

INFORMATIONAL

THE NEED FOR PATIENCE | 3

Even vacation travel can test our patience sometimes

IS IT TIME? | 4

How do we deal with the emotional challenges of retirement?

MARCH CRAZINESS | 5

Basketball brackets and the S&P 500 - an interesting analogy



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SPRING FORWARD!

by Luke Kuchenberg, CFP®

If you look outside, you may think I'm premature in declaring winter is over, but I feel it is time. After all, today (as I write this) is early April and it is now officially spring – at least by the calendar. With that, I believe it is time for us to put the cold winter away and start fresh. Let's wash the salt from our cars, put our boots and scarves in their basement tote boxes and hang up those snow shovels. It is time for a little spring in our step.

As I get older, I feel the hope of spring more and more. There is something about the season's new life, the grass and trees once again turning green. The year 2018 may be into its fourth month, but spring gives us all the feeling of a fresh start. Maybe it is the planner in me, but this new season brings with it a time for plans and projects. We all seem a bit antsy to get outside - to do, to create, to breathe. The kids love this time of year, too, whether it is outdoor soccer games at school recess or playing in the mud when they get home. It doesn't seem to be spring unless Jack, Lauren and our yellow lab, Stella, are covered in dirt. Maybe this is the spring fever we all hear about?

Call it whatever you would like, I'm ready. Bring on the daffodils and the tulips. Welcome back our snow birds from the south as well as the robins, orioles

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



“Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.”

– RALPH WALDO EMERSON



LIVE IT!

by Tyson Ray, CFP®

Imagine that I made a plan to take my family to Walt Disney World next year.

Pretend that I sat down at the computer with my sons and showed them the magical sights and sounds of Disney. That throughout the year I reviewed my plan to make sure we were on track: setting aside the money, planning the travel, making sure the kids were going to be able to get out of school and the dogs would be cared for... checking all the details.

Imagine that throughout the year, as the family lost sight of what was to come, I took them back to the Disney website over and over to remind them of the unparalleled entertainment, the rides, and the adventure that awaited us there.

Picture the day that we finally load ourselves into the car and begin the long road trip to that glorious place. Along the way, at different times and

for different reasons, each of us gets impatient and complains about how long the drive is. "Are we there yet?" is voiced too many times to count. And envision when, after many long hours of travel and a year of planning, we arrive in Orlando and see the sign that says "Welcome to Disney!"

Finally, imagine that we park the car in the parking lot and spend our vacation there, never actually going into Walt Disney World. Wouldn't you think I had lost my mind? Well, I see many people do this every day. Confused? Permit me to explain.

One thing that I know for sure is that there is a big difference between *making* a plan and *living* out the plan. For years, I have watched people plan to retire and, when the day arrives, they keep working. I have seen people plan for their dream vacation, save the money, research the destination, accommodations, and activities, yet they never go. I have also seen people who do not make plans and end up

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

SPRING FORWARD!

continued from page 1

and bluebirds. Opening Day baseball? Yes, please! Let our decks once again become part of our living room. Time to light the grills, invite some friends or family over and raise a cold (insert beverage of your choice) to toast the new season.

Make no mistake, spring is here. How will you celebrate the season? No matter how you go about it, we look forward to hearing all about your plans, projects and goals for spring 2018.

Until then, here's to good living!

Luke

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THE NEED FOR PATIENCE

Even vacation travel can test our patience sometimes.

by Tyson Ray, CFP®

**“Patience is a virtue,
and I’m being patient.
It’s a tough lesson.”**

Though I thought that, and shared it recently on Facebook, Elon Musk actually said it. Here’s my story.

For spring break this year, Jenny and I took the boys to Panama City Beach. I left a few days early to visit clients. Jenny wanted to drive with the boys and do some sightseeing along the way. We all ended up in Florida the weekend of Palm Sunday and had a great week of beach life.

The following Saturday morning, Jenny left in the car with the boys,

planning to spend two days in Nashville, while I was to fly home alone from Panama City, through Atlanta to Milwaukee.

At the airport in Panama City, I’m told my flight is delayed. The Delta agent explains the delay may cause me to miss my Atlanta to Milwaukee flight. I asked about flights to Chicago and found a flight that would have me home before I would even leave Atlanta for Milwaukee. She printed me a confirmation but suggested I still try to make my original flight. Will do.

