

# Live Your Ideal Life

By Gaining Financial Independence



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Hi All,

If I look back to the quarter ending March 2020, there was widespread panic in the stock market due to the pandemic, with many businesses closing or doing substantially less sales and historic unemployment claims being filed. When the dust settled, the broad-based Morningstar US Stock Index was down almost 21%. Never in my wildest dreams did I think the stock market would recover by the end of the year.

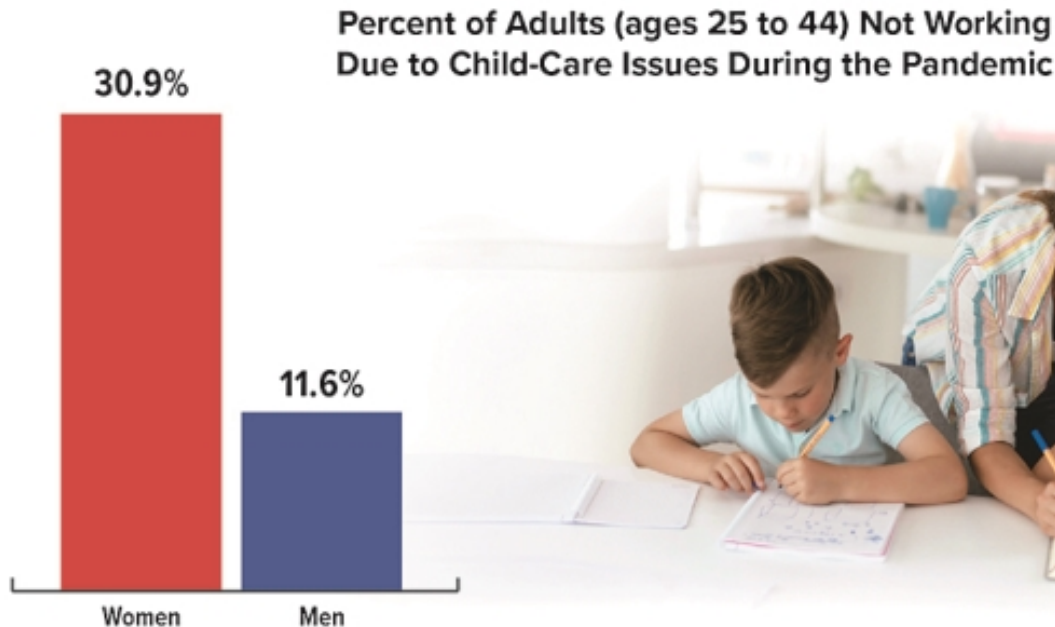
The quarter ending June 2020 saw a remarkable recovery of 19%, gaining most of the loss back in just three months. The downturn technically qualifies as a recession, but never has there been such a fast recovery. The quarter ending September 2020 continued with gains approaching 10%. The quarter ending December 2020 came with some very bad news of the pandemic picking up steam, add to this a contentious presidential election, and somehow the stock market manages to gain another 14%, to end the year up almost 21%. Almost inconceivable!

Regards,

Brian

## Impact of COVID-19 on Working Parents

The sudden shift to remote learning and stay-at-home orders imposed during the coronavirus pandemic forced many parents to juggle working at home with taking care of children and helping them with schoolwork. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, around one in five working-age adults (ages 18 to 64) with children said the reason they were not working was because COVID-19 had disrupted their child-care arrangements. Of those not working, women ages 25-44 were almost three times as likely as men to not be working due to child-care demands.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, July 2020

# Estate Planning Strategies in a Low-Interest-Rate Environment

The federal government requires the use of certain interest rates (published by the IRS) to value various items used in estate planning, such as an income, annuity, or remainder interest in a trust. The government also has interest rates that a taxpayer may be deemed to use in connection with certain installment sales or intra-family loans. These rates are currently at or near historic lows, presenting several estate planning opportunities. Low interest rates generally favor certain estate planning strategies over others and may have a detrimental effect on others.

