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Truth, Knowledge, Experience *1st Quarter 2019*

Hi Everyone,

I never thought the rains this spring would end. Similar to my feeling about the dysfunction in Washington, but this too shall pass.
The economy is strong, but markets are anticipatory. Trade negotiations with China remain a major issue.

Sincerely,

Steve Geremia

In This Issue:

- **A Solution to the Password Problem**
- **Planning Your Charitable Giving for 2019**

A Solution to the Password Problem

Presented by Stephen Geremia

Whether you're looking to make a New Year's resolution or you're simply trying to implement some information security best practices, you would be well served to start using a password manager. Why?

Passwords: The weak link
According to a survey by Digital Guardian, "password overload" is a real problem. Worse, despite known risks, at least half of us admit to reusing passwords.

How many online accounts do you have? Probably more than you think. You've likely got at least one social media profile. Then, there's your e-mail (which might include both personal and work accounts), your various banking accounts, streaming services like Netflix or Hulu, and your Amazon account (who doesn't have one of those?!). That's not to mention all those apps on your smartphone.

Now think about the passwords you use for those accounts. Chances are, either you reuse passwords across multiple accounts or you have your passwords written down somewhere—both of which are no-nos when it comes to information security best practices. If, as the experts tell us, you need a strong password for each account that is at least eight characters long (and preferably longer) and combines upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, and symbols, there's simply no way you can remember all the passwords to all your accounts.

Unless, that is, you start using a password manager.

An all-in-one solution
A password manager—some well-known versions include LastPass, Dashlane, RoboForm, and 1Password—is essentially a secure online storage vault for your passwords. You'll find both desktop and smartphone app versions available. Load them on multiple devices and your information will be synced across them.

There are several features that make password managers extremely valuable from an information security standpoint:

1. **Remember one master password.** Because the password manager stores all your credentials for you, the only password you need is the one that logs you in to the vault. So be sure to make it the most complex password you can think of—and remember!
2. **Auto-generate passwords.** Instead of trying to come up with a unique, complex password for each account on your own, the password manager will do it for you—and save it for future use.

"Remember, cash is a fact, profit is an opinion." ~ Alfred Rappaport

3. **Automatically save and store new accounts.** Adding a new streaming service? Opening a new credit card or bank account? Your password manager will recognize the new account and save your credentials for you, so your next login will be seamless.
4. **Easily fill web forms.** By saving some of your personal information in the vault (e.g., address, phone number, and credit card number), the next time you have to fill out an online form, the password manager will auto-fill your information. It's safer than storing these details in your browser.
5. **Log in to sites automatically.** Once your preferred sites and credentials are set up, you can access the sites directly from the password manager, which will log you in automatically. As an added bonus, with the browser extension enabled, you can navigate to the website you want to visit, and your password manager will log you in—again, automatically.

Hopefully you're seeing how much easier—and more secure—your online life can be. Imagine never having to remember multiple passwords or having to go through the hassle of resetting your password because you forgot it. That's what a password manager can do for you.

Ready to get started?
First, find the one you want. PCMag has put together this side-by-side comparison of what it considers the best password managers of 2019. Ranging from the most expensive (Dashlane, at $59.99/year and climbing) to the least expensive (Zoho, at $12/year), you'll also see the various features each of these tools offers. You might consider one of the free password managers available, which PCMag also reviews.

Once you download the manager you want, you need to start adding your accounts. Keep in mind that this can be time consuming, depending on how many accounts you have. Don't worry if you miss a few on this first pass; you can always come back later to add more. This is where the password manager earns its keep. You'll be able to see, at a glance, which existing passwords are considered weak, as well as which ones are repeated across accounts. From there, simply use the tool's password generator to create and assign new, unique passwords to these accounts to shore up your online security.

Be sure to enable multifactor authentication (MFA). An extra layer of security, MFA will require you to provide two forms of identification to log in to your password manager—your password and a second token, which is typically a passcode sent to your smartphone or an authenticator app. Considering how much sensitive information will be stored in the tool, *this step is a must*.

