

Give Yourself an Annual Financial Check Up

Many individuals get an annual medical examination, but neglect to take the same care with their finances. Reviewing your financial affairs can pay dividends now and later.

Annual Financial Check Up

Anytime is an ideal time to take some time and review your finances. Some time spent can help you reach your financial objectives faster, perhaps save some taxes and give you some financial peace of mind. Here are some areas to consider:

Insurance

1. Have you chosen deductibles that provide lower premiums with an acceptable level of risk?
2. Do you have an umbrella liability policy for potential large damages?
3. Do you have enough life insurance including cheaper term insurance?
4. Have you considered a life insurance trust to keep insurance proceeds out of your estate?

Mortgage

1. Could you reduce your monthly mortgage payments by refinancing your mortgage?
2. Should you consider some other type of mortgage (ARM, 15 year, 30 year) that corresponds with how long you plan to stay in your current home?

Household spending

1. Have you analyzed your monthly spending to identify ways to save?
2. Do you have a household budget?

Retirement planning

1. Have you calculated your retirement income and asset needs? Many calculators can be found on the Internet.
2. Are you taking full advantage of your employer's 401(k) plan or other retirement plan?
3. Are you going to make an IRA contribution? If so, make it early.
4. Should you consider converting your IRA to a Roth IRA?

College funding

1. Are you regularly saving for a child's college expenses?
2. Have you investigated Coverdell Education Savings Accounts (Education IRAs) or Qualified Tuition (Section 529) Plans? The new tax laws have enhanced these tools.

Your investments

1. Do you have an asset allocation plan to serve as a framework for your individual investment decisions?
2. Have you reviewed your portfolio holdings recently?
3. Does your investment strategy match your time horizon and risk tolerance?

Income taxes

1. Are your withholding and estimated tax payments at the right level?

2. Have you considered deferring income to next year or accelerating deductions to this year to save on this year's tax return?
3. Are you possible subject to the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT)? Stock option exercise, large deductions or the phase out of the benefits of personal exemptions at high-income levels could subject you to this tax. Contact your tax professional if you think you may be subject to AMT.

Estate planning

1. Have you had your estate plan reviewed recently? If you have moved, had a change in your family situation (births or deaths) or a change in your financial status, you may want to schedule a review with your advisor.
2. Does your estate plan provide for the naming of the guardians for your children and executor of your estate you wish?
3. Does your estate plan reflect the new estate tax laws?

Taking control of your financial future is an on-going process that requires some time and effort. Consider using a weekend to review your finances. Hopefully, everything is fine. If not, take the actions necessary for your sake and that of your family.