## Grantor Retained Annuity Trust (GRAT)

In a GRAT, you transfer property to a trust, but retain a right to annuity payments for a term of years. After the trust term ends, the remaining trust property passes to your beneficiaries, such as family members. The value of the gift of a remainder interest is discounted for gift tax purposes to reflect that it will be received in the future. Also, if you survive the trust term, the trust property is not included in your gross estate for estate tax purposes. If the rate of appreciation is greater than the IRS interest rate, a higher value of trust assets escapes gift and estate taxation. Consequently, the lower the IRS interest rate, the more effective this technique generally is.

## Charitable Lead Annuity Trust (CLAT)

In a CLAT, you transfer property to a trust, giving a charity the right to annuity payments for a term of years. After the trust term ends, the remaining trust property passes to your beneficiaries, such as family members. This trust is similar to a GRAT, except that you get a gift tax charitable deduction. Also, if the CLAT is structured so you are taxed on trust income, you receive an upfront income tax charitable deduction for the gift of the annuity interest. Generally, the lower the IRS interest rate, the more effective this technique is.

## Installment Sale

You may also wish to consider an installment sale to family members. With an installment sale, you can

generally defer the taxation of any gain on the property sold until the installment payments are received. However, if the family member resells the property within two years of your installment sale, any deferred gain will generally be accelerated. The two-year limit does not apply to stocks that are sold on an established securities market.

You are generally required to charge an adequate interest rate in return for the opportunity to pay in installments, or interest will be deemed to be charged for income tax and gift tax purposes. However, with the current low interest rates, your family members can pay for the property in installments, while paying only a minimal interest cost for the benefit of doing so.

## Low-Interest Loan

A low-interest loan to family members might also be useful. You are generally required to charge an adequate interest rate on the loan to avoid income tax and gift tax consequences. However, with the current low interest rates, you can provide loans — or refinance an existing loan — at a very low rate and family members can effectively keep any earnings in excess of the interest they are required to pay you.

## Charitable Remainder Unitrust (CRUT)

You retain a stream of payments for a number of years (or for life), after which the remainder passes to charity. You receive a current charitable deduction for the gift of the remainder interest. Interest rates have no effect if payments are made annually at the beginning of each year. Otherwise, interest rates generally have only a minimal effect. However, in this case, a lower interest rate increases the value of the charitable remainder interest slightly less than a higher interest rate would.

*The use of trusts involves a complex web of tax rules and regulations, and usually involves upfront costs and ongoing administrative fees. You should consider the counsel of an experienced estate professional before implementing a trust strategy.*

## More to Consider

Here is how certain factors affect the valuation of remainder interest transfers in the trusts discussed here. In addition to the interest rate, you may want to consider how the length of the trust term and the amount of the trust payments affect values.

FACTOR	GRAT	CLAT	CRUT
Lower interest rate	LV	LV	Minimal or no effect
Longer term of years	LV	LV	LV (shorten term to increase value)
Higher annuity payment	LV	LV	N/A
Lower unitrust payout rate	N/A	N/A	HV

HV = higher value for remainder interest; LV = lower value for remainder interest

# Watch Out for These Financial Pitfalls in the New Year

As people move through different stages of life, there are new financial opportunities and potential pitfalls around every corner. Here are common money mistakes to watch out for at every age.

## Your 20s & 30s

**Being financially illiterate.** By learning as much as you can about saving, budgeting, and investing now, you could benefit from it for the rest of your life.

**Not saving regularly.** Save a portion of every paycheck and then spend what's left over — not the other way around. You can earmark savings for short-, medium-, and long-term goals. A variety of mobile apps can help you track your savings progress.

**Living beyond your means.** This is the corollary of not saving. If you can't manage to stash away some savings each month and pay for most of your expenses out-of-pocket, then you need to rein in your lifestyle. Start by cutting your discretionary expenses, and then look at ways to reduce your fixed costs.

**Spending too much on housing.** Think twice about buying a house or condo that will stretch your budget to the max, even if a lender says you can afford it. Consider building in space for a possible dip in household income that could result from a job change or a leave from the workforce to care for children.

**Overlooking the cost of subscriptions and memberships.** Keep on top of services you are paying for (e.g., online streaming, cable, the gym, your smartphone bill, food delivery) and assess whether they still make sense on an annual basis.