Now, all you have to do is monitor the passwords you have saved. Many password managers alert you when it's time to refresh your passwords (which you should do periodically). Some, like Dashlane, even scan the dark web for risks to your personal information.

What are you waiting for?
You may have had your personal e-mail account hacked, all because you used a weak password that was easy for some cybercriminal to guess. Or maybe your credit card number was stolen from an online payment site, again due to weak credentials. You might argue that a company like Dashlane or LastPass can get hacked, too, so why bother going through this hassle? In fact, LastPass was hacked, back in 2015, but the exposed data was encrypted, so the hackers didn't really get away with anything.

The lesson? No account is completely hack-proof, but using a password manager can substantially reduce the risk that your passwords—and the information secured behind them—will be compromised. And that's an information security best practice you want to follow, in the New Year and beyond.

"The most important thing about an investment philosophy is that you have one." ~ David Booth

Planning Your Charitable Giving for 2019

Presented by Stephen Geremia

A new year has begun. It's time to evaluate what worked well for you financially in 2018 and whether you need to make any changes for 2019. As you do that, you'll want to put together a plan for this year's charitable giving.

A good place to start the process is to consider the following items:

1. Review your donations for 2018 and how you made them. How much would you like to donate in 2019?

2. Did you exceed the standard deduction and itemize your taxes for the 2018 tax year? Do you antici pate exceeding the standard deduction and itemizing your taxes for 2019?

2019 Standard Deductions

Married Filing Jointly and Surviving Spouse	$24,400	Married Filing Separately	$12,200
Single	$12,200	Head of Household	$18,350

Are you age 70½ or older? Do you have an IRA or inherited IRA?

Charitable giving strategies to consider

Next, you'll want to decide on a strategy for this year's giving. Maybe one or multiple strategies can work together to create an effective plan to benefit your favorite charities. Below are several strategies to mull over.

Group your charitable contributions together. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 brought us a higher standard deduction. Unless you have enough deductions to itemize above the standard deduction threshold, you may not be able to deduct your charitable contributions. Therefore, in combination with other deductions, you might want to consider grouping multiple years of charitable contributions together into a single year to generate a deduction larger than the standard amount.

Contribute to a donor-advised fund (DAF). If you are interested in grouping charitable deductions together but would prefer spreading the distributions to charities out over a period of years, a DAF may be an option for you. It is a charitable giving vehicle that allows you to contribute as frequently as you desire and to recommend grants to your favorite charities from your fund. It can also be used to create a pool of money that will encourage giving by your family for generations to come.
A DAF is established through a public charity, so you can receive an immediate charitable tax deduction when you exceed the standard deduction threshold and itemize taxes. With the 2017 tax law, charitable deductions are limited to 60 percent of adjusted gross income (AGI) for cash gifts to the DAF or 30 percent of AGI for long-term appreciated assets (e.g., stock) to the DAF. **Please note:** You can also avoid capital gain taxes on gifts of appreciated assets to the DAF.

