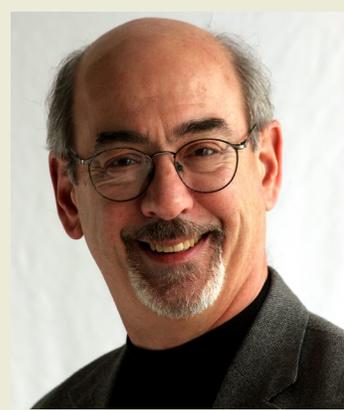


THE PERSONAL PLANNER

Personal Financial Planning Tips for Today and the Rest of Your Life



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Even though Mother Nature seems somewhat undecided about which season it is, it feels increasingly like Spring/Summer rather than the Winter/Spring it felt like this time last month, at that is certainly a welcome, if gradual, change.

The financial markets seem similarly undecided, although unlike the climate, the markets don't seem to be even sure which direction they're headed. We are long into a slow and gradual market recovery and an even slower economic advance and, thus, should not be surprised by a significant market correction, although the timing remains a mystery. This normal cyclical uncertainty is compounded by international currency and debt concerns that could have a significant impact on capital markets worldwide. But we've dealt with uncertainty before and we'll continue to monitor things and make portfolio adjustments as needed.

Enjoy the onset of summer!

Bruce Heling, CFP CPA
May 28, 2015

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It's Complicated: Money and Happiness

Millennials vs. Boomers: How Wide Is the Gap?

Age-Based Tips for Making the Most of Your Retirement Savings Plan

Are stock dividends reliable as a source of income?

 **HELING ASSOCIATES**
Bringing the Personal to Financial Planning

It's Complicated: Money and Happiness



Does more wealth lead to more happiness? Researchers have tackled this question for decades, and although the results have differed, one fact is certain: The relationship between money and

happiness--or "well-being," as many researchers put it--is complicated.

Think before you spend

In their book, *Happy Money: The Science of Smarter Spending*, Professors Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton summarize their own and others' research. What they found is that it's not necessarily how much you make that matters to overall happiness (although that certainly contributes), but what you do with your money. They boiled down the findings to five "key principles of happy money."

1. Buy Experiences. Investing in memories can result in a more sustained level of happiness than buying a bigger house, a more luxurious car, or other material goods. Buying the latest technological gadget might elicit the kind of joy of a child experiences opening a new toy on the holidays, but just like that new toy, the gadget loses its novelty with time--a principle psychologists refer to as "hedonic adaptation." On the other hand, experiences--even those that are fleeting or may initially provoke trepidation, such as hang gliding--create memories that help foster prolonged contentment.

2. Make It a Treat. While you're investing in those experiences, be sure to spread them out so they don't become expectations or habits. In this way, the novelty of each new experience will be fully realized. As the book says, "Abundance is the enemy of appreciation." This is also true with something as simple as a cappuccino. If you make it a daily ritual, it becomes a habit. If you instead substitute your daily coffee once a week with a froth-covered treat, then it becomes a reward to savor.

3. Buy Time. According to Dunn and Norton, individuals should ask themselves the question, "How will this purchase change the way I use my time?" For example, will it allow you to spend more time with your friends or family, or create more "to-dos" to clog your list? Will it free you up to participate in more activities you enjoy? Investing in products or services that allow you to spend time on the things you love will lead to greater overall well-being. And, say the authors, don't fall into the trap of putting a dollar value on your time, as this leads to increased stress levels. "Simply feeling like your time is valuable can make it seem scarce."

4. Pay Now, Consume Later. Paying for a treat or experience up front, such as event tickets you buy months in advance, allows you to benefit from the extended pleasure of eager anticipation. With all due respect to Tom Petty, the waiting, it seems, may be the best part. Conversely, credit cards can be a dangerous, albeit convenient, financial tool, facilitating a "consume now, pay later" dynamic. One study cited in *Happy Money* found that all 30 people surveyed underestimated their monthly credit-card bills by a sizable average of nearly 30%.

5. Invest in Others. Regardless of your circumstances--wealthy or not, young or old--research finds that spending money on others leads to greater happiness than spending on oneself.

The danger zones

While some experts differ on whether higher incomes result in greater levels of happiness, they tend to agree on the following: Increasing debt levels are detrimental to happiness, and keeping up with the Joneses can lead to a general sense of dissatisfaction. Instead, actively managing debt while finding ways to appreciate what you already have on a day-to-day basis may help you make well-thought-out saving and spending choices that support your overall level of well-being.

Millennials vs. Boomers: How Wide Is the Gap?



Can you tell the difference between the attitudes of baby boomers and millennials when it comes to finances? Take this quiz and see.

Texting versus email (or even snail mail). Angry Birds versus Monopoly. "The Theory of Everything" versus "The Sound of Music." "Dancing with the Stars" versus "American Bandstand."

It's no secret that there are a lot of differences between baby boomers, born between 1946-1964, and millennials, who were generally born after 1980 (though there is disagreement over the precise time frame for millennials). But when it comes to finances, there may not be as much difference in some areas as you might expect. See if you can guess which generation is more likely to have made the following statements.

