Would You Like Us to Prepare Your Taxes for You?

One of the perks of being in the IDA program is that we will prepare your taxes for you by appointment, as opposed to coming to one of the VITA tax clinics as a “walk in”. Liz and Maureen are both trained and certified to prepare federal and state taxes as well as Renter Rebate and Home Declaration. Please contact us directly or through the phone or email above between now and early April. For clinic information, the full VITA schedule and what to bring are online at www.capstonevt.org. Whether or not you have us prepare your tax return, we hope you will choose to save a portion of your refund in you IDA!

Capstone’s Micro Business Offering Exciting Workshops for Entrepreneurs!

Business Counselor, Margaret Ferguson is please to host the following workshops at 20 Gable Place in Barre. There is no cost to attend:

**Using Google To Promote Your Business:** Monday, February 26th at 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm; please call Paige Johnson, 882-8191 to register in advance

**Run Your Business, Balance Your Life:** Wednesday, February 28th at 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm; with Lisa Danforth

**How to Master Your Time Management:** March 28th at 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm; with Lisa Danforth

**QuickBooks:** Friday, March 30th at 8:30 am – 4:30 pm; the morning is focused on basic set up and use while the afternoon builds on that and introduces new material; come to one or both. Must register in advance - Contact Maggie Fox, Business Advisor at Community Capital, 479-0167, ext. 1 or mfox@communitycapitalvt.org visit www.communitycapitalvt.org.

Vermont Saves!

Vermont Saves is a new alliance under the umbrella of America Saves (the “Save Your Refund” folks). Vermont Saves is reaching across the state to help guide Vermonters on a savings journey. Vermont Savers practice sound savings habits, achieve financial goals, and build financially stable lives for themselves and their families through this free and open platform.

Check out the official Vermont Saves website at [https://americasaves.org/local-campaigns/vermont-saves](https://americasaves.org/local-campaigns/vermont-saves) for lots of great advice or to take the pledge to save. It is quick and easy to pledge — enter your name, how much you plan to save, and for what.

That’s it! You are simply pledging to deposit a designated amount of money to your own savings account. The money is yours to be used for whatever you want, whenever you want it! The week of Feb. 26—March 3 has been designated for the Vermont kick-off, but you can start saving at any time.
On the surface, personal finance seems to be primarily about money: getting rich and optimizing your investments and so on. It's definitely about all of that stuff, but in a larger, more important way, it has nothing to do with money all at. It's more about using it to optimize your values and priorities.

Learn to Manage Your Money So It Doesn't Manage You

My dad used to say, “Money isn't the problem; the lack of it is.” And it's true: money doesn't buy you happiness, but not having enough of it can be a pain. And the level of pain varies, depending on your situation.

Growing up, my parents had a hard time making ends meet, at least for a few years. They wanted to move to a better neighborhood with better schools, but that wasn't going to happen. Others have it even worse. In *Scarcity, Why Having Too Little Means So Much*, authors and researchers Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir describe study after study that shows a lack of money affects our decisiveness, well-being—even our politeness. The authors write:

> Scarcity is not just a physical constraint. It is also a mindset. When scarcity captures our attention, it changes how we think. By staying top of mind, it affects what we notice, how we weigh our choices, how we deliberate, what we decide and how we behave.

Like it or not, money is powerful. Most of us are controlled by it, and that’s where personal finance comes in. Personal finance is about learning to manage money so you can use it to your advantage. It’s about taking control. Ironically, the goal of personal finance is to get to a point where you don’t have to worry about money at all.

Money Itself Is Not The Goal

It's easy to assume that managing money means chasing after it. Obviously, having more money always helps, but if money is the end goal, you're doing it wrong. And for a long time, I did it wrong.

After I graduated, I wanted to travel. My goal was to get out of debt so I could afford to go to Europe. That was a specific, concrete goal, and it motivated me to pay off my student loan. After I traveled, though, I started earning a bit more money, but I didn't really have another financial goal. In a way, I was drifting; my goal was simply to accumulate money. That goal was vague and boring, because it was just about hoarding pieces of paper. There's little point in accumulating money if it doesn't have some purpose. In my situation, it felt pointless, so eventually, I stopped saving as much and started spending mindlessly.

It took me a while to realize that **money is a tool**, not an ideal. Personal finance isn’t about accumulating tools. It’s about using that tool to live the life you want. Here’s how Luke Landes of Consumerism Commentary puts it:

> Money is only worth what you can do with it...So when I hear that someone’s goal is to have a nest egg of ten million dollars, it is an empty goal. This goal is nothing more than having bits and bytes in a certain configuration on a certain server in a database record associated with your identity... What would you like to do with that money?... Assign your goals to the reasons you are saving money, not the money itself.

That last sentence pretty much sums up what people think personal finance is versus what it’s actually about. I also like the way writer Colin Wright puts it at Big Picturing:

> There is absolutely nothing wrong with money, and there’s absolutely nothing wrong with pursuing more of it, if doing so will help you become more you, and allow you to do more of what makes you feel alive. It’s also important to have enough so that you can keep a roof over your head and food on the table: I’m certainly not suggesting that the desire to have any money is a waste of time, particularly when it allows us to sustain the societal fundamentals.

Just make sure you know why you’re pursuing it. That you see the big picture and allow it to guide your steps.

In short, money is not the focus. It’s not about busting your ass at a job you hate so you can earn pieces of paper and then one day retire and finally relax. It’s about using money to pursue more of what you want in life. That might even mean saving enough to leave the job you hate and do something you actually enjoy instead.

It’s More About Mind Than Math

Sure, there are some basic financial rules that come with personal finance. Rules like:

- Spend less than you earn
- Pay off your debt
- Invest so your money can grow

These are important, but they’re not the meat of what personal finance is really about. Most of personal finance is, well, personal. And sometimes that even means bending these basic tenets and doing what works for you. More than math and rules, personal finance has to do with behavior: your habits, mindset, and actions.

I’d even argue that the focus should be more on behavior than the rules. You can read about the best methods to pay off debt all day long, but if you’re not in the right mindset, you’re probably not going to do it...People tend to brush off money management because they “don’t care about money.” Oddly enough, that’s exactly why they should care about managing it. If you don’t like to think about money, the best way to make sure you don’t have to is to set up a system for properly managing it.

Yes, personal finance has to do with money. However, it’s really about learning to control it so you can get on with your life, whether that means traveling, affording the lifestyle you want, or paying your bills without worry.