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As we move into fall and I start catching up with clients on matters financial, one of the most common topics of conversation is “what did you get up to over the summer?”. On my (too short) list was seeing my 18-year old son off to his first semester at university. This news is quite often greeted with complete shock – “Your son is 18?? Really?” Or, some version of “Wow, time flies”. Time does seem to speed by faster each year. When you’re 10, summer lasts forever - when you’re four score and ten it goes by in a heartbeat.

The passage of time has profound implications when it comes to our financial goals and plans. It’s easy to let things “get away from us” because we’re both busy and we typically don’t have a “hard and fast” date or time table for when things need to be done - like ensuring our wills are up-to-date or saving enough for retirement.

To that end, one of the most useful planning exercises I know of is also one of the most simple – and it goes like this:

Make a vertical list of all the important people in your life -- you, your spouse, children, parents, other family members, etc. Beside that list make five columns. The first is headed 2013, the second 2018, then 2023, 2028, and finally 2033. Now fill in everyone’s ages in the respective columns.

Forget about your own “age trajectory” for a moment. The real significance of the list

hits home when it comes to your “significant others” and the timing of life events relative to your age. Say you are 50 and your daughter is in grade 10. In five years, she’s 21 – 3rd year university perhaps? Are you prepared for that financially? In 10 years, you’re now 60 and she’s 25, graduated and maybe starting career #1 (or degree #2). Was the plan to help her with a first home purchase? Within 20 years could a wedding and the start of a family be in the picture? You don’t know exactly when these things will take place, but future events become a lot more certain when you look at them in terms of 5-year “windows”.

More significant issues arise when we start to consider timelines in relation to parents and older family members. As mentioned, I’m 55. My father is 25 years older than me. Now he’s a pretty fit and healthy 80 - but when I’m 65 and perhaps thinking of retiring myself, he’s going to be 90.

Hmm... I hope he’s still playing “pickle ball” and snooker with his buddies in 10 years, but he may not be. Will he be living independently? Are the resources in place in case he needs assistance? What about estate issues? Tough questions – but I know that in one of those upcoming 5-year time periods I’ll likely have some important personal and financial events occurring. Whether I’m wearing my “financial planning” hat, or my “dutiful son” hat, I’d rather start planning for them now.



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