On the plane from Panama City to Atlanta, I sit down next to a wonderful mother with her 9-month old baby girl in her lap. I reassure her not to worry,

I’ve got three kids. She responds, “Great because I’ll breastfeed her on the way up and down to help her clear her ears.”

For two hours this little girl not only cried but screamed with volume that should not be possible for something so small. I felt badly, not just for the woman but for everyone on that airplane. And what made it worse was about every 15 minutes, mom would pop her head up from behind the breastfeeding privacy blanket to say, “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry. Sorry!”

Finally landing in Atlanta, I had 19 minutes to go from B10 to E33 to catch my connection. If you’ve ever traveled through the Atlanta airport,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



IS IT TIME?

by Luke Kuchenberg, CFP®

Your financial plan is set. It looks great. It has been stress-tested and we have discussed all of your many, varied “what if” scenarios.

You are ready and this is the day you have looked forward to... Retirement. Or financial independence. No matter what words or phrasing you use, it means one thing. You no longer HAVE to work for income. You are beholden to no one, no company, no more email chains or meeting in Kansas City next Tuesday. You have arrived. So why is it you don't feel better about it? Again, you have waited, saved and planned for this day for decades. Dreamed about it even. But there is something that is muting all of that joy. What is it? The answer may surprise you. After all, who thought the financial aspects of this whole retirement thing would be the easy part. But it turns out, in many client situations, it is just that.

I can imagine some of you saying, “What? Yeah right! When it is time for me, I'm done...no problem!” And, that may be. This is not something everyone deals with, but we run into it more often than not. Think about it for a minute. You work at a career, day in and day out, for decades, 30-40 years. You trade your Monday through Friday to make a living, build a life and provide for your family. While not everyone truly loves what they do, most do enjoy their work and it gives them satisfaction. Now, after annual meetings with your knowledgeable and follicle-challenged financial planner, you just leave work and it is all okay? Stop right there.



Going from 40-60 hours a week, earning a living, to no work on a dead stop can be very difficult mentally. As many of you have heard me say over the years, the very stewardship that got you here financially is the same trait that can now work against you to give up that paycheck and turn on income from your investments. This is something that is very real and we work with clients to coach them through. In the end, once we have determined through your plan that you are financially ready to retire, we focus on making sure you are emotionally ready to retire. This aspect is key to being happy in this much-awaited next phase of your life and is often overlooked. After 20 years of working and coaching clients through this big

decision, the truth is indisputable; you must retire to something, rather than from something.

How do we do it? How can we work through this emotional part of retirement? We advise clients to give themselves some grace. While you have indeed waited and wished for this day for many years, it is a learned lifestyle just like any other. When you first went to work you didn't have it all figured out on the first day, maybe not even in your first years. Retirement is no different. We tell clients it will come with time, to not over-think it.

The next step is gradually moving into this next phase. This can mean many

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



THE NEED FOR PATIENCE

continued from page 3

you know how sprawling it is, so off I go for the races. Down the hall, down an escalator, on the train C-D-E, up an escalator, and a long run for Gate 33. I see the plane still there around the corner, but the door is shut. I proceed to pound on the door.

After more pounding than I care to admit, an attendant from another gate comes up to me and says, “Sir, the door locks 10 minutes before the flight. You missed it.” Now drenched in sweat, I proceed to the Delta ticket counter to get a new boarding

pass for my flight to Chicago.

After waiting in line, I walk up to the Delta rep and explain my confirmation and rebooking from Milwaukee to Chicago. I am told, “You don’t have a seat assignment and the flight is full.” I point to the word “confirmed” that is highlighted and circled from the attendant in Panama City. “Nope, sorry but they needed to print you a boarding pass to reserve the seat.” Don’t worry, I’m told, in five hours there’s another flight to Milwaukee.

So I waited five hours, flew home, landed in Milwaukee, got my luggage and then got a phone call from a friend who’s picking me. Yep, he’s going to be 45 minutes late. (Hmm, it only takes 45 minutes to go from the Milwaukee airport to my house.) I wait again.

