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Known for its ability to get crowdfunding off the ground and onto the radars of average consumers everywhere, Kickstarter also ups the ante when it comes to employee benefits: pet-friendly workspaces, paid holidays, sabbaticals, and a flexible vacation policy where employees can take off an uncapped number of days — a policy the company recently amended.

Kickstarter found that allowing employees ample time off actually challenged workers in the cutthroat tech industry not to take it, which decreased employee satisfaction, and increased stress levels and confusion in the workplace. These days, Kickstarter operates on a more finite vacation policy, but their short-lived unlimited vacation stint raises a significant question: Why don't more employees take time off?

Most of us take time off when we're sick, going on a yearly family vacation, or for those with kids, working around the

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hectic schedules of the young in our care. Rarely do those days off account for what some of us really need: a mental health day, which is informally defined as time an employee takes off for reasons other than a physical illness.

The lack of mental health days taken by employees occurs for a few reasons. The first stems from a martyr-like complex where workers feel so tied to their desks, the fear of leaving outweighs the need for a break. Other reasons are accounted for in a study by the GfK Public Affairs and Corporate Communications and the U.S. Travel Association. It was found that workers either can't afford to take a mental health day, or are afraid of returning to loads of work no one else is capable of doing.

Chronic stress is not only bad for your health, it's bad for your work life too. Working until the point of burnout can have even more adverse effects on your work and personal life than taking a single day off can. Overcoming the idea that a mental health day is a detriment is all about breaking away from denial, putting your own health first, and trusting that the company can survive a single day without you.

The best advice: If you see stormy seas ahead, schedule your mental health day in advance and respect it! Not only can it motivate you to keep up the good work, but it's a small step toward better mental health overall.

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People with aspirations can, in general, be split into two groups:

1. Doers
2. Dreamers

Doers make the world go 'round.

That said, dreaming isn't all bad ... and the truth is, most doers are also big dreamers.

But the key is turning dreams into real-world action.

You'll never have the life you want — the career you want — the real estate business you want — if you spend your whole life just dreaming.

You're on my list and get my newsletter because you have dreams.

You want to be a better real estate investor.

You want to build a bigger real estate business.

You want to grow your personal fortune.

You want to live a better life.

These are all good and noble things to want, but to get what you want and turn your dreams into reality, you must take action.

This lesson applies everywhere in life.

Doers take decisive action over and over again. Sometimes things work out, sometimes they don't — it really doesn't matter because in the long run, doers normally win. So, how do you force yourself to act even if you're a little scared or overwhelmed? Napoleon Hill said, "Fear, the worst of all enemies, can be effectively cured by forced repetition of acts of courage."

It's time to get to work. **SO ... How Will You Make 2016 Wildly Successful?** Onward and upward!

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If you're coachable, open to instruction, and will take what I share and put it into action immediately, complete the application by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/glcoachingapplication>.

After you complete the application, here's what will happen:

I will personally review your application to make sure you're a good fit for my program. If your application passes, then either I or someone from my office will call or email you to set up a one-on-one interview and strategy session with me.

Gerald Lucas

GERALD LUCAS
Real Estate Expert & Best-Selling Author



LOWER YOUR PROPERTY TAX

Without Lowering Your Living Space

Property taxes have become something of a taboo subject in American households. They have a nasty tendency to rise over time and, even after your mortgage is paid, the dreaded property tax keeps on coming. Unfortunately, your fresh exterior paint and flawless landscaping aren't doing you any favors — the better you keep your home, the more taxes you'll have to pay. Before you resort to living in ruins, however, check out these simple tips to help you reduce your property tax without reducing your home.



your curb appeal on the day the tax assessor drives by. Wait until after the evaluation (which should be scheduled) to renovate your kitchen. Anything that will increase the value of your home will also increase your property tax. Keep this in mind before making any structural changes to the outside of your house as well; a new deck or pool can cost you an arm and a leg in rising property taxes. Get an estimate from your local building department before you begin construction.

1. Study your assessment: The simplest way to lower your property tax is to study your Property Record card. You can find this card at your local town hall or on your tax assessor's website. It's easy for tax assessors (who often assess your house without ever stepping foot inside) to make costly mistakes. They could assume that your house has four bedrooms when it only has three, or that you have a finished attic when all you really have is a dusty storage space above the garage. In any case, mistakes are common, and any discrepancies

can be taken up with your tax assessor. Likewise, make sure to include any deficiencies that your assessor may not know about. If your roof leaks and your backyard floods, the value of your house (as well as your property tax) will lower.

