



Bell Financial

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Dear Friends:

Although we tend to avoid the spotlight, we've made a few television appearances these past few months. You may have caught me on a couple of episodes of WNMU Public TV 13's Ask the Experts series. Or maybe you saw the news clip highlighting Stephanie's presentation to GINCC members on providing exceptional customer service. I'm especially proud of Stephanie both for being recognized for her exceptional client service skills, and also for overcoming her fear of public speaking to deliver a great message.

If you'd like to see the clips, check out our Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/BellFinancial or by searching @BellFinancial on your Facebook mobile app. We use Facebook to share what's going on in and outside of the office as well as information and articles you may find useful. Social media is just one of the ways we try to keep in close contact; please take a moment to follow our page and see what we're up to!

Jesse

March 2017

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Quiz: How Much Do You Know About Social Security Retirement Benefits?



Social Security is an important source of retirement income for millions of Americans, but how much do you know about this program? Test your knowledge, and learn more about your retirement benefits, by answering the following questions.

Questions

1. Do you have to be retired to collect Social Security retirement benefits?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. How much is the average monthly Social Security benefit for a retired worker?

- a. \$1,360
- b. \$1,493
- c. \$1,585
- d. \$1,723

3. For each year you wait past your full retirement age to collect Social Security, how much will your retirement benefit increase?

- a. 5%
- b. 6%
- c. 7%
- d. 8%

4. How far in advance should you apply for Social Security retirement benefits?

- a. One month before you want your benefits to start.
- b. Two months before you want your benefits to start.
- c. Three months before you want your benefits to start.

5. Is it possible for your retirement benefit to increase once you start receiving Social Security?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Answers

1. b. You don't need to stop working in order to claim Social Security retirement benefits. However, if you plan to continue working and you have not yet reached full retirement age (66 to 67, depending on your year of birth), your Social Security retirement benefit may be reduced if you earn more than a certain annual amount. In 2017, \$1 in benefits will be deducted for every \$2 you earn above \$16,920. In the calendar year in which you reach your full retirement age, a higher limit applies. In 2017, \$1 in benefits will be deducted for every \$3 you earn above \$44,880. Once you reach full retirement age, your earnings will not affect your Social Security benefit.

2. a. Your benefit will depend on your earnings history and other factors, but according to the Social Security Administration, the average estimated monthly Social Security benefit for a retired worker (as of January 2017) is \$1,360.¹

3. d. Starting at full retirement age, you will earn delayed retirement credits that will increase your benefit by 8% per year up to age 70. For example, if your full retirement age is 66, you can earn credits for a maximum of four years. At age 70, your benefit will then be 32% higher than it would have been at full retirement age.

4. c. According to the Social Security Administration, you should ideally apply three months before you want your benefits to start. You can generally apply online.

5. a. There are several reasons why your benefit might increase after you begin receiving it. First, you'll generally receive annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). Second, your benefit is recalculated every year to account for new earnings, so it might increase if you continue working. Your benefit might also be adjusted if you qualify for a higher spousal benefit once your spouse files for Social Security.

For more information, visit the Social Security Administration website, ssa.gov.

¹ Social Security Fact Sheet, 2017 Social Security Changes

Why Diversification Matters



Diversification and asset allocation are methods used to help manage investment risk; they do not guarantee a profit or protect against investment loss.

When investing, particularly for long-term goals, there is one concept you will likely hear about over and over again — diversification. Why is diversification so important? The simple reason is that it helps ensure that your risk of loss is spread among a number of different investments. The theory is that if some of the investments in your portfolio decline in value, others may rise or hold steady, helping to offset the losses.

Diversifying within asset classes

For example, say you wanted to invest in stocks. Rather than investing in just domestic stocks, you could diversify your portfolio by investing in foreign stocks as well. Or you could choose to include the stocks of different size companies (small-cap, mid-cap, and/or large-cap stocks).

If your primary objective is to invest in bonds for income, you could choose both government and corporate bonds to potentially take advantage of their different risk/return profiles. You might also choose bonds of different maturities, because long-term bonds tend to react more dramatically to changes in interest rates than short-term bonds. As interest rates rise, bond prices typically fall.

Investing in mutual funds

Because mutual funds invest in a mix of securities chosen by a fund manager to pursue the fund's stated objective, they can offer a certain level of "built-in" diversification. For this reason, mutual funds may be an appropriate choice for novice investors or those wishing to take more of a hands-off approach to their portfolios. Including a variety of mutual funds with different objectives and securities in your portfolio will help diversify your holdings that much more.

