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THE FRANKENMUTH GROUP  
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### SPRING CLEANUP

Spring has sprung which leads to blooming flowers and greening grass. On a personal note, the change in season brings me much joy. I love the sounds of birds chirping and the smell of grills cooking. Having sunshine filled days that progress into star lit evenings is also a delight. I enjoy time searching for my ball on the golf course and praying for a bite on the lake. "Spring clean-up" is another part of the equation that takes time and effort now but sets the stage for a fruitful looking lawn throughout the outdoor months.

This time to "clean-up" ties in well with your finances as a way to assess where you are now and where you want to go. What has been working well or what could use some work? Might there be an inefficiency that is costing you over time? In general, the season of blossom seems to jive well as the season of reflection and being proactive in your financial life.

Often times the word "budget" is frowned upon or promotes a certain level of anxiety. Having a plan on paper goes a long way in keeping one honest and on track. A simple "zero based" budget where you list your take home income and subtract all categories of spending/saving down to zero is sufficient. Completing this task on a monthly basis allows you to keep score and take charge of your money. Ask yourself - do you control money or does money control you?

Establishing an emergency fund is a great way to take control of your money while being proactive for those rainy days. I often recommended 3-6 months of living expenses in cash or an easily accessible alternative. Having something is better than nothing and can potentially avoid blowing up your budget or having to take on debt to cover an unforeseen expense.

Lastly, decluttering your accounts will often bring a sense of organization and control. Think about the bank accounts, credit cards, CD's, 401(k)'s, etc. that may be spread amongst numerous entities. Taking inventory and consolidating allows for more transparency and understanding of your entire financial situation. This ties in well as an excellent time to review your annual free credit report that will list open lines of credit while also alerting you to any credit issues you may not be aware of.

Much like the joy that can come from warmer temps and being able to get outside, a sense of joy and control can come from taking inventory of your finances. It's a commitment of time that has potential to pay dividends all year. It's also a commitment that doesn't need to be tackled alone. Work with a trusted advisor that is willing to take the necessary time to make sure you are comfortable and aware of your entire financial picture.

—Rob Swarts, AWMA®