



Duncklee & Nott

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Hi friends and clients!
March is finally here and Spring is right around the corner! Hopefully we'll see some melting soon rather than more snow.

March marks the corporate tax filing deadline and there is a little over a month left for individuals to file and get last minute IRA or Roth IRA contributions in. The limit for 2014 (and 2015) is \$5,500 for those under 50 and \$6,500 for those age 50 or older.

Enjoy the articles this month!

Jim, Ken, Megan, Sharon, & Susie

March 2015 Financial Fitness

Points to Consider If Your Retirement Goal Seems Out of Reach

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Points to Consider If Your Retirement Goal Seems Out of Reach



Each year in its annual Retirement Confidence Survey, the Employee Benefit Research Institute reiterates that goal setting is a key factor influencing overall retirement confidence. But for

many, a retirement savings goal that could reach \$1 million or more may seem like a daunting, even impossible mountain to climb. What if you're investing as much as you can, but still feel that you'll never reach the summit? As with many of life's toughest challenges, it may help to focus less on the big picture and more on the details.* Start by reviewing the following points.

Retirement goals are based on assumptions

Whether you use a simple online calculator or run a detailed analysis, your retirement savings goal is based on certain assumptions that will, in all likelihood, change. Inflation, rates of return, life expectancies, salary adjustments, retirement expenses, Social Security benefits--all of these factors are estimates. That's why it's so important to review your retirement savings goal and its underlying assumptions regularly--at least once per year and when life events occur. This will help ensure that your goal continues to reflect your changing life circumstances as well as market and economic conditions.

Break it down

Instead of viewing your goal as ONE BIG NUMBER, try to break it down into an anticipated monthly income need. That way you can view this monthly need alongside your estimated monthly Social Security benefit, income from your retirement savings, and any pension or other income you expect. This can help the planning process seem less daunting, more realistic, and most important, more manageable. It can be far less overwhelming to brainstorm ways to close a gap of, say, a few

hundred dollars a month than a few hundred thousand dollars over the duration of your retirement.

Make your future self a priority, whenever possible

While every stage of life brings financial challenges, each stage also brings opportunities. Whenever possible--for example, when you pay off a credit card or school loan, receive a tax refund, get a raise or promotion, celebrate your child's college graduation (and the end of tuition payments), or receive an unexpected windfall--put some of that extra money toward retirement.

Retirement may be different than you imagine

When people dream about retirement, they often picture images like exotic travel, endless rounds of golf, and fancy restaurants. Yet a recent study found that the older people get, the more they derive happiness from ordinary, everyday experiences such as socializing with friends, reading a good book, taking a scenic drive, or playing board games with grandchildren. (Source: "Happiness from Ordinary and Extraordinary Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, June 2014) While your dream may include days filled with extravagant leisure activities, your retirement reality may turn out much different--and that actually may be a matter of choice.

The bottom line

Setting a goal is a very important first step in putting together your retirement savings strategy, but don't let the number scare you. As long as you have an estimate in mind, break it down to a monthly need, review it regularly, and increase your investments whenever possible, you can take heart knowing that you're doing your best to prepare for whatever the future may bring.

**All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there can be no assurance that any investment strategy will be successful.*

Last-Minute Tax Tips



It's that time of year again--tax filing season. And while many taxpayers like to get a head start on filing their returns, there are those of us who always find ourselves scrambling at the last minute to get our tax returns filed on time. Fortunately, even for us procrastinators, there is still time to take advantage of some last-minute tax tips.

If you need more time, get an extension

Failing to file your federal tax return on time could result in a failure-to-file penalty. If you don't think you'll be able to file your tax return on time, you can file for and obtain an automatic six-month extension by using IRS Form 4868. You must file for an extension by the original due date for your return. Individuals whose due date is April 15 would then have until October 15 to file their returns.

In most cases, this six-month extension is an extension to file your tax return and not an extension to pay any federal income tax that is due. You should estimate and pay any federal income tax that is due by the original due date of the return without regard to the extension, since any taxes that are not paid by the regular due date will be subject to interest and possibly penalties.

Try to lower your tax bill

While most tax-saving strategies require action prior to the end of the tax year, it's still not too late to try to lower your tax bill by making deductible contributions to a traditional IRA and/or pre-tax contributions to an existing qualified Health Savings Account (HSA). If you're eligible, you can make contributions to these tax-saving vehicles at any time before your tax return becomes due, not including extensions (for most individuals, by April 15 of the year following the year for which contributions are being made).

For tax year 2014, you may be eligible to contribute up to \$5,500 to a traditional IRA as long as you're under age 70½ and have earned income. In addition, if you're age 50 or older, you may be able to make an extra "catch-up" contribution of \$1,000. You can make deductible contributions to a traditional IRA if neither you nor your spouse is covered by an employer retirement plan; however, if one of you is covered by an employer plan, eligibility to deduct contributions phases out at higher modified adjusted gross income limits. For existing qualified HSAs, you can contribute up to \$3,300 for individual coverage or \$6,550 for family coverage.

Use your tax refund wisely

It's easy to get excited at tax time when you find

out you'll be getting a refund from the IRS--especially if it's a large sum of money. But instead of purchasing that 60-inch LCD television you've had your eye on, you may want to use your tax refund in a more practical way. Consider the following options:

- Deposit your refund into a tax-savings vehicle (if you're eligible), such as a retirement or education savings plan--the IRS even allows direct deposit of refunds into certain types of accounts, such as IRAs and Coverdell education savings accounts.
- Use your refund to pay down any existing debt you may have, especially if it is in the form of credit-card balances that carry high interest rates.
- Put your refund toward increasing your cash reserve--it's a good idea to always have at least three to six months worth of living expenses available in case of an emergency.

