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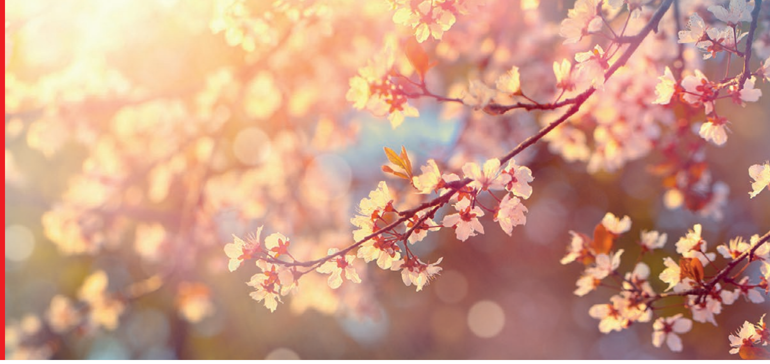
Wealth Management Group

Newsletter



Spring 2021

In this edition

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The Market Pendulum Swings... A Brighter Economic Outlook

Stock market valuations can swing back and forth from one extreme to the other, sometimes being depressed and offering high value, and at other times appearing overvalued and speculative. Somewhere in the middle of this swing may be the fair value of any particular equity.

Consider how quickly the market's pendulum changed course over just the past year. After last spring's significant drop in the markets, in the midst of the greatest economic and public health crisis of our time, the pendulum swung to the other side. To start 2021, the S&P/TSX Composite (TSX) and S&P 500 indices posted record highs, with many stock valuations appearing stretched.

Of course, equity markets are forward-looking in nature: economies will eventually fully reopen and pent-up demand is anticipated to be released. However, other factors have helped to push the markets higher. With central banks pledging to keep interest rates low for the near term, investors have turned to equity markets given a lack of alternatives. Continuing stimulus measures have also helped to inflate asset prices. A rise in low-commission trading platforms has enticed many new investors to enter the markets, often trading based on momentum.

More recently, long-term bond rates have been rising, which has increased inflation expectations. Yet, this shouldn't be a surprise: rising yields are often seen when economic expectations strengthen. In the U.S., where the opening of the economy is, to a considerable extent, ahead of Canada, recent employment and manufacturing data has been better than expected.[1] Here at home, accelerating vaccination programs continue to support the path to economic reopening—the light at the end of the tunnel we have long awaited!

Will the markets continue their climb? For many investors, there is limited value in trying to predict the near-term direction of the markets; after all, the overall success of your wealth plan isn't dependent on calling the top of any cycle. Yet, consider that equity markets can often progress further than many believe. With growing optimism for a return to normal, there has been some rotation into areas of the markets that are expected to benefit as economies reopen. Volatility has also returned, largely in market sectors that have seen significant gains throughout the pandemic. After many months of market advances, this can be expected and may provide opportunities to put capital to work as investors continue to build portfolios for the future.

For most investors, the investing journey will be a long one. With a sound wealth plan to guide us, and a portfolio built on quality, diversification, and focused on the longer term, it should serve us well no matter where the market pendulum may swing. Continue to have confidence in that plan, enjoy the market advances and look forward: brighter days are ahead!

1. bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-05/u-s-feb-payrolls-increase-379-000-est-200-000

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Your Estate Plan: Is a Review in Order?

When was the last time you reviewed your estate plan? While this should be done at least every five years or when personal circumstances change, the pandemic reminds us of the value in revisiting plans when circumstances around us also change.

As part of your review, one place to start is with those appointed to help carry out your estate plan: the attorney (mandatory) named under power of attorney (POA) documents and the executor (liquidator) of your will. Here are a few considerations:

The importance of checking in. When was the last time you spoke to your named executor or attorney about the role? The pandemic may have altered an individual's capacity to act on your behalf. A front-line healthcare worker may not be able to manage additional duties if under significant work obligations. Immune-compromised individuals may be unable to safely perform certain functions of the role. If the individual is not aware that they have been appointed, consider that court intervention will be required if they are unwilling or unable to act and an alternate has not been named. Under normal circumstances, this is a lengthy and costly process; throughout the pandemic, this has been complicated by further delays as court operations have been impacted in many provinces.

The value in communicating the "basics." Have you provided direction to help support those acting on your behalf? With your executor/attorney, have you communicated where important documentation can be found? This is important to prevent an unnecessary search, and with many businesses now having reduced operations (including banks, law firms), access to documents may be made more challenging. Is your executor/attorney aware of the financial or healthcare choices you wish to make in the event of incapacity?

The health consequences of COVID-19 have highlighted the differing outcomes that some may find more controversial, such as the use of a ventilator for life support.