Tired and frustrated, I arrived at home and realized all the lights are out. Then I remembered that Jenny had a friend turn off the power in the house because we were having our hardwood floors refinished. (We’d been told the dust can cause sparks in the electrical system and we didn’t want to blow up the neighborhood.)

I found a flashlight, went down into the electrical room, turned on the breakers and returned to the kitchen upstairs. That is when I saw it - the huge puddle of water underneath the refrigerator. I opened up the fridge to see that all the ice is melted, along with ice cream, raw meat and other slimy stuff. I thought I’d instructed not to cut the power to the refrigerator when shutting things down, but nevertheless, everything was lost. As I’m cleaning the mess, I did remember to thank God that the hardwood floors were not ruined.

Totally exhausted, I went into my bathroom to get ready for bed and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

MARCH CRAZINESS

Tyson Ray, CFP®

I don’t enjoy spectator sports. I’m extremely competitive and I grew up competing in about every sport I could play. But after graduating high school and enjoying some intramural sports in college, I shifted my focus to my profession, which I pursue with passion. My free time is spent reading economic reports or research

reports, so rarely do I watch sports, much less follow teams. Many times, other people in the office have had to remind me what sports are in season, and I still may not pick up on it until they enter the playoffs.

Then I had three sons, and so now in March, my oldest son, Nelson,

challenges me to fill out an NCAA March Madness™ bracket. For the few of you who don’t know what I’m talking about, college basketball in the month of March consolidates itself down to apparently 68 teams that then compete against each other in a single elimination tournament

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

MARCH CRAZINESS

continued from page 5

to create the national champion. So, without much thought, I joyfully select teams - some I know, some based on their current ranking, some picked at random. In the end, my bias actually comes from some of you, our clients, because your favorite teams stick out in my mind.

This year, my son filled out his bracket, and he then got our youngest son to fill out a bracket by just naming off the names. Carson, at age nine, just picked whichever team he liked that sounded better. Austin, the middle son, pretty much will not do anything his older brother is doing, so he shook his head and didn't participate.

But after filling out these brackets, an interesting thing happened. My house came alive, and on Thursday, Friday, and the weekends through the second half of March, basketball played on TV, and kids were cheering for each game. There was teasing and laughing and support. Much joy flowed throughout the event.

Those of you who know me well will understand that it didn't take me long to relate all of this to investments. For example, instead of 68 basketball teams in a bracket, we deal with pools of companies - let's call them an index. In furthering this example, we could use the S&P 500 index, often referred to as "the market." While both the basketball bracket and the index start with a wide net in terms of what teams or companies get in, there is a critical but important difference here to note.

We are not trying to eliminate all the contenders and find the one winner. After all, what are the odds of having success with that? Just ask any bracket builder and they will tell you it is



not easy. (Can you say University of Maryland Baltimore County?!) Thus, with investing, we don't take those risks, but rather invest in the whole index. While there will no doubt be some companies in the index that underperform in any one year, we are also assured we will own the best at the same time. This, in the end, better balances your risk and provides the opportunity to participate in those index or market averages.

Through all of this, I have found a new spring pastime. At least while the boys are around, I believe this will become an annual Ray competition. All investing analogies aside, while the easy picks will always stay with Duke, Kentucky or Kansas, isn't it fun to see a Loyola Chicago once in a while? I hope you had some fun of your own with the brackets this year. If not, maybe consider it for next year. If I waited 43 years to get started, it is never too late! ■

The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index of 500 widely held stocks that is generally considered representative of the U.S. stock market. Inclusion of this index is for illustrative purposes only. Investors may not make direct investments into any index.

IS IT TIME?

continued from page 4

things, including cutting down your time slowly in your current working position. We are seeing more and more of this happen. Companies have been reluctant to let go of good, wise and experienced talent. They are encouraging employees to stick around on a more limited schedule to help ease any transition to new employees who will take your place. If this is not an option, another part-time position may be. This could take place within your same profession, as a consultant of some type, or with a career or industry that has nothing to do with the career from which you are retiring. The point is to slowly transition from working those full-time weeks to less and less time. At some point, the grace you give yourself works with you, and you realize you are not only ready to retire, you are looking forward to it.