Boomer or millennial?

- 1) I have enough money to lead the life I want, or believe I will in the future.
- 2) My high school degree has increased my potential earning power.
- 3) I rely on my checking account to pay for my day-to-day purchases.
- 4) I consider myself a conservative investor.
- 5) Generally speaking, most people can be trusted.
- 6) I'm worried that I won't be able to pay off the debts that I owe.

The answers

1) Millennials. According to a 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center, millennials were more optimistic about their finances than any other generational cohort, including baby boomers. Roughly 85% of millennials said they either currently had enough to meet their financial needs or expected to be able to live the lives they want in the future; that's substantially higher than the 60% of boomers who said the same thing. Although a higher percentage of boomers--45%--said they currently have enough to meet their needs, only 32% of millennials felt they had enough money right now, though another 53% were hopeful about their financial futures. Source: "Millennials in Adulthood," Pew Research Center, 2014

2) Boomers. The ability of a high school education to provide an income has dropped since the boomers' last senior prom, while a college education has never been more valuable. In 1979, the typical high school graduate's earnings were 77% of a college graduate's; in 2013, millennials with a high school diploma earned only 62% of what a college graduate did. And 22% of millennials with only a high school degree were living in

poverty in 2013; back in 1979, the figure for boomers at that age was 7%. Source: "The Rising Cost of Not Going to College," Pew Research Center, 2014

3) Boomers. Not surprisingly, millennials are far more likely than boomers to use alternative payment methods for day-to-day expenses. A study by the FINRA Investor Education Foundation found that millennials are almost twice as likely as boomers to use prepaid debit cards (31% compared to 16% of boomers). They're also more than six times as likely to use mobile payment methods such as Apple Pay or Google Wallet; 13% of millennials reported using mobile methods, while only 2% of boomers had done so. Source: "The Financial Capability of Young Adults--A Generational View," *FINRA Foundation Financial Capability Insights*, FINRA Investor Education Foundation, 2014

4) Millennials. You might think that with thousands of baby boomers retiring every day, the boomers might be the cautious ones. But in one survey of U.S. investors, only 31% of boomers identified themselves as conservative investors. By contrast, 43% of millennials described themselves as conservative when it came to investing. The survey also found that millennials outscored boomers on whether they wanted to leave money to their children (40% vs. 25%) and in wanting to improve their understanding of investing (44% vs. 38%). Source: Accenture, "Generation D: An Emerging and Important Investor Segment," 2013

5) Boomers. Millennials may have been around the track fewer times than boomers have, but their experiences seem to have given them a more jaundiced view of human nature. In the Pew Research "Millennials in Adulthood" survey, only 19% of millennials said most people can be trusted; with boomers, that percentage was 31%. However, millennials were slightly more upbeat about the future of the country; 49% of millennials said the country's best years lie ahead, while only 44% of boomers agreed.

6) Millennials. However, the difference between the generations might not be as significant as you might think. In the FINRA Foundation financial capability study, 55% of millennials with student loans said they were concerned about being able to pay off their debt. That's not much higher than the 50% of boomers who were worried about debt repayment.



1 This hypothetical example is for illustrative purposes only. Investment returns will fluctuate and cannot be guaranteed.

2 All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there can be no assurance that any investment strategy will be successful. Investments offering a higher potential rate of return also involve a higher level of risk.

3 Asset allocation is a method used to help manage investment risk; it does not guarantee a profit or protect against a loss.

4 There is no assurance that working with a financial professional will improve your investment results.

5 Withdrawals from your retirement plan prior to age 59½ (age 55 in the event you separate from service) may be subject to regular income taxes as well as a 10% penalty tax.

Age-Based Tips for Making the Most of Your Retirement Savings Plan

No matter what your age, your work-based retirement savings plan can be a key component of your overall financial strategy. Following are some age-based points to consider when determining how to put your plan to work for you.

Just starting out

Just starting your first job? Chances are you face a number of financial challenges. College loans, rent, and car payments all compete for your hard-earned paycheck. Can you even consider contributing to your retirement plan now? Before you answer, think about this: The time ahead of you could be your greatest advantage. Through the power of compounding--or the ability of investment returns to earn returns themselves--time can work for you.

Example: Say at age 20, you begin investing \$3,000 each year for retirement. At age 65, you would have invested \$135,000. If you assume a 6% average annual rate of return, you would have accumulated \$638,231 by that age. However, if you wait until age 45 to invest that \$3,000 each year, and earn the same 6% annual average, by age 65 you would have invested \$60,000 and accumulated \$110,357. By starting earlier, you would have invested \$75,000 more but would have accumulated more than half a million dollars more. That's compounding at work. Even if you can't afford \$3,000 a year right now, remember that even smaller amounts add up through compounding.¹

Finally, time offers an additional benefit to young adults: the ability to potentially withstand greater short-term losses in pursuit of long-term gains. You may be able to invest more aggressively than your older colleagues, placing a larger portion of your retirement portfolio in stocks to strive for higher long-term returns.²

Getting married and starting a family

At this life stage, even more obligations compete for your money--mortgages, college savings, higher grocery bills, home repairs, and child care, to name a few. Although it can be tempting to cut your retirement plan contributions to help make ends meet, try to avoid the temptation. Retirement needs to be a high priority throughout your life.

