to my Uncle Walter.

Walt is a lovable and giving person. Yet if you spent more than five minutes with him, you'd quickly understand how miserable he is in his own skin. He's overweight. He doesn't eat well or exercise. And, worse yet, he stays married to my aunt, a fate I could wish only on Osama Bin Laden!

Walt complains about all these maladies, of course ... but he doesn't do anything about them. Whenever I point out the benefits of eating well, exercise, and divorce attorneys, Walt finds a good excuse to stay stuck in his familiar rut. For every reason I give him to do something different, he gives me ten excuses why he can't.

It's maddening, isn't it? Do you know somebody who complains all the time but won't do anything to improve the situation? I imagine we all know someone like Walt.

The sad truth is we all have a little bit of Walt inside us, especially when it comes to finance.

- We know we should cut our spending, but ...

- We know we should create a budget, but ...
- We know we should set up that living trust, but ...
- We know we should review our investments, but ...

Can you fill in the blanks? Never mind. Don't answer. I don't think I can take it.

One reason everyone procrastinates and sits around on their "but" is that most of us think the pain of change is greater than the pain we currently experience, so we stay stuck.

Lilly is 62, hates her job, and tells me she wants to retire-but she won't do anything to achieve her goal. She hasn't gotten around to calling Social Security to find out about her retirement benefits. She hasn't taken the steps I outlined last month to determine how much she needs to spend every month or done the calculation to determine how much she can safely withdraw from her investments to create income. She hasn't taken her ailing, 95-year-old father to the attorney to review his trust, which jeopardizes his entire estate and her entire multimillion dollar inheritance.

All of these seem to overwhelm Lilly, so instead of doing one thing at a time, she does nothing. The pain she is in now is less than the pain she perceives in climbing that financial mountain. And the thing that really steams my broccoli is that, based on some quick calculations, I know Lilly can easily afford to retire immediately. But Lilly must convince herself.

Lilly needs to do two things. She needs to break the tasks down to bite-sized actions and make a commitment to get these things done one at a time.

If you are like Lilly or Walt (and let's face it, we all are), here's an action plan that can help get you unstuck.

1. Today, right now, right this second, go get a piece of paper and a pen. Do not pass go, do not collect \$200. Do not take another breath until you have your pen and paper.

2. Write down your most important financial goals. They could include such things as reviewing your life insurance needs, having your trust reviewed, making better investments, creating a budget or reviewing your IRA beneficiaries. If you

don't know what your goals are, your first assignment is to go to the bookstore and read a book by Suze Orman or David Bach. These books will give you plenty of ideas.

3. Do you have your goals written down? Good. Now, pick one. You are allowed to work on only one at a time. Once you complete the first task, you have my permission to work on the second item. But we are only going to work on one task at a time.

4. For that one task, write down all the steps you need to take to complete the task. For example, let's assume you want to have a living trust created or reviewed.

Here's a list of what your steps might be:

- Get referrals from friends and professionals for a good lawyer.
- Call at least three lawyers on this list to determine the cost and to determine if you feel comfortable with that person.
- Decide who will be your attorney.
- Make an appointment to meet with the attorney.
- Complete and return the documents the attorney asks for.

5. Schedule a time today or at the very latest tomorrow to complete the first step. Immediately after the first step is complete, schedule time the very next day to complete the next step. You schedule a new step only after the current step is complete. In other words, you're going to knock down one goal at a time, and the way you're going to accomplish this goal is to do it one step at a time, one day at a time.

Even Uncle Walt could get this done-if he'd decide that his life is more important than his laziness. I'll leave you with these wise words from personal development great Napoleon Hill: "Remember, no more effort is required in order to aim high in life, to demand abundance and prosperity, than is required to accept misery and poverty."

Neal Frankle is the author of Why Smart People Lose a Fortune: 5 Steps to Restoring Your Wealth and Sanity. He helps affluent clients establish and implement a safety-net strategy to protect their wealth. He also helps other professionals, such as CPAs, to do the same thing for their clients. To contact him, send an email to Neal@WealthResourcesGroup.com.

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