

Financial Lessons That Made a Difference

I didn't start adulthood with a detailed plan. Most of what worked came from small decisions, a few good mentors, and learning from mistakes. Looking back now, a pattern does appear. Here's roughly how it unfolded.

Starting Out

One early advantage was simple: my parents let me stay at home for a while without charging rent. That gave me room to get on my feet and I've always appreciated it.

College Years

I worked while going to school and eventually graduated without debt. It took about five and a half years, and at the time it probably looked like I was wandering a bit.

Transportation during those years was my Aunt Joan's **\$900 1971 Plymouth Duster**, which I drove about 181,000 miles. It wasn't impressive, but it worked.

To save money I also took every community college class available while figuring out a direction. Eventually I discovered work I really enjoyed — solving puzzles and problems.

That discovery shaped the rest of my career.

Growing Up

At some point along the way I realized discipline mattered more than talent.

I made a simple rule:

No drinking until the work was done, and never at lunch, and NEVER ON A SUNDAY.

It sounds minor, but it changed the direction of things.

Around the same time I met Pam. One of the best things we shared was a similar attitude toward money. She has always been a saver, which made many later decisions easier.

Early Career Decisions

When my career first started, my income actually went down for a while.

Instead of buying a new car, I bought bonds. A few years later the interest from those bonds helped offset interest on a car loan.

Not a master strategy — just a small decision that worked out.

I also started tracking money carefully. I've kept some form of a budget since the late 1970s and still have check register entries going back to **1979**. Mostly that was to keep myself honest.

Using Opportunities at Work

My company offered education benefits, so I used them. They helped pay for graduate school and even covered the books.

During those years I was still driving my Aunt Joan's **\$1,100 1975 Duster** until the torsion bars rusted out. Eventually I donated it to the Clawson High School auto shop.

At the same time I began paying attention to retirement plans, profit sharing, and employee savings programs. At the time those seemed small, but they quietly accumulated over the years.

Mentors

Another turning point was finding people who knew more than I did.

A math professor helped me get my first real job. Graduate school professors were generous with their time and guidance. Later in my career I learned a lot just by observing experienced leaders.

Listening to people who had already been through it saved me from some mistakes.

Fixing My Work Habits

When I was younger I wasted more time than I should have.

Eventually I corrected course and made a habit of showing up on time every day. I kept that up for about thirty years.

Consistency counts for more than people think.

A Few Simple Rules

Over time a few personal guidelines helped:

- Vacations were paid for before we took them
- Tried to live within cash flow

Nothing complicated, just guardrails.

Lending and Helping

When someone asked for a small or medium loan, I usually tried to help if I could.

If it came back, great. If not, I treated it as tuition in understanding people.

Cars and Lifestyle

GM employee pricing helped when it was available, but most of the time we simply kept cars longer.

Often I would take the car after Pam had driven it for three or four years. That simple approach saved more money than it felt like at the time.

Learning About Investing

Over the years I spent time learning about finances and investing.

A stock club at work, reading, spreadsheets, and conversations helped.

Eventually I discovered index funds and the logic of low-cost investing. The more I learned, the more that approach made sense.

Simple tends to win over complicated.

Around the same time we set up a Roth IRA for Pam. Life got busy and we mostly forgot about it. Years later we looked at it again and realized it had grown into something meaningful.

Sometimes patience does most of the work.

Becoming Careful

Experience also taught me to be cautious with financial products that required a long explanation or a strong sales pitch.

If something is difficult to understand, slowing down usually helps.

A Lesson About Job Security

One of the most valuable lessons I learned came from losing a job at an ice cream shop when I was young. It removed the idea that any job was permanent. After that I tried to stay prepared.

Investing in Myself

Throughout my career I tried to keep learning.

Classes, certifications, and training whenever possible.

Eventually I went back to school and earned a **Master of Science in Business**. The company helped pay for it and scholarships filled in the rest.

Some of the most valuable experience came from volunteering for projects outside my normal responsibilities, including helping establish the Comerica Association of Project Professionals and assisting with company training initiatives.

Those experiences mattered later.

Saving for the Future

Whenever retirement plans, profit sharing, or stock programs were available, we tried to participate. Pam did the same.

Those steady contributions add up more than people realize.

The Closing Chapter

Near the end of my career the company actually wanted me to stay.

Instead we worked out a package that included a year of severance so a younger employee could keep their position.

It felt like a reasonable way to close that chapter.

Looking Back

None of this was genius.

Mostly it was patience, decent habits, and avoiding a few expensive mistakes.

Over a long enough timeline, that turns out to be enough.