2. Don't flaunt: Attractive homes are more likely to be assigned a higher value, and expensive homes pay expensive property taxes. There's a fine line between owning a beautiful home and paying too much in property tax. No one expects you to live in a dump; just limit

3. Check out your neighbors: If their three bed, two bath house with an in-ground pool is valued at a lower cost than your three bed, one-and-a-half bath home with an above-ground sprinkler, there is probably a mistake in there somewhere. If you can find several similar houses that were assessed lower than yours, bring it to your tax assessor's attention. It's likely that your property taxes will be reduced to a more manageable level in no time.

ASK GERALD a Real Estate Question

Q: Gerald, I hired a contractor to renovate our kitchen and bathroom. The first two guys I spoke with wanted half of the money upfront. **How much upfront money should I give a contractor before he starts working?**
Robbie, Passaic, NJ



ability of the contractor to take off with our money without completing the work we paid them to do. In fairness, the contractor also wants to make sure that he or she gets paid for the work that they do — so it requires some give and take. As a rule, I like to make small payments to contractors as they complete mutually agreed upon milestones. I also only work with contractors who have trade lines, which are credit lines that allow them to buy their own supplies and materials for the work they are going to do. In my view, at the end of the day, the person who is paying the money should have the final say. So what should you do if the contractor wants more money than you feel comfortable paying upfront? The answer is move on to the next contractor.

Thanks for your question, Robbie, and good luck. For more real estate tips and information, visit my blog at www.geraldilucas.com.

A: That's a great question, Robbie, and as a full-time real estate investor myself, it's an issue that I deal with all the time. So, how much money should you give a real estate contractor before he starts working? The answer is as little money as possible. If you've been burned by contractors in the past like most of us investors who've been in the business for a while, you'll understand why. As investors, we ideally would like to keep a contractor's work ahead of our payments — this way, we limit the

Why You Need to Pay Yourself First



If you've studied personal finance, you've probably heard the tip to always *pay yourself first*. Well, it sounds great, but in the real world, there are bills to pay, right? Yes — and you represent one of those bills!

Why is paying yourself first such an important habit in personal finance? For one thing, it reminds you that you matter. Your own finances aren't just an afterthought — they're the priority! It's empowering to know that you come first.

Second, paying yourself first helps you get money stashed away in spite of human nature. Generally, people will spend money on bills, followed by fun, and save whatever's left over. It's much better to change the order so that you save first, before you can think of a reason not to save — and then adjust your bills and lifestyle for the remainder of your income.

Third, that money may well come in handy. If you learn to live on less and save 5 or 10 percent of your income, you'll always have a life preserver to fall back on. That lump sum you've been building could cover you during an emergency, go toward a down payment on a home, or start compounding for you in a retirement fund!

With so many compelling reasons to pay yourself first, now the question is, how do you do it? The key is automation. Start by signing up for your company's 401(k) plan and arrange for automatic deductions from your paycheck into that account. Another priority is opening a high interest savings account and setting up automatic transfers from your paycheck or from your regular savings account. You should view this separate account as untouchable except in the direst of circumstances.

What else can you do? Start small rather than waiting any longer to save. If it's hard, start with just 1 percent of your income monthly: a penny out of every dollar you earn. Then raise it from there as possible.

If finances are so tight that you can't spare anything right now, rededicate yourself to getting a raise at work or a better job, and pledge to allocate that additional money as savings. Instead of seeing it as an insurmountable obstacle, see paying yourself first as a challenge that will reap huge rewards for you in the future — because it will!

Real Estate Insights

- Average New Jersey home prices are currently increasing at a 3 percent annual rate.
- Easing mortgage standards are allowing first-time homebuyers to finally jump into the housing market after a rough start to the year held a lot of them back. The share of mortgages going to first-time buyers has risen sharply over the past year.
- New Jersey's industrial real estate market continued to shine toward the end of 2015, bringing vacancy down to levels not seen since before the recession.
- Garages and basements are cheap spaces that typically add more value to a property than their cost.



- 1.** When you file a property insurance claim, document damage with both photos and video.
- 2.** Line up multiple potential funding sources beforehand as you plan a property rehab or renovation.
- 3.** Confirm contractor availability to work before you commit to buying a property that needs extensive renovations.
- 4.** When interest rates are low, always borrow for the longest term you can negotiate.