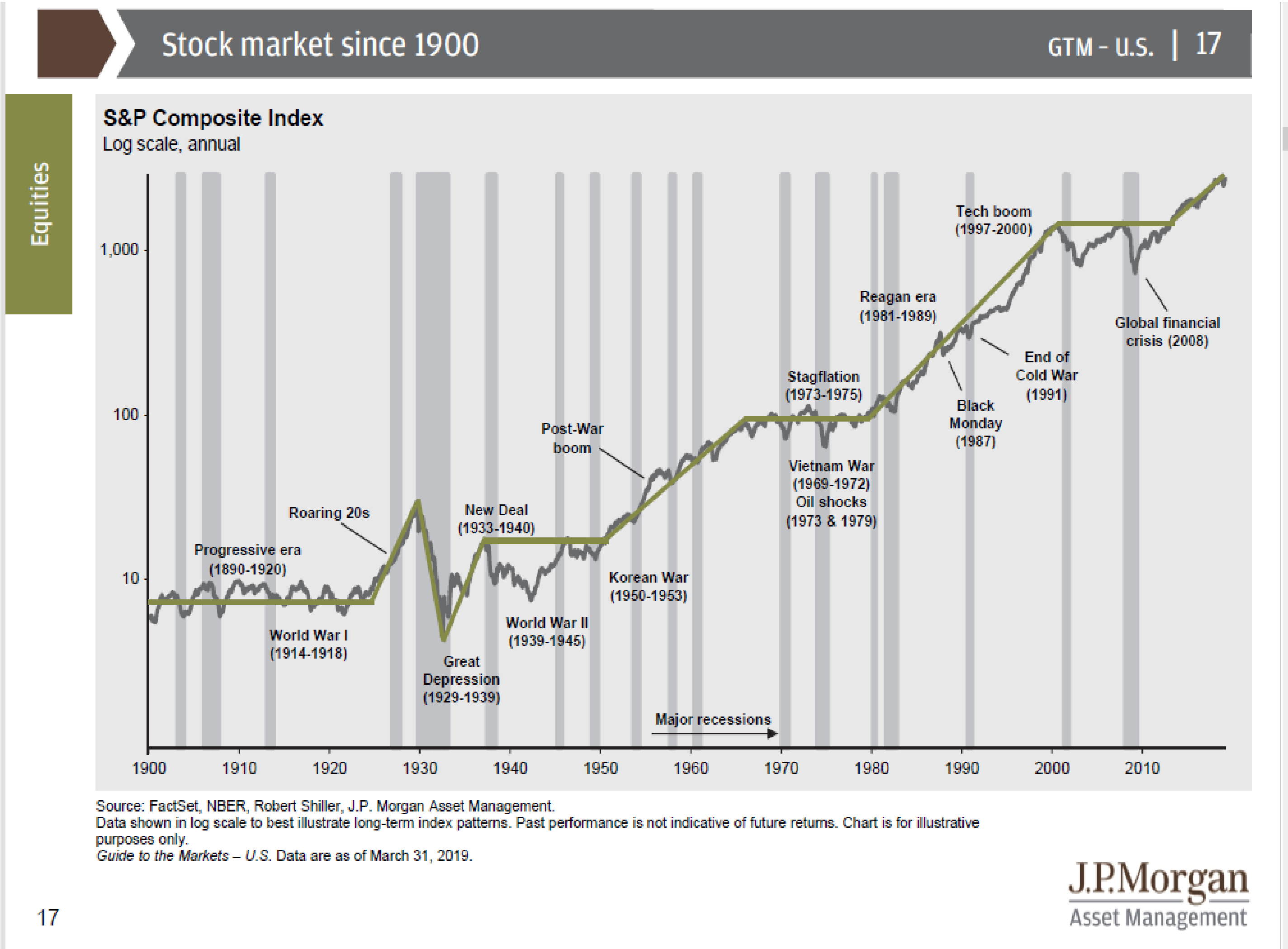
Donate appreciated assets directly to charities. If you have stock or another asset that has increased in value over the years, you can gift the appreciated asset directly to a charity. Gifting appreciated assets directly may avoid the inconvenience of selling the assets, as well as the realization of a taxable gain. In addition, the gifted assets may qualify for a charitable deduction if you exceed the standard deduction threshold and itemize your taxes. Charitable deductions are limited to 30 percent of AGI for long-term appreciated assets (e.g., stock) gifted to a public charity.

Consider a qualified charitable distribution (QCD). If you are 70½ or older and have an IRA or inherited IRA, you may contribute up to $100,000 from your IRA directly to a 501(c)(3) qualified charity without having to include that distribution as income. The QCD can go to a single charity or to a variety of charities.

You can make multiple QCDs if the total of all your distributions stays within the $100,000 annual limit. In addition, the distribution may be counted as your annual IRA required minimum distribution. Also, it doesn't matter whether or not you itemize deductions for taxes because a QCD is not eligible as a charitable deduction.

These are just a few of the strategies that may be available to you. As always, before making any decisions, a best practice is to consult your financial advisor and a tax professional.

"The individual investor should act consistently as an investor and not as a speculator."
~ Ben Graham



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