Macquarie Private Wealth
A world of opportunities

MACQUARIE

OUR VIEW

VOLUME 1, EDITION 3

DO YOU INVEST WITH EMOTION?

Ongoing market volatility in recent years has made it difficult for some to keep their emotions in check. The predisposition to act emotionally is often triggered when the brain becomes excited or fearful and may lead to poor decision making.

Have your financial decisions been based on your long-term best interests, or have they been influenced by the turbulence within the short-term?

The study of behavioural finance has helped to explain how emotions influence the decision-making process for investors. This contrasts traditional economic and financial theory that assumes that investors always act rationally and that, as a result, markets are efficient. Take, for example, the concept of "recency bias." Although most investors recognize that markets are cyclical and will experience highs and lows, this bias causes investors to believe that recent patterns or events will continue into the future. "Anchoring" may cause an attachment to a particular investment. As an example, investors may hold on to an asset for longer than is prudent, despite changes in fundamentals, believing that the asset will reach, or return to, a certain price level.

Overconfidence, or the belief that one is above-average, may also influence investment decision making. Why is it that most of us claim that we are above average drivers? Studies have shown that most people consider themselves to be above-average performers. This translates into many aspects of life, including investing. Prominent economist Robert Shiller, who teaches behavioural finance at Yale University, notes that during recent market turbulence, most investors were surprised to have suffered losses although they should not have expected otherwise, especially given that most portfolio management is based on longer-term investment strategies.

Are emotions getting in the way of your decision making? We're here to help provide an alternative perspective when needed. We can assist you in reviewing your financial goals and remind you of the investment strategies that will guide you to make decisions without letting your emotions take charge.

David Bassett, BA, CFP
Investment Advisor
E: david.bassett@macquarie.com
T: 604 640 0322

Gigi Yiu, BA, FMA
Investment Services Associate
E: gigi.yiu@macquarie.com
T: 604 640 0324

Stephanie Falcon
Investment Services Assistant
E: stephanie.falcon@macquarie.com
T: 604 640 0325

Macquarie Private Wealth Inc.
550 Burrard Street, Suite 500
Vancouver, BC V6C 2B5
F: 604 640 0300

Don't forget to make your 2010 Tax Free Saving Account contributions.

Toll-free 1 866 640 0400

macquarieprivatewealth.ca

THINK TWICE

CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY RRSP WITHDRAWALS

Before you look to your retirement savings as a source of cash, it is important to consider the consequences of early Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) withdrawals.

First, the contribution room represented by the withdrawn amount will be lost forever. Many investors forget the impact of time on the value of an investment. As an example, if you make a withdrawal of $20,000 20 years before retirement, you will forego over $53,000 in retirement savings, assuming a 5 per cent return annually. This is a significant amount that would have been tax-sheltered over time.

Second, the withdrawn amounts are considered income for the year and must be reported for tax purposes. When funds are withdrawn, the financial institution will also withhold tax, depending upon the place of residence and amount withdrawn (note that the tax withheld may not fully account for tax owed on withdrawn amounts each year, so further payments may be required). Residents of Canada are subject to the following withholding rates:

- 10 per cent (21 per cent in Quebec) on amounts up to $5,000;
- 20 per cent (26 per cent in Quebec) on amounts over $5,000 up to and including $15,000; and
- 30 per cent (31 per cent in Quebec) on amounts over $15,000.

There are two ways to avoid these consequences: early withdrawal of RRSP amounts for i) the Home Buyers' Plan (HBP); and/or ii) the Lifelong Learning Plan (LLP). Various conditions must be met in order to participate in either of these programs.

Under the HBP, individuals may borrow up to $25,000 from their RRSP in one lump sum or via a series of withdrawals throughout the year to buy or build a first-time house. The entire amount must be repaid within 15 years, starting in the second year after the withdrawal, generally at a rate of 1/15th per year. If an individual fails to make the minimum annual payment, that amount must be claimed as income on the tax return of that year.

