Birdsall Wealth Management Group Newsletter

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In this edition

Volatility Continues

It has been said that change is the only constant, and the investing world is no exception. For more than a year, we've seen the effects of a rapid change in inflation and interest rates on the financial markets.

These have been difficult times for investors. As the central banks have continued their fight against inflation, much of the financial market volatility has been driven by uncertainty over the path forward for interest rates. To start the year, good economic news was perceived as bad news by the markets. Stronger labour market and consumer spending data created worries that the central banks would continue raising rates to slow economies and bring down inflation. Now, new jitters have emerged as a result of the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in the U.S. — the unfortunate reality that the aggressive rate hikes by the central banks were bound to have consequences.

For now, we can expect continued volatility. While it may be difficult to see beyond today, there will be a time when inflation is eventually brought under control, though patience has been needed. As investors, we would be wise to remember that changes in interest rates, inflation, monetary and economic policy and many other factors have always created near-term uncertainty in previous times. Every financial cycle has its own challenges that differ from those that came before. Throughout time, the companies that succeed in meeting the challenge of change are rewarded with higher stock prices. And, over time, in spite of the many challenges, economies have continued to grow, demonstrating our collective ability to adapt and advance. This time is no different.

One such reminder may come with the excitement generated by the artificial intelligence (AI) chatbox, ChatGPT. With its potential disruption capabilities, in a recent OpEd, Henry Kissinger went so far to as say that the evolution of AI may "redefine human knowledge, accelerate changes in the fabric of our reality and reorganize society." While these are very early days — it is premature to suggest exactly how this technology will shape the future — ChatGPT demonstrates the human pursuit to innovate, one of the underlying drivers of growth throughout time. Business cycles have operated under long waves of innovation; Earlier revolutions, such as those sparked by the development of railroads, electricity and the automobile ignited waves of economic growth that lasted for many decades. Our focus has always been on the longer term, and though we face current challenges, there are many reasons to expect that future growth will continue.

Equally important, we are here to manage through the ever-changing times. A sound investment process involves having a plan to set priorities, assessing the changing landscape and the potential opportunities to come, in conjunction with the risks involved, and making informed decisions when necessary — all with a view for the longer term. Thoughtful analysis, evaluation and portfolio oversight are skills that should be trusted to help guide us through the unavoidable cycles. While it may be easy to get discouraged with current conditions, have the patience to see this period through. Try to look beyond today — we will get through this difficult period — there is growth that lies ahead.

1. https://www.wsj.com/articles/chatgpt-heralds-an-intellectual-revolution-enlightenment-artificial-intelligence-homo-technicus-technology-cognition-morality-philosophy-774331c6

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"Take Five, Tell Two" — Protecting Yourself & Others Against Scams

A recent article in the popular press provides a candid reminder: "the fraud landscape is exploding...targeting anyone and everyone."[1] And, as the number of scams continues to grow, fraud has become increasingly sophisticated.

Phishing attacks, where deceptive messages fool victims into providing sensitive information, are now using multiple channels concurrently to target victims. For instance, scammers leave voicemails or texts about an email or phone call they just made to add credibility or increase the urgency of the request.[2] Scammers are increasingly forming longer-term relationships with victims to build credibility. In one type of financial scam, scammers befriend victims via text or social media, and over time eventually convince them to invest using websites that look like legitimate trading platforms. Victims are then tricked into thinking their investments are making money and are encouraged to invest more. This scam was commonly associated with cryptocurrencies, but has since evolved to focus on the gold market.[3]

How can we protect against these rising scams? As a starting point, one expert suggests adopting the approach of: "take five, tell two." If you are solicited by others, "take five minutes to think about it, and then talk to two different people about it before doing anything." This can prevent us from making rash decisions. Educating ourselves and others, especially the vulnerable, is also important. Often, there are common "red flags" that indicate a scam:

› **It seems too good to be true**. Many financial scams offer the opportunity for quick gains. If it appears too good to be true, it likely is.

› **Personal/financial information is requested**. Be wary when personal information of any kind is requested or asked to be confirmed. Credible sources are unlikely to ask for this.

› **There is a sense of urgency**. Many scams pressure individuals to act immediately or focus on lost opportunity or penalties to evoke fear.

› **There is secrecy or you are made to feel guilty**. Scams often try to evoke feelings of guilt or shame, or prey on loneliness or isolation. In many cases, victims are asked to keep matters secret.

It goes without saying that we should all maintain a sense of vigilance when it comes to sharing our personal information. Not responding can be one of the best ways to stay safe. Don't answer a call if you don't recognize the caller; often a scammer's goal is to find out if a phone line is active. Never respond to emails, text messages or social media requests from unknown sources. If you aren't certain if a situation is credible, double check. An internet search can often determine if others have received similar messages/calls. Or, if a source claims to be a legitimate company, try calling a general number found on the internet.

There are tools that can add an additional layer of protection. Anti-phishing software and other cyber security tools can help protect against potential attacks. Many mobile phone companies now offer "call control" that can help screen out robo-callers or spammers.