Mutual funds are sold by prospectus. Please consider the investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses carefully before investing. The prospectus, which contains this and other information about the investment company, can be obtained from your financial professional. Be sure to read the prospectus carefully before deciding whether to invest.

Diversifying among asset classes

You might also consider including a mix of different types of asset classes — stocks, bonds, and cash — in your portfolio. Asset allocation is a strategic approach to diversifying your portfolio. After carefully considering your investment goals, time horizon, and risk tolerance, you would then invest different percentages of your portfolio in targeted asset classes to pursue your goal.

Winning asset classes over time

The following table, which shows how many times during the past 30 years each asset class has come out on top in terms of performance, helps illustrate why diversifying among asset classes can be important.

	Number of winning years, 1987-2016
Cash	3
Bonds	5
Stocks	10
Foreign stocks	12

Performance is from December 31, 1986, to December 31, 2016. Cash is represented by Citigroup 3-month Treasury Bill Index. Bonds are represented by the Citigroup Corporate Bond Index, an unmanaged index. Stocks are represented by the S&P 500 Composite Price Index, an unmanaged index. Foreign stocks are represented by the MSCI EAFE Price Index, an unmanaged index. Investors cannot invest directly in any index. However, these indexes are accurate reflections of the performance of the individual asset classes shown. Returns reflect past performance and should not be considered indicative of future results. The returns do not reflect taxes, fees, brokerage commissions, or other expenses typically associated with investing.

The principal value of cash alternatives may fluctuate with market conditions. Cash alternatives are subject to liquidity and credit risks. It is possible to lose money with this type of investment.

The return and principal value of stocks may fluctuate with market conditions. Shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost.

U.S. Treasury securities are guaranteed by the federal government as to the timely payment of principal and interest, whereas corporate bonds are not. The principal value of bonds may fluctuate with market conditions. Bonds are subject to inflation, interest rate, and credit risks. Bonds redeemed prior to maturity may be worth more or less than their original cost.

The risks associated with investing on a worldwide basis include differences in financial reporting, currency exchange risk, as well as economic and political risk unique to the specific country.

Investments offering the potential for higher rates of return also involve higher risk.



Growth, Value, or Both



"I always say if you aren't investing for value, what are you investing for? And the idea that value and growth are two different things makes no sense.... Growth is part of the value equation."

—Warren Buffett

The terms growth and value are often used to describe two different investment strategies, yet many investors may want both qualities in an investment. Famed investor Warren Buffett put it this way in a 2015 interview: "I always say if you aren't investing for value, what are you investing for? And the idea that value and growth are two different things makes no sense.... Growth is part of the value equation."¹

Even so, analysts may look at specific stocks as offering more growth potential than value, and vice versa. And these concepts are used to construct many mutual funds and exchange-traded funds (ETFs). So it's helpful to understand the opposing ideas, even if you want the best of both in your portfolio.

Poised to grow?

As the name suggests, growth stocks are associated with companies that appear to have above-average growth potential. These companies might be on the verge of a market breakthrough or acquisition, or they may occupy a strong position in a growing industry.

Growth companies may place more emphasis on reinvesting profits than on paying dividends (although many large growth companies do offer dividends). Investors hope to benefit from future capital appreciation of growth stocks, which tend to be considered higher risk than value stocks. However, it's equally important for growth and value stocks to have strong fundamentals.

Undervalued?

Value stocks are associated with companies that appear to be undervalued by the market or are in an industry that is currently out of favor. Unlike growth stocks, which might seem expensive and overvalued, value stocks may be priced lower in relation to their earnings, assets, or growth potential.

Established companies are more likely than younger companies to be considered value stocks, and these firms may emphasize paying dividends over reinvesting profits. An investor who purchases a value stock typically expects the broader market to eventually recognize the company's full potential, which may result in rising share prices. One risk with this approach is that a stock considered to be undervalued because of legal or management difficulties or tough competition might not be able to recover from the setback.

Focused funds

Identifying specific growth or value investments requires time, knowledge, and experience to analyze stock data. A more convenient and

accessible way to add growth or value stocks to your portfolio may be through mutual funds or ETFs that focus on these categories. Such funds often have the word "growth" or "value" in their names. However, there could be a wide variety of objectives and stock holdings among funds labeled growth or value.

Also keep in mind that you might find growth, value, or both in a broad range of investments that do not employ growth or value strategies.

