Money and investments

Investing during challenging times

So far, 2020 had been a year of volatility and upheaval; almost everything is less predictable than it was a year ago. How people respond to unforeseeable challenges often determines their success and satisfaction in life. When it comes to investing, meeting tribulations with calmness could be the key to maintaining financial stability.

Financial professionals say that one of the most important things to remember during challenging times is not to panic. The markets survived Black Monday in 1987, the Dot-Com crash of 2001, and 2008’s Great Recession. Although the COVID-19’s impact on every aspect of life is unprecedented, history tells us that the markets can survive 2020 too.

This doesn’t mean it will be easy to remain calm. It’s normal to feel as if you’re losing money when you see your investments decline in value. However, as behavioral finance expert John Forlines, III, a professor at Duke University, told CNBC, “You’ve only lost money if you’ve sold something at a loss.” In other words, focusing on the long-term when market volatility is high can help you ride out temporary setbacks.

Forlines says challenging times can drive vulnerable investors to make three big mistakes:

1. **Lack of financial planning.** People often think they need help with their financial planning, but neglect to seek it. They think they can do it themselves or, worse, follow the hottest topic of the moment. This can lead to unbalanced portfolios.

2. **Herding in at the wrong time.** Forlines says that many investors who fled the stock market after the crash in 2008 didn’t start to herd back in until late 2018 and 2019. This means they missed out on seven or eight years of a bull market, which is generally considered a good time for buying. Investors who followed the herd are likely to feel more clobbered by 2020 than those who’d stayed in the market or began easing back in years earlier.

3. **Being risk averse.** Feeling too uncomfortable with risk might hurt long-term financial planning. Although the market numbers may go up and down from day to day, over any considerable period of time, the S&P has historically experienced a gentle upwards slope, according to Forlines. He says this is true even of 2008.

Forlines cautions investors to control their emotions and focus on the big picture—have a plan and stick to it. Seeking help from certified financial planners who take into account your age, goals, the amount of time before you’ll need your money, and your risk tolerance can help you make smart, informed decisions about your investments.

Before considering whether to invest new money during challenging times, make sure you have a strong financial foundation that includes:

- No “ugly” debt—Not all debt is created equally. Ugly debt is unsecured debt (credit cards, personal loans, perhaps even student loans) with relatively high interest rates and/or minimum monthly payments in relation to your income.
- Living costs are covered—Investing money is likely not a sound idea if you are having trouble meeting all your necessary living expenses.
- Prudent reserve—Most adults should set aside three to six months’ of living expenses to protect against sudden loss of income before earmarking funds for investment.
- Emergency fund—If you need to make a big purchase or pay an unexpected bill, do you have cash set aside for that purpose? Many Total Control Accountholders use their TCAs as emergency funds.

Even before the COVID-19 disrupted virtually every facet of life, 72% percent of Americans reported feeling stressed over money, according to psychologist and researcher Linda Gallo, PhD. Now, more than ever, it’s important to try to remain positive and hopeful. History has proven that Americans are resilient and resourceful, and financial markets are capable of rebounding after challenging times.

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Thoughts to consider
Mind and mood

Fight, flight, or freeze: how stress affects you

Stress is a normal part of everyday life, but recent events have caused heightened tension and anxiety for many people. Everyone responds to stress in his or her own way. Some people become angry and confrontational when dealing with undue pressure. Others tend to withdraw and create distractions. Some experience a form of paralysis—the classic example of this is the deer-in-the-headlights moment.

Stress and perceived threats affect both mind and body, triggering a surge of hormones that instantly cause physiological changes. These changes kick in a natural response that is often referred to as fight, flight, or freeze.

When in fight or flight mode, your heart rate accelerates, which increases oxygen to your muscles. Pain perception dims and hearing and other senses sharpen. Freeze mode also causes physiological changes, but instead of readying you to fight or flee, you might become unable to react at all.