Under the LLP, individuals may borrow up to $20,000 from their RRSP to pay for full-time training or education at a qualifying institution for an individual or an individual's spouse. A maximum of $10,000 may be withdrawn from the RRSP per calendar year and the total amount withdrawn must be repaid over 10 years, generally at a rate of 1/10th per year, with the timing of the repayment period based on the length of enrolment of the student.

BACK TO SCHOOL

THE HIGH COST OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

With children now back to school, parents may be breathing a sigh of relief. But, how prepared are you when it comes to post-secondary education costs?

Are you prepared?

Around this time of year, we often stress the importance of education savings as part of a broader financial plan. Post-secondary education costs continue to rise, with Statistics Canada reporting a 12 per cent increase in average tuition costs across Canada over the past three years. Including tuition, a year in residence may cost a student up to $15,000 or more.

Without proper planning, a student may be left with a large student debt upon graduation. A variety of options exist within the education savings realm.

Government programs

The Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) offers parents and grandparents the opportunity to contribute up to $50,000 per beneficiary, on a tax-deferred basis, for up to 31 years for post-secondary education. Under the Canada Education Savings Grant, the government may also add up to $7,200 in grant dollars to the student's RESP for beneficiaries up to the age of 17. Other provincial programs, such as those in Alberta and Quebec, may also offer education savings opportunities.

Other opportunities

An in-trust account, or informal trust, may complement an RESP. This non-registered investment account may be set up for a beneficiary and offer tax advantages if structured correctly.

We would be happy to discuss these or other opportunities in greater detail. If you haven't started an education savings plan, or would like to explore options to supplement your current plan, please contact us.

The comments contained herein are general in nature and are not intended to be, nor should be construed to be, legal or tax advice to any particular individual. Accordingly, individuals should consult their own tax advisors for advice with respect to the tax consequences to them, having regard to their own particular circumstances.

YEAR-END APPROACHING

EFFECTIVE YEAR-END TAX PLANNING

With the end of the calendar year quickly approaching, now is the ideal time to properly plan to minimize current and future income tax liabilities.

Reducing income

In general, taxable income may be reduced by deferring income or by splitting income with family members. For instance, income could be potentially deferred by choosing to receive a bonus payment after the end of the calendar year.

If you are in a high tax bracket, significant tax savings may be realized if a portion of your income is transferred to your spouse and/or children in a lower tax bracket. In general, this may be achieved by paying a reasonable salary to your spouse and/or children for services provided to your self-employed business or private company and/or by electing to split eligible pension income with your spouse on your tax return.

Another potential opportunity to split income with your spouse is by way of an investment loan. The loan must bear interest at a rate greater than, or equal to, the prescribed rate determined by the Canada Revenue Agency at the time the debt was incurred. Interest on the loan must be paid within 30 days of the end of each calendar year, otherwise any income (including capital gains) earned on the proceeds of the loan will be attributed to the high tax bracket spouse and included in their income for tax purposes.

Before implementing any income splitting strategy, consider the potential impact on payroll related taxes and how an increase in the income of an individual in a lower tax-bracket will affect any tax credits, benefits, or federal/provincial programs that are calculated based on their income.

A Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) may also reduce taxable income. Up to $5,000 may be contributed annually and any unused contribution room will be carried forward indefinitely. Although TFSA contributions are not tax-deductible, income earned in a TFSA is tax exempt. Withdrawals are tax-free and may increase contribution room in future years.

Tax Deductions and Tax Credits

While there are many tax deductions available, the following are some commonly overlooked deductions. As previously noted, interest paid on loans used to earn investment income is generally deductible for tax purposes. Thus, effectively structuring your debt obligations may provide tax relief. Consider an individual who has a non-registered investment portfolio as well as non-deductible debt. Assume that the investment portfolio could be liquidated at a nominal tax cost and the proceeds from the liquidation used to pay down any non-deductible debt. If the individual could then borrow an equivalent amount to invest in a new qualified investment portfolio, the previously non-deductible interest would be exchanged for deductible interest.

The recent performance of the stock markets may have created loss positions in many investment portfolios.

However, unrealized losses may provide tax relief in the current taxation year and possibly provide for a recovery of taxes previously paid if the securities in a loss position are sold prior to the end of the calendar year.

