



Financial Foresights

Practical Insights For Your Financial Goals

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Hi Everyone,

I hope you enjoy this month's edition of my newsletter!

Enough with the snow already - bring on Spring!!

Dave

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Teach Your Children Well: Financial Tips for Teens

Today's teens have more money to spend and more opportunities to spend it, and if they're not careful, they can easily get into financial trouble. Before that happens to your teen, help him or her learn a few financial lessons.

Earning wages

If you think your teen is ready, encourage him or her to get a part-time job. Here are some things to discuss once your teen begins working:

- Agree on what your child's pay should be used for
- Show your teen how taxes reduce take-home pay
- Open a checking and savings account for your teen, and encourage him or her to save a portion of every paycheck before spending any of it



Keeping a balanced budget

To develop a balanced budget, have your teen list all his or her income. Next, list common expenses, such as food and gas (don't include things you will pay for). Finally, subtract the expenses from the income. If the results show that your teen will be in the red, you'll need to come up with a plan to address the shortfall.

To help your teen learn about budgeting:

- Devise a system for keeping track of what's spent
- Suggest thinking through spending decisions rather than buying on impulse
- Categorize expenses as needs (unavoidable) and wants (that can be cut)
- Suggest ways to increase income (like doing extra chores) and/or reduce expenses

The future is now

An older teen should be ready to focus on saving for larger goals (e.g., a new computer or a car) and longer-term goals (e.g., college, an apartment). Here are some ways to encourage saving for the future:

- Have your teen put the goals in writing to make them more concrete
- Encourage your child to save for what he or she wants, not what other kids have
- Praise your child for showing responsibility in meeting a goal

To introduce your teen to investing, open an investment account for him or her. (If your teen's a minor, this must be a custodial account.) Look for an account that can be opened with a low initial contribution at an institution that supplies educational materials about basic investment terms and concepts.

Should you give the kid credit?

If your teen is responsible, you might consider getting him or her a credit card. Most major credit card companies require an adult to co-sign a credit card agreement before they will issue a card to someone under the age of 18. Ask the credit card company for a low credit limit (e.g., \$300) or a secured card. This can help your child learn to manage credit without getting into serious debt. Also:

- Set limits with your teen on the card's use
- Make sure your child understands the grace period, fee structure, and how interest accrues on the unpaid balance
- Agree on how the bill will be paid, and what will happen if your child can't pay the bill
- Make sure your child understands how long it will take to pay off a credit card balance if he or she only makes minimum payments

Women Need Life Insurance Too

Today, women have more financial responsibilities than ever before. But, according to the LIMRA report entitled *U.S. Individual Life Insurance Sales Trends (2007)*, women are still underinsured. To be sure, life insurance planning is now just as important for women as it is for men.

Income replacement

Life insurance can be a useful tool for replacing income lost due to the death of a family's wage earner. Increasingly, families depend on the income of two working parents. If you're a working mother, your income can have a significant impact on the quality of your family's lifestyle. Your income helps cover the cost of ordinary living expenses such as food, clothing, and utilities. It provides savings for your children's college education, and for your retirement. Life insurance protects your family by providing proceeds that can be used to replace your lost income if you die prematurely.

If you're a single mother, you most likely are primarily responsible for your children's support. If you die prematurely, life insurance can provide ongoing income to cover child-care costs, medical expenses, and debts. While term insurance would suffice for simple income replacement, you may want to consider a permanent policy that builds cash value. The policy can replace your lost income if you die prematurely; otherwise, the cash value can be used to supplement your retirement.

Stay-at-home moms

Maintaining a household is a full-time job, and you have many important roles and duties. If you die, your surviving spouse may have to pay for services such as child care, transportation for your children, and housekeeping. Assuming any added responsibilities could cause your spouse to shorten work hours, resulting in a reduction in income. Proceeds from your life insurance can help your spouse pay for necessary services and replace lost income.



Caregiver replacement costs

Many women find themselves providing care for both children and elderly family members. It's hard enough finding sufficient income to pay for household expenses, child care, and college tuition. Add the costs of caring for an elderly parent or other family member, such as adult day care, uninsured medical expenses, and extra travel and transportation costs, and the financial burden can be overwhelming.

Unfortunately, these financial responsibilities may continue after your death. Life insurance provides a source of funds that can be used to help pay for these expenses.

Business succession

The Center for Women's Business Research reports that over 10 million businesses are owned by women. If you die while owning your business, life insurance can be used to provide cash for company expenses such as payroll or operating costs while your estate is being settled. Life insurance can also be a useful tool for women business owners who are structuring buy-sell arrangements or providing benefits to key employees.

Final expenses

The costs of funeral and burial expenses, estate administration expenses, outstanding debts, estate taxes, and the uninsured expenses of a final illness can place a financial burden on your survivors. Life insurance can ease this strain by providing a benefit that can be used to help pay for these expenses.

The need for life insurance protection for women is equally as important as it is for men. However, women's life insurance coverage is often inadequate. It may be time to consult with an insurance professional who can help you assess your life insurance needs, and offer information about the different types of policies available.

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Will You Pay Taxes on Your Social Security Benefits?

Did you know that you might have to pay federal income tax on your Social Security benefits? If Social Security was the only income you had during the year, then your benefits generally won't be taxable. However, if you or your spouse worked and had any earned income during the year, or if you had other substantial income (such as investment income), then a portion of your Social Security benefits may be taxable.