If you plan to take time out of the workforce to raise children, consider temporarily increasing your plan contributions before leaving and after you return to help make up for the lost time and savings.

Also, while you're still decades away from retirement, you may have time to ride out market swings, so you may still be able to invest relatively aggressively in your plan. Be sure to fully reassess your risk tolerance before making any decisions.²

Reaching your peak earning years

This stage of your career brings both challenges and opportunities. College bills may be invading your mailbox. You may have to take time off unexpectedly to care for yourself or a family member. And those pesky home repairs never seem to go away.

On the other hand, with 20+ years of experience behind you, you could be earning the highest salary of your career. Now may be an ideal time to step up your retirement savings. If you're age 50 or older, you can contribute up to \$24,000 to your plan in 2015, versus a maximum of \$18,000 if you're under age 50. (Some plans impose lower limits.)

Preparing to retire

It's time to begin thinking about when and how to tap your plan assets. You might also want to adjust your allocation, striving to protect more of what you've accumulated while still aiming for a bit of growth.³

A financial professional can become a very important ally at this life stage. Your discussions may address health care and insurance, taxes, living expenses, income-producing investment vehicles, other sources of income, and estate planning.⁴

You'll also want to familiarize yourself with required minimum distributions (RMDs). The IRS requires you to begin taking RMDs from your plan by April 1 of the year following the year you reach age 70½, unless you continue working for your employer.⁵

Other considerations

Throughout your career, you may face other decisions involving your plan. Would Roth or traditional pretax contributions be better for you? Should you consider a loan or hardship withdrawal from your plan, if permitted, in an emergency? When should you alter your asset allocation? Along the way, a financial professional can provide an important third-party view, helping to temper the emotions that may cloud your decisions.

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Are stock dividends reliable as a source of income?

Dividends can be an important source of income. However, there are several factors you should take into consideration if you'll be relying on them to help pay the bills.

An increasing dividend is generally regarded as a sign of a company's health and stability, and most corporate boards are reluctant to cut them. However, dividends on common stock are by no means guaranteed; the board can decide to reduce or eliminate dividend payments. Investing in dividend-paying stocks isn't as simple as just picking the highest yield; consider whether the company's cash flow can sustain its dividend, and whether a high yield is simply a function of a drop in a stock's share price. (Because a stock's dividend yield is calculated by dividing the annual dividend by the current market price per share, a lower share value typically means a higher yield, assuming the dividend itself remains the same.)

Also, dividends aren't all alike. Dividends on preferred stock typically offer a fixed rate of return, and holders of preferred stock must be paid their promised dividend before holders of common stock are entitled to receive theirs.

However, because their dividends are predetermined, preferred stocks typically behave somewhat like fixed-income investments. For example, their market value is more likely to be affected by changing interest rates, and most preferred stocks have a provision allowing the company to call in its preferred shares at a set time or at a specified future date. If you have to surrender your preferred stock, you might have difficulty finding an equivalent income stream.

Finally, dividends from certain types of investments aren't eligible for the special tax treatment generally available for qualified dividends, and a portion may be taxed as ordinary income.

Note: All investing involves risk, including the potential loss of principal, and there can be no guarantee that any investing strategy will be successful. Investing in dividends is a long-term commitment. Investors should be prepared for periods when dividend payers drag down, not boost, an equity portfolio. A company's dividend can fluctuate with earnings, which are influenced by economic, market, and political events.



How important are dividends in the S&P 500's total returns?

In a word, very. Dividend income has represented roughly one-third of the total return on the Standard & Poor's 500 index since 1926.*

According to S&P, the portion of total return attributable to dividends has ranged from a high of 53% during the 1940s--in other words, more than half that decade's return resulted from dividends--to a low of 14% during the 1990s, when the development and rapid expansion of the Internet meant that investors tended to focus on growth.*

And in individual years, the contribution of dividends can be even more dramatic. In 2011, the index's 2.11% average dividend component represented 100% of its total return, since the index's value actually fell by three-hundredths of a point.** And according to S&P, the dividend component of the total return on the S&P 500 has been far more stable than price changes, which can be affected by speculation and fickle market sentiment.

Dividends also represent a growing percentage of Americans' personal incomes. That's been especially true in recent years as low interest

rates have made fixed-income investments less useful as a way to help pay the bills. In 2012, dividends represented 5.64% of per capita personal income; 20 years earlier, that figure was only 3.51%.*

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*Source: "Dividend Investing and a Look Inside the S&P Dow Jones Dividend Indices," Standard & Poor's, September 2013

**Source: www.spindices.com, "S&P 500 Annual Returns" as of 3/13/2015