Stay updated on evolving scams and new targeting methods. Many online resources report the latest scams and offer ways to protect against fraud: Better Business Bureau, www.bbb.org/ca/news/scams; Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca

1. www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/fraud-scams-tips-avoid-ontario-1.6764432; 2. www.cnbc.com/2023/01/07/phishing-attacks-are-increasing-and-getting-more-sophisticated.html; 3. www.consumeraffairs.com/news/fools-gold-the-story-behind-a-fake-gold-market-pig-butchering-scam-021523.html

Educating (Grand)Kids: The FHSA — A Potentially Valuable Tool

With the cost of home ownership becoming increasingly out of reach for many younger folks, our clients often have questions about the opportunity to assist (grand)children with buying a home or condo.

There are a variety of ways to help fund a (grand)child's property, including purchasing the property in your name, gifting cash for the purchase or lending funds to the child. Each comes with various tax and family law issues. For example, if the home is not designated as a principal residence, there may be future significant tax consequences to the owner on any capital gain realized upon its sale. Or, if the child is married/common-law, there may be concerns about what will happen to the property if the couple splits. As always, we recommend seeking advice from tax and family law experts.

Planning Ahead

IIf (grand)children are still years away from a first home purchase, the First Home Savings Account (FHSA) may be a valuable tool. The FHSA is a registered plan that combines the tax benefits of the RRSP and TFSA; tax-free in and tax-free out. Eligible Canadian residents ages 18 and over can contribute up to $8,000 per year, to a maximum of $40,000, toward a first home. Contributions are tax deductible, and qualified withdrawals are tax free. The FHSA can remain open for 15 years.*

While the limit has been criticized as being too low given current housing prices, the potential to invest funds and allow them to grow in the FHSA may be significant (chart). A couple who are both first-time home buyers could potentially each access the FHSA. As well, the rules now permit the use of the existing Home Buyers' Plan (HBP) alongside the FHSA.[1] The HBP allows first-time buyers to withdraw up to $35,000 from the RRSP, subject to repayment in 15 years and other conditions. Together, these tools could provide a substantial down payment for a home.

Potential Growth of FHSA in 15 Years – Assuming 5% Annual Growth; Not Including Tax Benefit from Contribution

Year	Contribution	Start of Year	Growth	End of Year
1	$8,000	$8,000	$400	$8,400
2	$8,000	$16,400	$820	$17,220
3	$8,000	$25,220	$1,261	$26,481
4	$8,000	$34,481	$1,724	$36,205
5	$8,000	$44,205	$2,210	$46,415
...15	–	$72,005	$3,600	$75,606

If you are having conversations with (grand)children about saving for the future, the FHSA may be an important consideration. If you are in need of support with this, or any other financial literacy discussions with adult children, please don't hesitate to reach out.

*This article is intended to provide a brief overview of the rules. For more information, please get in touch; 1. This was changed from the original proposals in Budget 2022.

Your Money & Your Heirs: What's Your Plan for Wealth Longevity?

As part of your wealth planning, have you considered your wealth's longevity? Many of us have heard of the "shirtsleeves curse": Family wealth is often built up and lost within three generations. Studies suggest that it takes the average recipient of an inheritance just 19 days before buying a new car. This is because many heirs are not focused on the longevity of new-found wealth.[1]

What are high-net-worth families doing to help prevent this loss? There has been an increasing focus on intergenerational wealth planning, with the objective of supporting wealth longevity. This involves getting existing generations to meet about their finances and form shared financial goals and values to help encourage lasting wealth. Here are some steps that can be taken as part of this planning process:

Start with a plan and document it. Start by thinking about your vision for your wealth for the generations to come. The plan should set out goals and provisions for how you wish funds to be used, accessed and replenished. For instance, you may wish for family members to invest in themselves to gain the experience needed to create and grow wealth, using funds for higher education or a business start-up or expansion. Others may wish to leave endowments to a charity. Once you determine your goals and provisions, it is important to formally record them as this document will be passed along to future generations.

Communicate your plan. Once the plan has been documented, it should be communicated to family members. Often, parents keep their finances and related values to themselves, missing the opportunity to pass along their ideals to children. While specific financial details need not be disclosed, sharing your vision is intended to be a catalyst for meaningful discussions. Some families use this plan to form a family constitution to help future generations carry forward your intentions.

Engage in regular meetings. Regular family meetings are intended to help cultivate family values based on your vision for your wealth. If wealth has been carefully built up through the generations, it may involve exploring family history. Or, you may use this time to educate children about finances or managing money, or introduce high-level strategies to carry out the intergenerational plan relating to running a family business or a family giving strategy.

Consider protection tools. You may determine through family meetings that beneficiaries will need support. Certain tools can support beneficiaries to meet your goals, or protect future wealth in situations in which beneficiaries may not be capable. For example, a trust can put assets under the control of a responsible trustee, with the terms of the trust specifying the conditions, timing and amount of distributions to be made to heirs. Other tools, such as life insurance, can protect and grow assets while also providing access to cash. Setting up a support system of trusted professionals may help to ensure a successful wealth transfer, especially if heirs do not have the skills to manage funds independently.