Is your executor/attorney aware that tasks may need to be carried out differently? There have been positive changes as a result of the pandemic; many provinces have allowed for virtual witnessing of certain documents or electronic submissions for some court-related applications.*

However, the pandemic has also made seemingly easy procedures more difficult or time-consuming, such as constraints on in-person meetings. Jointly appointed executors/attorneys may struggle to effectively act in unison. With limits on travel, if an executor/attorney doesn't live locally, can they fulfill their role?

In some cases, changes may be needed, such as appointing temporary alternatives during this period. However, the impact of the pandemic on those appointed to support you is just one area to contemplate as you review your estate plan. For a discussion on this, or other aspects of your estate plan, please get in touch.

* Some measures have been approved under emergency conditions and may be temporary.

Spring Cleaning Your Estate Plan

Here are five questions that may prompt a review:

1. Is my plan structured in a way that promotes efficient administration and limits expense?
2. Will my plan minimize family effort or even controversy?
3. Are my assets structured to limit exposure to potential liability (i.e., former spouses, creditors)?
4. Do I have protection in place to allow my family to make financial and healthcare decisions in the event I am unable?
5. Can my family maintain their current lifestyle if I am no longer able to contribute?

Food for Thought: the Rising Canadian Dollar

Over the past year, the Canadian dollar (CAD) has been gradually appreciating in value, rising by 15 percent after it fell to a low of 0.69 USD in March 2020. What's driving the loonie's flight?

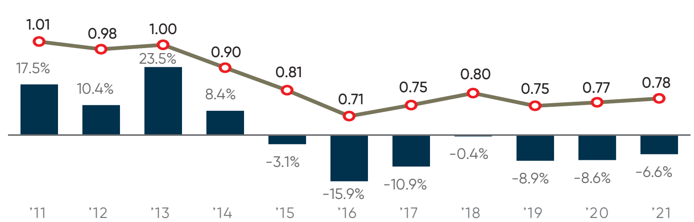
Oil prices, which briefly turned negative in April 2020, were one reason why the loonie struggled. The CAD is largely impacted by the price of oil since Canada earns a large portion of its U.S. dollars (USD) from the sale of oil. As oil prices have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, this has helped to strengthen the CAD.

At the same time, the USD has been losing its lustre. Significant U.S. stimulus actions have increased the money supply, creating concerns about future inflation and placing downward pressure on the greenback. With near-zero interest rates and a yield on U.S. government bonds closer to that of other developed nations, this may reduce demand for U.S. treasuries and further weaken the USD.

Will the loonie continue its upward flight? Here is some "food for thought." The "Big Mac Index," published by The Economist magazine, is a fun tool to make exchange rate theory digestible. It compares the purchasing-power parity (PPP) of global currencies. PPP suggests that over the long run, exchange rates should adjust so that an identical basket of goods/services costs the same in each country. Instead of using a basket of goods, it creates an exchange rate by comparing the cost of a Big Mac in a nation's currency to its cost in the U.S. Comparing this to the prevailing exchange rate determines whether a currency is considered under- or over-valued. The bar chart shows the under/over-valuation of the CAD versus the USD based on the Big Mac. The actual exchange rate is shown on the blue line.

Currency fluctuations are a normal part of the financial markets. While a stronger CAD may provide better buying opportunities to purchase U.S. assets, for longer-term investors, the impact of currency changes on returns has the tendency to even out over time.

Big Mac Index Over/Under Valuation: CAD vs. USD 2011 to 2021 (Jan.)



Source: January data: github.com/TheEconomist/big-mac-data, accessed 2/11/21.

How Much Do You Need to Retire?

Worried about retirement? Specifically about the cost of retirement and whether you will have enough money? If so, you're not alone. According to recent surveys, more than half of Canadians are concerned about their retirement savings, and the pandemic has only made this situation worse.[1]

Worrying Too Much?

Some studies have shown that perhaps we worry too much about our funds in retirement. One expert estimated that a couple could live on around $44,000 per year.[2] Government safety nets could supplement this amount if personal assets were exhausted. Many of us would dispute this assessment, as most would like retirement to go beyond subsistence! However, while the pandemic has created income issues for some, it has shown others how much discretionary spending could be reduced—though few would want retirement to mirror pandemic life.

If you are fortunate enough to have a defined-benefit pension plan at work, you will have at least some idea of your retirement income. However, the world continues to change, and defined-benefit pension plans have become increasingly rare.

Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) are the other major component of retirement savings for many Canadians. They are often converted to a Registered Retirement Income Fund (RRIF) to provide taxable income. How much can a RRIF provide? For those who are regimented in contributing, the RRIF may play a substantial role. The table (right) shows the payments that would be received based on the current minimum withdrawal requirements for a plan value of $300,000 at age 70. Assuming a five percent annual return on investments, changes in the RRIF value are also shown. For those worried about outliving assets, the numbers provide some comfort. At age 90, 60 percent of the original asset value is still available, and this doesn't consider other sources of retirement income.