Finally, a tax refund is essentially an interest-free loan from you to the IRS. If you find that you always end up receiving a large income tax refund, it may be time to adjust your withholding.

Beware of possible tax scams

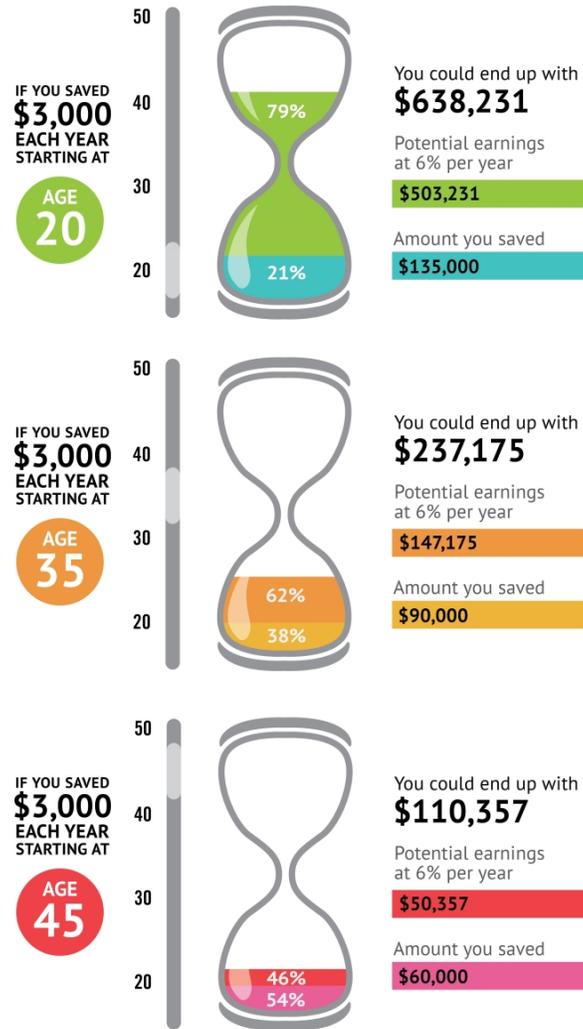
Though tax scams can occur throughout the year, they are especially prevalent during tax season. Some of the more common scams include:

- Identity thieves who use your identity to fraudulently file a tax return and claim a refund.
- Callers who claim they're from the IRS insisting that you owe money to the IRS or that you're entitled to a large refund.
- Unsolicited e-mails or fake websites, often referred to as "phishing," that pose as legitimate IRS sites to convince you to disclose personal or financial information.
- Scam artists who pose as tax preparers and promise unreasonably large or inflated refunds in order to commit refund fraud or identity theft.

The IRS will never call you about taxes owed without sending you a bill in the mail. If you think you may owe taxes, contact the IRS directly at www.irs.gov. In addition, the IRS will never initiate contact with you by e-mail to request personal or financial information. If you believe that you've been the victim of a tax scam, or would like to report a tax scammer, contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at www.treasury.gov/tigta.

The Cost of Waiting

Starting to save early means your money has more time to go to work for you. Even if you can only afford to set aside small amounts, compounding earnings can make them really add up. It's never too late to begin, but as this illustration shows, the sooner you start, the less you may need to rely solely on your own savings to build your total nest egg.



This illustration assumes annual investments made at the end of each year through age 65 and a 6% fixed annual rate of return. The rate of return on your actual investment portfolio will be different, and will vary over time, according to actual market performance. This is particularly true for long-term investments. It is important to note that investments offering the potential for higher rates of return also involve a higher degree of risk to principal.

The examples do not take into account the impact of taxes or inflation; if they did, the amounts would have been lower. They are intended as hypothetical illustrations of mathematical principles and should not be considered financial advice.

All investing involves risks, including the possible loss of principal, and there can be no guarantee that any strategy will be successful. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

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How much can I contribute to my IRA in 2015?

The combined amount you can contribute to your traditional and Roth IRAs remains at \$5,500 for 2015, or \$6,500 if you'll be 50 or older by the end of the year. You can contribute to an IRA in addition to an employer-sponsored retirement plan like a 401(k). But if you (or your spouse) participate in an employer-sponsored plan, the amount of traditional IRA contributions you can deduct may be reduced or eliminated (phased out), depending on your modified adjusted gross income (MAGI). Your ability to make annual Roth contributions may also be phased out, depending on your MAGI. These income limits (phaseout ranges) have increased for 2015:

Income phaseout range for deductibility of traditional IRA contributions in 2015	
1. Covered by an employer-sponsored plan and filing as:	
Single/Head of household	\$61,000 - \$71,000
Married filing jointly	\$98,000 - \$118,000
Married filing separately	\$0 - \$10,000
2. Not covered by an employer-sponsored retirement plan, but filing joint return with a spouse who is covered by a plan	
	\$183,000 - \$193,000

Income phaseout range for ability to contribute to a Roth IRA in 2015	
Single/Head of household	\$116,000 - \$131,000
Married filing jointly	\$183,000 - \$193,000
Married filing separately	\$0 - \$10,000



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