Monitor the plan's success. By having an ongoing dialogue with family members, you will be able to identify and address any gaps or concerns as they arise. You can also continue to define and refine family roles to ensure that your plan has a greater chance of success.

Here to Provide Support

While intergenerational wealth planning may not be for everyone, consider that creating a lasting legacy can be one of the greatest gifts you leave behind. If you need assistance with family discussions or educational tools to support children, please call the office.

1. https://financialpost.com/personal-finance/retirement/inheritance/how-to-help-prevent-your-heirs-from-blowing-through-the-family-fortune

During Volatile Times: Perspectives on the Equity Markets

Renowned investor Warren Buffett is well known for saying, *"our favourite holding period is forever. When we own portions of outstanding businesses with outstanding managements, we expect to hold them for a long time."*[1] Yet, despite these words of wisdom, consider how the average holding period for stocks has changed over time. For the NYSE, back in the 1950s, the average holding period was 100 months, or 8 years. By 1990, this dropped to 26 months. And today, it is closer to 5.5 months![2]

What has caused this decline? Technology has been one of the biggest drivers. Up until the 1970s, trading systems were not automated, which limited the number of trades that could be processed each day. The chart below shows how trading volume has grown over time. Technology has also significantly lowered the cost of transactions. And, with the connectivity of the internet, it has enabled investors of all kinds to trade, with information widely distributed and easy to access.

NYSE Trading Volume History

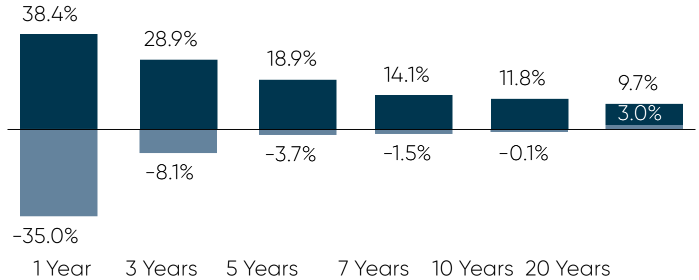
Year	NYSE Avg. Daily Trading Volume (# Shares)
1886	1M
1982	100M
2020	1,000M

https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-decline-of-long-term-investing/

Yet, history shows that when it comes to investing in the stock market, the longer your ability to focus, the better. Why? The variability of equity market performance smooths out substantially as the investing period grows. The graph (top, right) shows the range of outcomes for the best and worst annualized returns of the S&P/TSX Composite Index (not including dividends reinvested) from 1956 to the start of 2023. These figures were calculated using rolling annual returns. Over one-year periods, the variability is substantial: historically, you could have experienced a variation in annual returns of between -35.0 percent and +38.4 percent (and if you were to use rolling monthly returns, the analysis shows that the variance would be even greater!) However, as the time horizon extends to decades, the range of outcomes narrows significantly and the likelihood of negative returns also diminishes.

During volatile times, for some investors it may be difficult to maintain a longer-term view. But, the long and the short of it is that by extending a time horizon, historical probabilities continue to favour the long-term investor.

Best & Worst Annualized Returns Over Different Holding Periods: S&P/TSX Composite Index Since 1956



Using S&P/TSX Composite Index rolling annual returns (not including dividends reinvested), 1956 to 2022.

Let's also not forget that equities continue to be one of the best asset classes in which to generate wealth and beat inflation over time. We could choose to invest in other assets like low-risk, fixed-income investments to avoid this volatility, but then we would also forego the potential returns over the longer term. Just how much of a difference can this make over time? The chart (below) looks at the period from 1975 to 2022, which includes times of higher inflation and interest rates. History has shown that being invested in equities over the longer term has been a good way to stay ahead of inflation. Equities also receive favourable tax treatment: capital gains are taxed at a lower rate compared to interest and other income.

Historical Real Returns 1975 to 2022 (Inflation Adjusted Returns)

Asset Class	% Real Return	Amount if $100 Invested in 1975*
Equities (S&P500)	8.0%	$20,656
Bonds	3.8%	$3,796
Cash	0.5%	$726
Inflation	3.7%	–

Equities: S&P 500 with dividends reinvested; Bonds: 50% 10-year Treasury, 50% Baa Corporate Bonds; Cash: 3-month T. Bill. *Does not include impact of taxes. Source: https://pages.stern.nyu.edu/~adamodar/New_Home_Page/datafile/histretSP.html

The Bottom Line: While we continue to endure more challenging equity market times, maintain a longer-term perspective. Markets have always been cyclical and better days lie ahead. Equities continue to be an important part of building wealth for the future. Continue looking forward!

1. https://www.berkshirehathaway.com/letters/1988.html; 2. New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) data from https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-decline-of-long-term-investing/

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Charlene's Corner

With spring amidst comes new spring outfits! Jas took his Pinterest's favorite fits and had them come to life. Specially hand tailored from India by the best of the best.