Diversification

Holding growth and value stocks and/or funds is one way to diversify the stock portion of your portfolio. Over the past 20 years, the average annual return for value stocks was about 1.5 percentage points higher than that of growth stocks (8.54% versus 7.02%). Yet growth stocks outperformed value stocks in eight of those years — in some years by large margins. This suggests that growth and value stocks may respond differently to varying market conditions.²

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

The return and principal value of stocks, mutual funds, and ETFs fluctuate with changes in market conditions. Shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Supply and demand for ETF shares may cause them to trade at a premium or a discount relative to the value of the underlying shares.

Mutual funds and ETFs are sold by prospectus. Please consider the investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses carefully before investing. The prospectus, which contains this and other information about the investment company, can be obtained from your financial professional. Be sure to read the prospectus carefully before deciding whether to invest.

¹ CNBC.com, March 2, 2015

² Thomson Reuters, 2016, for the period 9/30/1996 to 9/30/2016. Growth stocks are represented by the Russell 3000 Growth Index. Value stocks are represented by the Russell 3000 Value Index. The performance of an unmanaged index is not indicative of the performance of any particular investment. Individuals cannot invest directly in an index. Rates of return will vary over time, particularly for long-term investments. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results.



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What happens to my property if I die without a will?

If you die without a will, your property will generally pass according to state law (under the rules for intestate succession). When this happens, the state essentially makes a will for you. State laws specify how your property will pass, typically in certain proportions to various persons related to you. The specifics, however, vary from state to state.

Most state laws favor spouses and children first. For example, a typical state law might specify that your property pass one-half or one-third to your surviving spouse, with the remainder passing equally to all your children. If you don't have children, in many states your spouse might inherit all of your property; in other states, your spouse might have to share the property with your brothers and sisters or parents.

But not all property is transferred by will or intestate succession. Regardless of whether you have a will, some property passes automatically to a joint owner or to a designated beneficiary. For example, you can transfer property such as IRAs, retirement plan benefits,

and life insurance by naming a beneficiary. Property that you own jointly with right of survivorship will pass automatically to the surviving owners at your death. Property held in trust will pass to your beneficiaries according to the terms you set out in the trust.

Only property that is not transferred by beneficiary designation, joint ownership, will, or trust passes according to intestate succession. You should generally use beneficiary designations, joint ownership, wills, and trusts to control the disposition of your property so that you, rather than the state, determine who receives the benefit of your property.

Even if it seems that all your property will be transferred by beneficiary designation, joint ownership, or trust, you should still generally have a will. You can designate in the will who will receive any property that slips through the cracks.

And, of course, you can do other things in a will as well, such as name the executor of your estate to carry out your wishes as specified in the will, or name a guardian for your minor children.



How can I prepare financially for stormy weather?

Floods, tornadoes, torrential rain, lightning, and hail are common events in many parts of the country during the spring and may result in widespread damage. Severe weather often strikes with little warning, so take measures now to protect yourself and your property.

Review your insurance coverage. Make sure your homeowners and auto insurance coverage is sufficient. While standard homeowners insurance covers losses from fire, lightning, and hail, you may need to buy separate coverage for hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and other disasters. Consult your insurer or insurance professional, who can help determine whether you have adequate coverage for the risks you face.

Create a financial emergency kit. Collect financial records and documents that may help you recover more quickly after a disaster. This kit might contain a list of key contacts and copies of important documents, including identification cards, birth and marriage certificates, insurance policies, home inventories, wills, trusts, and deeds. Make sure your kit is stored in a secure fireproof and

waterproof container that is accessible and easy to carry. The Emergency Financial First Aid Kit, available online at ready.gov, offers a number of checklists and forms that may help you prepare your own kit, as well as tips to guide you through the process.

Protect your assets. Take some commonsense precautions to safeguard your home, vehicles, and other possessions against damage. For example, to prepare for a possible power outage, you might want to install an emergency generator and a sump pump with a battery backup if you have a basement or garage that is prone to flooding. Inspect your yard and make sure you have somewhere to store loose objects (e.g., grills and patio furniture) in a hurry, cut down overhanging tree limbs, and clean your gutters and down spouts. Check your home's exterior, too, to make sure that your roof and siding are in good condition, and invest in storm windows, doors, and shutters. In addition, make sure you know how to turn off your gas, electricity, and water should an emergency arise. And if you have a garage, make sure your vehicles are parked inside when a storm is imminent.



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