In general, capital losses can only be used to offset capital gains. To the extent that capital losses exceed capital gains in the current year, the resulting net capital loss may be carried back to any of the three preceding taxation years to recover taxes paid on the taxable capital gains realized in those years, or carried forward indefinitely to reduce capital gains realized in future years. The optimal amount of capital losses to be carried back to prior years should take into consideration the preservation of any non-refundable tax credits claimed in the preceding taxation years and a comparison of the effective tax rates at which the capital losses would be applied in the preceding tax years versus carrying the capital losses forward to future tax years.

In addition, tax planning opportunities may exist permitting the transfer of capital losses between spouses, in the event that one spouse has unrealized capital losses while the other spouse has capital gains in the current year or any of the preceding three tax years.

You should also perform a careful review of your investment portfolio at the end of the year to determine if your portfolio has shares in companies that are bankrupt or insolvent, as it may be possible to file an election in your tax return to claim a capital loss on those shares in the current taxation year, provided certain conditions are met.

Prior to implementing any tax planning involving capital losses, recognize that rules in the Income Tax Act may deny a capital loss in certain circumstances, most notably in transactions involving an “affiliated person” (which includes a spouse or controlled corporation) and when identical securities are acquired or disposed of within a certain time frame. We recommend that you seek the advice of a tax professional prior to implementing any strategy to ensure it applies to your particular situation.

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RETIREMENT PLANNING: THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME

There has been ongoing discussion about Canada potentially facing a retirement income crisis. Since late 2007, various government committees have been evaluating the three pillars of Canada's existing retirement system: government pensions, employer pensions and individual savings. Government programs have been criticized, despite the fact that the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Program were only intended to supplement an individual's retirement income.

Employer-sponsored pensions have become less commonplace and the potential for a reduction in promised pensions under defined-benefit plans has become a reality.

That leaves the third pillar — individual savings — and according to many reports, Canadians aren't doing a very good job at saving for retirement.

According to a recent Harris/ Decima poll of Canadians, only 55 per cent of people surveyed save on a regular basis. Nearly 20 per cent of Canadians said that they do not have savings at all and almost 25 per cent of Canadians are living "day-to-day" and do not think about saving money.

Time is your greatest ally!

One of the most important concepts when thinking about retirement savings is the compounding effect that occurs over time. Three elements are needed to grow money: capital (initial investment), rate of return and time

Of these three, time is arguably the most important factor.

As an example, let's compare a 25- year-old and a 45-year-old who both begin to save $500 per month starting today for 20 years for a total

contribution of $120,000. Assuming an annual rate of return of 5 per cent, by the retirement age of 65 years the 45-year-old will have about $205,000 in savings. However, the 25-year-old will have a total of approximately $545,000 in savings, or 166 per cent more than the 45-year-old.

If the 45-year-old wished to achieve the same return as the 25-yearold (at the same rate of return), she would have to invest almost $1,350 per month (or a total contribution of $324,000 over the 20-year period versus $120,000) to achieve that same return of $545,000. That's the power of time.

What if time isn't on my side?

Although it's better late than never, your retirement planning will be much more challenging should you wait until later in life. A larger percentage of income must be set aside in later years to fund retirement, and expectations for retirement may have to be reevaluated as estimated savings may not be sufficient. Delaying retirement may also be necessary, especially given today's greater life expectancy.

We're here to help

We are here to provide support at any stage of the retirement planning process. For individuals who are just starting their retirement planning, we can provide planning tools, including guides and worksheets, which help to lay out your current financial position and forecast your retirement income needs. Or, for those who have already developed a plan, we would be happy to suggest changes to your existing plan should your situation have changed.

Our goal is to help you to take charge and maximize your projected asset pool to meet your future objectives.

Common retirement pitfalls

1. Relying on home equity during retirement
2. Unanticipated divorce
3. Miscalculating the costs of supporting children
4. Underestimating life expectancy
5. Expecting other sources of income, e.g., inheritance
6. Misjudging the cost of retirement
7. Not planning for unanticipated events, including job loss or illness

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