This is not one-size-fits-all. Clients over the last 20 years have come from varied backgrounds, careers, and situations. And as varied as those were, so were the plans we designed to move them from their working years to being retired. As you see, while there are many nerdy and wonderful technical aspects of building a sound and sustaining financial plan, there are some emotional components as well. We will continue to work through those as we coach and walk alongside you in navigating your future. If you have questions or concerns about your upcoming or recent retirement and we have not yet had this conversation, please let us know. We look forward to helping you, too, discover this about yourself and come up with a plan that is unique to you. ■

LIVE IT!

continued from page 2

in one of two camps; they never saved enough to do anything, or they never realized all they could do with what they have.

Planning is Only the Beginning

At FORM Wealth Advisors, we work to help people live better in retirement, to enjoy life to the fullest with a simple two-step process: Plan It. Live It.

Step 1 - Plan It. Planning is to discover what is possible. It is to dream and then determine if and how the dream can become a reality. It is to understand the future consequences of today's decisions in order to avoid spending too much today, only to regret it tomorrow. Planning is a process of identification and then of elimination since, in the end, everyone has a limited amount of resources and an endless number of options. Planning finds the balance for the best life you can afford.

Step 2 - Live It. Living is the goal – not just having something to look forward to, but actually allowing yourself to enjoy the activity or achievement. And ultimately, you can spend the rest of your life with great memories. I have always said that, if you want to know what life is all about, you should spend some time with someone in their 90's who has lived well. The 90-year-old, content and holding treasured memories, is so much fun to be around!

A Living and Loving Reminder

On my recent Florida vacation, I didn't go to Disney, but I did spend some time visiting with my last living grandparent. Gramma Ray turned 99 three days before I turned 43 back in March. I walked away from our visit reminded that just about everything I currently worry about will not matter when I am 99. What does matter is to make sure I don't sell myself, my family or my clients short by camping out in the parking lots of life when we can enjoy experiencing things like Disney World. ■



THE NEED FOR PATIENCE

continued from page 5

start to see the dust. Dust is everywhere. We had scheduled the hardwood floor work to be done while we were on spring break and had asked if we should have a construction deep clean after they finished. We were told no, it won't be that bad. Well, it was that bad. Completely wiped out, I debated checking into a hotel, but the guest bedroom seems better so I dropped to sleep.

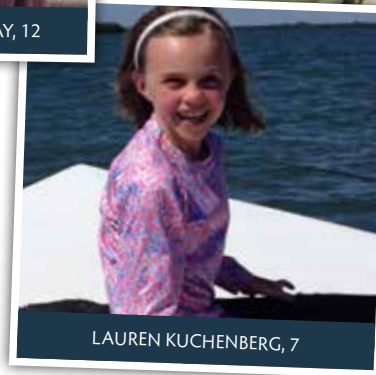
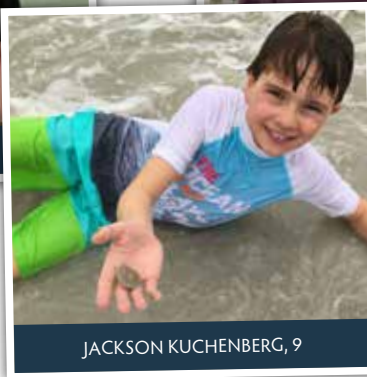
I woke up the next morning, Easter morning, and I'm thankful for being rested. I jumped in my car and zipped off to Lowe's to buy a shop vac to vacuum up the dust. While grabbing some supplies, I realized I was supposed to be at Lakeland Church encouraging the children's ministry. In fact, there was a group of third-graders counting on me. I headed off to church.

As I walk in, the youth leader stands up and says, "Our word for the day is *patience* - waiting until later for what you want now."

I burst out laughing. Patience, that is a good one! But an important lesson on that Sunday and every day is that patience is not simply the ability to wait, but how we behave while we wait or are being tested. Patience with the market as it rises and falls. Patience with the Wisconsin winter as it continues to cover the ground with snow. Patience with the person who waits in the long Starbucks line, yet still has no idea what to order when his turn comes. Ah, patience – I'm waiting. ■

FORM FAMILY

Spring 2018



Spring break highlights with our families

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