Gather information

Your benefits are taxable if one-half of your Social Security benefit plus your other income (called your "combined income") exceeds a certain amount (called the "base amount"). To determine if your benefit is taxable, you need to know three things: (1) how much you received from Social Security during the year, (2) your combined income, and (3) the base amount for your filing status.

Find out how much you received from Social Security

Each January, the Social Security Administration (SSA) will send you a Social Security Benefit Statement (Form SSA-1099) showing the amount of benefits you received during the previous year. You'll need to use this information to figure out whether any of your benefit will be taxable.

Calculate your total income

Once you know how much you've received from Social Security, it's time to calculate your combined income. This figure includes the following:

- One-half of Social Security benefits received
- Other income including wage income, and taxable interest and dividends
- Tax-exempt interest income
- Income that's normally excludable-- interest from qualified savings bonds, employer-provided adoption assistance, foreign earned income or foreign housing, and income earned by bona fide residents of American Samoa and Puerto Rico

The IRS has a worksheet you can use to calculate your combined income and determine whether or not your Social Security benefits are taxable. You can find this worksheet and more information about the taxation of Social

Security benefits in IRS Publication 915, *Social Security and Equivalent Railroad Retirement Benefits*.

Compare your combined income against the base amount for your filing status

Once you've calculated your combined income, you must compare that against the base amount for your federal income tax filing status. If your total income is less than the base amount, then your Social Security benefits won't be taxable. If your combined income is more than the base amount, then part of your benefits will be taxable. Base amounts aren't indexed for inflation, so they're the same year after year.

Your base amount is:

- \$25,000 if you file as single, head of household, qualifying widow(er), or married filing separately and you lived apart from your spouse for the entire tax year
- \$32,000 if you file as married filing jointly
- \$0 if you file as married filing separately and you lived with your spouse at any time during the tax year

For example, let's say your combined income for the year was \$30,000 and you file your taxes jointly with your spouse. Because your combined income is less than the base amount for your filing status, \$32,000, your benefits won't be taxable.

How much of your benefit is taxable?

Even if your combined income exceeds the base amount for your filing status, you won't have to pay taxes on the entire amount of benefits you've received. Generally, up to 50% of your benefits will be taxable, but if your combined income is more than \$34,000 (\$44,000 if you are married filing jointly), or if your tax filing status is married filing separately and you lived with your spouse at any time during the tax year, up to 85% of your benefit will be taxable. Again, see IRS Publication 915 for worksheets you can use to figure your taxable benefits.

Keep in mind that taxation of Social Security benefits can be complicated. Different rules apply to certain U.S. citizens and nonresident aliens living abroad and in other situations. If you have any questions, consult your tax professional.

Did you know?

Social Security benefits were not subject to federal income taxation until 1984. They became taxable as a result of the 1983 Amendments to the Social Security Act.



Tax withholding

You can have federal income taxes (but not state income taxes) withheld from your benefits if you so choose. Complete IRS Form W-4V and select the percentage that you want withheld (7%, 10%, 15%, or 25%), then return it to your local Social Security office.



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Ask the Experts



What are the benefits of donor-advised funds?

If you plan to make significant charitable gifts over a long period of time, a donor-advised fund (DAF) can be an attractive alternative to a private foundation.

While private foundations are separate charitable entities operated by their donors, a DAF is merely an account set up with a host organization, such as a community foundation or educational institution. You make contributions to the account, and the organization makes grants to qualifying charities in your name. Although the organization legally owns your contributions and has ultimate control over grants, you can advise the organization on how to invest your contributions and how grants should be made.

Donor-advised funds have become popular recently because they require less money, time, legal assistance, and administration than private foundations. DAFs also enjoy greater tax advantages.

Generally, you can open a DAF with a smaller initial contribution than would be required with a private foundation (as little as \$10,000). And because DAFs are qualified public charities, you generally get an immediate income tax deduction for your contributions (subject to the usual limitations).

Additionally, while private foundations are required to distribute a minimum of 5% of their assets each year, DAFs currently have no such minimum distribution requirement. You can let your account build up tax free for many years, deferring distributions until a later date. Further, DAFs are not subject to excise tax as private foundations are.

Finally, DAFs don't need to fulfill many of the reporting and filing requirements that are imposed on private foundations. And because the host organization handles any legal, administrative, and filing requirements (including tax returns), you're completely freed from these responsibilities.

How do I establish a donor-advised fund?

The first thing you should do is select an organization that offers donor-advised funds (DAFs). DAFs are offered by community foundations, financial service firms, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and public charities. Where you choose to establish your account depends on whether the charitable goals of the offering organization are compatible with your own.

Once you have selected a fund, be sure to obtain and carefully review the program's policies and guidelines before you open an account.

To open an account, you will need to complete and sign an application, also known as a letter of understanding. Many DAF accounts can be opened online. Typically, there is no charge to open the account, although you may be charged an administration fee each year thereafter.

You will then need to name your account. You can name it after yourself or your family, in memory of someone, or for a charitable purpose. If you prefer, you can name your account in a way that protects your anonymity.

You will also need to make the required minimum initial contribution. Typically, the minimum amount for subsequent contributions is lower than for the initial contribution. You can contribute cash, stocks, bonds, real estate,

life insurance, business interests, and other types of assets, but once made, contributions are irrevocable. If you wish, you can also name someone who will continue donating to your fund after your death.

Finally, you can designate someone to advise the fund for you if you don't plan to advise the fund yourself.

Once your account is open and funded, you can recommend grants at anytime.