Fight-flight-freeze responses can arise many times during a normal day, for example:

• Pulling your hand away from a hot stove
• Jumping out of the way of an oncoming car
• Slamming on your brakes to avoid an accident
• Feeling scared or startled by someone surprising you
• Feeling overwhelmed by a flood of texts and messages
• Ignoring people and ending relationships quickly when conflicts arise

Each stress response has positive aspects. When a healthy or flight or fight mode kicks in you may be able to save yourself or others from dangerous situations. Even freezing can be helpful when, in threatening situations, you are able remain calm and assess your next move.

While fight or flight is necessary for survival, responding to ordinary life situations with heightened survival tactics could lead to personal and professional problems. Here are some techniques that can help you manage an overactive stress response:

• Long, slow, deep abdominal breathing. Inhale through the nose, sending the air deep into your abdomen. Hold. Exhale slowly through the nose. Repeat this several times.
• Visualize a clock and watch the clock’s second-hand tick through the seconds. This helps you focus on something other than the stressor.
• Practice meditation and/or yoga, which can promote peace that helps reduce the perception of stress.
• Exercise regularly. Consult your healthcare provider before undertaking any new physical activity.

Sources: Healthline (February 20, 2020), Very Well Mind (August 18, 2019)

Money and you
Mobile TCA

Accessing your TCA funds to pay for purchases online and in person has never been easier. TCA account holders can now link the TCA to mobile payment services. To take advantage of this service, you need to use a Smartphone, tablet, or computer and you must have an account with PayPal®, Venmo®, or Square Cash®. To use your TCA for mobile payments, visit the Apple App Store (iPhone) or Google Play (Android and Chrome OS devices) on your mobile device and download one or more of the apps. Follow the simple instructions provided by the app for linking it to external accounts, including your TCA.

Health and fitness
Energizing morning ritual

You know that expression about getting up on the wrong side of the bed? It dates back to Ancient Rome and the Romans took it quite literally. The Ancients believed the right side of anything to be positive and the left side negative. Of course, in modern times the adage has morphed into meaning starting the day off on a bad note.

While not every morning can signal a red letter day, there are some actions you can take first thing upon waking up to help start your day off right.

1. Before getting out of bed, gently stretch your body. Lie on your back with legs straight and gently bring your right knee towards your chest. Hold for 3 long, deep breaths and repeat on the left side. This simple stretch helps bring mobility to hips while massaging internal organs.
2. Follow up the simple stretch above with an energizing exercise. Tense every muscle in your body, open your mouth wide and extend your tongue, squeeze your hands into fists, squeeze your feet, legs, buttocks, arms, hold for a few seconds and then completely relax. Repeat.
3. Take a few moments to visualize your day. See yourself completing necessary tasks with ease and give thanks for the good things in your life.

Sources: Entrepreneur (January 14, 2019), Grammarist (2020), Science Alert (July 18, 2018)
Grilled cauliflower steaks

Backyard grilling is one of summer’s simple pleasures, and grilled veggies are so delicious even confirmed meat and potato people will love them. Grilling vegetables brings out a flavor that might make them more appealing to kids. If that fails, you can always add a healthy tomato sauce. For a hearty veggie side or main dish, try these grilled cauliflower steaks.

**Ingredients**
- 1 head cauliflower
- 3 TBs olive oil
- 1 tsp coarse salt
- 1 tsp cracked black pepper
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

**Instructions**
Cut the cauliflower steaks by cutting the head of cauliflower in half down the center. Do not remove the stem. Cut each half into 1-1/2 to 2-inch wide “steaks.” Do not cut too thin. Place cauliflower in a bowl. Drizzle olive oil over cauliflower and season with salt and pepper; toss to evenly coat. Cook on the preheated grill, turning every 2 minutes, until cauliflower is golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Top with walnuts. Serves 2-4, depending on cauliflower size and appetite.

Sources: Healthy Kitchen Recipes (2019), Well plated by Erin (2017)