

FINANCE

Planning can yield big dividends

Now that 2005 is in the history books, how did you do? Or do you know how you did? Have you taken inventory of your accomplishments and goals? Did your personal life reach a new peak of satisfaction? Did you get to travel, go to the games you wanted to attend and do the things with your kids that you wanted to? If you accomplished the goals you were hoping to, you are one of the few who used a plan to get where you want to go.

Many people wonder why they have so little time or why they never accomplish some of the things they are so excited about when a new year begins. There is a major reason why this happens. A good example would be the ads that are airing at the end of the year already selling you on the weight loss program that will help you take off the pounds you put on over the holidays. The companies know you are thinking about your weight, so hopefully you will react when your emotion is high. The programs are primarily designed to get you to do exactly what you already know: You should lose weight, work out and watch what you eat. The backbone of what these companies are selling is the routine, and the discipline to follow the proper track. Most of us have trouble following the path without assistance.

Investing has the same characteristics. In the beginning you get all excited about saving money and achieving your goals, and as the years stretch on the



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question becomes whether you have a plan. Do you understand the importance of investing consistently in the marketplace or do you buy when the money is burning a hole in your pocket? Do you follow the crowd, or do you seek out the proper investment that will meet your objectives? People often argue about how well a fund has done or how a friend's

investment did versus their own investment portfolio.

This is where the story of the tortoise and the hare makes a full impact on the outcome of the race to achieve your goals. After all, achieving your goals should be part of an overall objective to be able to enjoy life in addition to investing. Those who invest consistently based on their goals and objectives will succeed more often and at a higher level than those who fail to plan and consistently invest. Part of the reason is that investors often chase investment deals without a plan or do not participate at all. Many times there is talk about the returns, but a failure to actually carry out the plan. Moving out of markets when they are low fearing further declines and then failing to get back in the markets allowing to participate in rising values as the markets turn.

Unfortunately for many investors, this is not unusual, but can affect the overall return on a dramatic basis. So now that the New Year is upon us you should do a couple of things to improve your financial health so you can enjoy

life just a little better. Imagine where you want to go and try to get there by the end of next year. Write out a plan to get there, and do it!

Remembering Christoffersen

On another note, in a couple of previous articles I have spoken of entrepreneurs and how they have a special talent to be able to build companies. When one of them succeeds and becomes a great business leader who is admired by his or her peers, we all celebrate their successes together as they continue to grow and employ many people. Through their ventures they affect many lives, not only through the income they provide for their employees, but for the additional contributions they make through time and or money that the individual contributes to the area and to the community.

Recently, our community lost such an entrepreneur who emulated what a good business man, leader and entrepreneur can be. Art Christoffersen was that individual. If you followed his career he not only was a great success in business, but a great success in his personal life. His contribution to numerous charities and community efforts will also be missed. He accomplished all of this despite the fact that he was given such a short life span.

I first met Art where we both grew up. Both of our families were residents of Delmar. The town had a population of less than 500 people, so it was easy to get to know one another. Art played basketball at Delwood where I also fol-

lowed in his footsteps. We were both part of successful teams that created a lot of excitement for such a small town. Later when my team went on to the state tournament, Art and many of the players followed us through our journey. He shared the excitement with the entire community as our small school of less than 120 kids represented the state team. He used to introduce me to some people and say, "Tom missed the last two free throws he shot in that game in Des Moines." I think it was his way of keeping me humble as a business man from Delmar knowing that I had actually made those shots.

Art and I would occasionally meet for breakfast just to keep the Delmar connection going and I think more so for him to give me some good advice. We would chat about different companies that were starting up in the state or ideas that people had brought to us. As investors and entrepreneurs you see a lot of the same deals, so to speak, as they circulate for capital raising ideas. We would exchange thoughts on many of the investment banking issues and then eventually get back to just fun conversation. Art not only built his own companies, but helped many others find the capital they needed or he helped them with advice as to how to succeed.

As a small town guy who shared a small amount of his time, I can only say he will be greatly missed by many.

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