**Not saving for retirement.** Perhaps saving for retirement wasn't on your radar in your 20s, but you shouldn't put it off in your 30s. Start now and you still have 30 years or more to save. Wait much longer and it can be hard to catch up. Start with whatever amount you can afford and add to it as you're able.

**Not protecting yourself with insurance.** Consider what would happen if you were unable to work and earn a paycheck. Life insurance and disability income insurance can help protect you and your family.

## Your 40s

**Not keeping your job skills fresh.** Your job is your lifeline to income, employee benefits, and financial security. Look for opportunities to keep your skills up-to-date and stay abreast of new workplace developments and job search technologies.

**Spending to keep up with others.** Avoid spending money you don't have trying to keep up with your friends, family, neighbors, or colleagues. The only financial life you need to think about is your own.

**Funding college over retirement.** Don't prioritize saving for college over saving for retirement. If you have limited funds, consider setting aside a portion for college while earmarking the majority for retirement. Closer to college time, have a frank discussion with your child about college options and look for creative ways to help reduce college costs.

**Using your home equity like a bank.** The goal is to pay off your mortgage by the time you retire or close to it — a milestone that will be much harder to achieve if you keep moving the goal posts.

**Ignoring your health.** By taking steps now to improve your fitness level, diet, and overall health, not only will you feel better today but you may reduce your health-care costs in the future.

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## The Weight of Too Much Debt

Approximately 70% of workers with non-mortgage debt say their debt has impacted their ability to save for emergencies and retirement, with 40% saying their debt is a “minor” problem and 21% saying it is a “major” problem.



Source: Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2020

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## Your 50s & 60s

**Co-signing loans for adult children.** Co-signing means you're 100% on the hook if your child can't pay — a less-than-ideal situation as you approach retirement.

**Raiding your retirement funds before retirement.** It goes without saying that dipping into your retirement funds will reduce your nest egg, a significant tradeoff for purchases that aren't true emergencies.

**Not knowing your sources of retirement income.** As you near retirement, you should know how much money you (and your partner, if applicable) can expect from three sources: your personal retirement accounts (e.g., 401(k) plans and IRAs); pension income from an employer; and Social Security at age 62, full retirement age, and age 70.

**Not having a will or advance medical directive.** No one likes to think about death or catastrophic injury, but these documents can help your loved ones immensely if something unexpected should happen to you.

# Four Tips to Help Avoid Burnout While Working from Home

The coronavirus pandemic has completely changed the corporate landscape. Many companies have transitioned to having a majority of their employees work from home. As a result, long commutes, office lunches, and face-to-face meetings could be a thing of the past.

Even when the pandemic eventually subsides, working remotely may be here to stay. According to a recent survey, three-quarters of adults who are able to work remotely would like to continue doing so at least one day a week after the pandemic is under control.<sup>1</sup>

While working from home has its advantages (e.g., no commuting costs, more flexibility), it also comes with certain challenges (e.g., lack of home office space, dealing with distractions at home). Often these challenges can make it difficult to have a healthy work/life balance. That's why it's important to take steps to help avoid burnout while working at home.

Here are some tips to help you stay on track.

**1. Carve out a dedicated workspace.** Ideally, your work-from-home setup should be located where you can avoid interruptions or distractions. If you don't have a spare room to use for your workspace, try carving out an area for your "office" wherever you can — even a dining room table or a desk in the corner of your bedroom can work.

**2. Stick to a routine.** Just because you aren't going into an actual office each day doesn't mean you should change your normal workday routine. Keeping a set schedule can help you stay focused and allow you to disconnect and wind down once the workday has come to an end.

It can take time to adjust to working from home, but you will eventually fall into a routine that works best for you and allows you to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

**3. Break up the day.** It's easy to forget to take breaks when your workspace is in your home. Going for a short walk, running a quick errand during lunch, and standing up to stretch once in a while will help you recharge and decompress throughout the day.

**4. Stay connected.** Working from home means you have less opportunity to interact regularly with your co-workers, which can feel isolating. That's why it is important to stay connected by using the technological resources that are available to you (e.g., video conferencing, instant messaging).

1) Morning Consult, 2020

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The information in this newsletter constitutes general tax and financial information. It may not apply to your specific situation, so you are advised to consult a tax and/or financial advisor before taking specific action based on this information.