Need More Income?

The RRIF is flexible in the amount of income you can withdraw, so some may withdraw more than the minimum when needed. The Tax-Free Savings Plan has also become a significant investment vehicle that can help to fund retirement. And in many cases, people do not stop working at age 65. While they may leave lifelong jobs, they may end up doing something else that is productive (and perhaps even profitable!).

For those concerned about longevity risk, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) has the potential for greater payouts if payments are deferred to the age of 70. The current maximum annual benefit is $14,445 for an individual starting payments at age 65, but this rises by 42 percent at age 70. Yet, fewer than one percent of retirees delay CPP until age 70, despite studies that show it to be one of the more financially prudent decisions should you live beyond the average life expectancy of 82 years old.

We Are Here to Assist

One of our roles is to help clients prepare for a comfortable retirement. We can assist with worksheets and tools to project your requirements as you plan for the future. Continue to look forward with confidence!

Age	Income	RRIF Value (Year End)
69	–	$300,000
70	$15,000	$300,000
71	$15,000	$299,160
72	$14,958	$297,963
73	$14,898	$296,384
74	$14,819	$294,398
75	$14,720	$291,984
80	$13,870	$272,352
85	$12,274	$236,867
90	$9,672	$180,049

* Based on $300,000 RRIF value at age 69, at five percent annual return, with minimum withdrawal factors. Illustrative only.

1. hoopp.com/docs/default-source/about-hoopp-library/advocacy/abacus_executive_summary_2020.pdf • 2. thestar.com/business/personal_finance/opinion/2020/02/10/a-fulfilling-retirement-may-be-cheaper-than-you-think-heres-why.html

The Great CPP Debate Continues...

It is a decision that many Canadians will need to make prior to retirement: when should you start Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits? At age 60, 65 or wait until 70?

Despite the potential for a higher CPP payout—an increase of 42 percent if the CPP is deferred to age 70[1]—less than one percent of Canadians wait until age 70 to collect CPP. For those who have a choice,[2] taking CPP before 70 may not be that surprising. In the 1972 Stanford Marshmallow Experiment, psychologist Walter Mischel gave his young participants a choice: one marshmallow immediately, or two if they waited 15 minutes. While most wanted to wait, less than one third were able. As the experiment showed, humans tend to favour instant gratification.

When considering delaying benefits, here's the good news: most of us are likely to live longer than we may believe. If you reach the age of 65, chances are you will likely live to age 85.

The Probability of a 65-Year-Old Reaching Various Ages?

Age	Women	Men
75	90%	86%
80	82%	75%
85	69%	59%
90	50%	38%
95	26%	17%

Source: Statistics Canada, T1310-0135.

This may mean many wonderful years in retirement, but it may also create worries for those concerned about outliving retirement savings. For many, income challenges from the pandemic haven't helped to ease these concerns.

Yet, given our life expectancy, studies continue to show that deferring CPP results in greater overall lifetime income for the average individual. A recent study published in the popular press will have you believe that taking CPP early at age 60 instead of 70 could cost you over $100,000.[3]

While there is no disputing that waiting until age 70 may deliver higher lifetime payments for the average retiree, there may be reasons to consider taking an earlier CPP.

Need for early income — Retirement costs aren't often linear in nature and may mirror life stages. Often, more income may be needed earlier in retirement, and CPP may provide this supplementary income.

Concerns about longevity — Some individuals may worry about longevity due to family history or illness. Life expectancy is difficult to predict.

Opportunity cost of other income — If CPP is deferred, other sources of income will be used. This may require withdrawing investments, which involves an opportunity cost of the potential loss of future growth. The recent study suggesting that you may forego $100,000 by taking CPP early may be misleading as it does not factor in this potential loss, which would reduce this gap.[4] In other cases, individuals may expect to leave certain investments to family members. A study done by the Society of Actuaries suggests that if the goal is to maximize a RRIF/RRSP for beneficiaries, then the best option may be to take CPP at age 65 so that the RRIF can be depleted more slowly.[5]

There are other factors that may impact the decision of when to start CPP benefits, including the amount of CPP to which you are entitled, the preservation of other income-tested benefits, and your current or future income tax bracket. All of these considerations can vary significantly by individual. For a thoughtful analysis specific to your particular situation, please call.

1. Or 0.7 percent for each month • 2. Other sources of income enable a CPP delay • 3. financialpost.com/executive/executive-summary/posthaste-canadians-who-take-cpp-at-60-lose-100000-in-retirement-income-study-finds; theglobeandmail.com/investing/personal-finance/article-taking-cpp-early-can-cost-you-100000-and-limit-your-long-term/ • 4. fpcanadaresearchfoundation.ca/media/5fpda5zw/cpp_qpp-reseach-paper.pdf • 5. cia-ica.ca/docs/default-source/research/2020/rp220114e.pdf

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