

Planning Your Financial Future

Atlas Brown Family Wealth Management

Have You Made Any of These Financial Mistakes?



As people move through different stages of life, there are new financial opportunities — and potential pitfalls — around every corner. Have you made any of these mistakes?

directive. No one likes to think about death or catastrophic injury, but these documents can help your loved ones immensely if something unexpected should happen to you.

Your 30s

1. *Being house poor.* Whether you're buying your first home or trading up, think twice about buying a house you can't afford, even if the bank says you can. Build in some wiggle room for a possible dip in household income that could result from leaving the workforce to raise a family or a job change or layoff.

2. *Not saving for retirement.* Maybe your 20s passed you by in a bit of a blur and retirement wasn't even on your radar. But now that you're in your 30s, it's essential to start saving for retirement. Start now, and you still have 30 years or more to save. Wait much longer, and it can be very hard to catch up.

3. *Not protecting yourself with life and disability insurance.* Life is unpredictable. Consider what would happen if one day you were unable to work and earn a paycheck. Life and disability insurance can help protect you and your family. Though the cost and availability of life insurance will depend on several factors including your health, generally the younger you are when you buy life insurance, the lower your premiums will be.

Your 20s

1. *Living beyond your means.* It's tempting to splurge on gadgets, entertainment, and travel, but if you can't pay for most of your wants up front, then you need to rein in your lifestyle, especially if you have student loans to repay.

2. *Not paying yourself first.* Save a portion of every paycheck first and then spend what's left over, not the other way around. And why not start saving for retirement, too? Earmark a portion of your annual pay now for retirement and your 67-year-old self will thank you.

3. *Being financially illiterate.* Learn as much as you can about saving, budgeting, and investing now and you could benefit from it for the rest of your life.

Your 50s and 60s

1. *Raiding your home equity or retirement funds.* It goes without saying that doing so will prolong your debt and/or reduce your nest egg.

2. *Not quantifying your expected retirement income.* As you near retirement, you should know how much money you (and your spouse, if applicable) can expect from three sources:

- Your retirement accounts such as 401(k) plans, 403(b) plans, and IRAs
- Pension income from your employer, if any
- Social Security (at age 62, at your full retirement age, and at age 70)

3. *Co-signing loans for adult children.*

Co-signing means you're 100% on the hook if your child can't pay, a less-than-ideal situation as you're getting ready to retire.

4. *Living an unhealthy lifestyle.* Take steps now to improve your diet and fitness level. Not only will you feel better today, but you may reduce your health-care costs in the future.

Your 40s

1. *Trying to keep up with the Joneses.*

Appearances can be deceptive. The nice lifestyle your friends, neighbors, or colleagues enjoy might look nice on the outside, but behind the scenes there may be a lot of debt supporting that lifestyle. Don't spend money you don't have trying to keep up with others.

2. *Funding college over retirement.* In your 40s, saving for your children's college costs at the expense of your own retirement may be a mistake. If you have limited funds, consider setting aside a portion for college while earmarking the majority for retirement. Then sit down with your teenager and have a frank discussion about college options that won't break the bank — for either of you.

3. *Not having a will or an advance medical*

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Atlas BROWN
FAMILY WEALTH MANAGEMENT



No investment strategy can guarantee success. All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of your contribution dollars.

There is no assurance that working with a financial professional will result in investment success.

On the Road to Retirement, Beware of These Five Risks

On your journey to retirement, you'll likely face many risks that have the potential to throw you off course. Following are five common challenges retirement investors face. Take some time now to review and understand them before your journey takes an unplanned detour.

1. Traveling aimlessly

Setting out on an adventure without a definitive destination can be exciting, but probably not when it comes to saving for retirement. As you begin your retirement strategy, one of the first steps you'll need to take is identifying a goal. While some people prefer to establish one big lump-sum accumulation amount — for example, \$1 million or more — others find that type of number daunting. They might focus on how much their savings will need to generate each month during retirement — say, the equivalent of \$5,000 in today's dollars, for example. ("In today's dollars" refers to the fact that inflation will likely increase your future income needs. These examples are for illustrative purposes only. They are not meant as investment advice.)

Regardless of the approach you follow, setting a goal may help you better focus your investment strategy. In order to set a realistic target, you'll need to consider a number of factors — your desired lifestyle, pre-retirement income, health, Social Security benefits, any traditional pension benefits you or your spouse may be entitled to, and others. Examining your personal situation both now and in the future can help you determine how much you may need to accumulate.

2. Investing too conservatively...

Another key to determining how much you may need to save on a regular basis is targeting an appropriate rate of return, or how much your contribution dollars may earn on an ongoing basis. Afraid of losing money, some retirement investors choose only the most conservative investments, hoping to preserve their hard-earned assets. However, investing too conservatively can be risky, too. If your investment dollars do not earn enough, you may end up with a far different retirement lifestyle than you had originally planned.

3. ...Or too aggressively

On the other hand, retirement investors striving for the highest possible returns might select investments that are too risky for their overall situations. Although you might consider investing at least some of your retirement portfolio in more aggressive investments to potentially outpace inflation, the amount you invest in such higher-risk vehicles should be

based on a number of factors. Appropriate investments for your retirement savings mix are those that take into consideration your total savings goal, your time horizon (or how much time you have until retirement), and your ability to withstand changes in your account's value. Would you be able to sleep at night if your portfolio lost 10%, 15%, even 20% of its overall value over a short time period? These are the types of scenarios you must consider when choosing an investment mix.

4. Giving in to temptation

On the road to retirement, you will likely face many financial challenges as well — the unplanned need for a new car, an unexpected home repair, an unforeseen medical expense are just some examples.

During these trying times, your retirement savings may loom as a potential source of emergency funding. But think twice before tapping your retirement savings assets, particularly if your money is in an employer-sponsored retirement plan or an IRA. Consider that:

- Any dollars you remove from your portfolio will no longer be working for your future
- You may have to pay regular income taxes on distribution amounts that represent tax-deferred investment dollars and earnings
- If you're under age 59½, you may have to pay an additional penalty tax of 10% to 25% (depending on the type of plan and other factors; some exceptions apply)

For these reasons, it's best to carefully consider all of your options before using money earmarked for retirement.

5. Prioritizing college saving over retirement

Many well-meaning parents may feel that saving for their children's college education should be a higher priority than saving for their own retirement. "We can continue working, if needed," or "our home will fund our retirement," they may think. However, these can be very risky trains of thought. While no parent wants his or her children to take on a heavy debt burden to pay for education, loans are a common and realistic college-funding option — not so for retirement. If saving for both college and retirement seems impossible, consider speaking with a financial professional who can help you explore the variety of tools and options.

Building Confidence in Your Strategy for Retirement



In 2018, 64% of workers surveyed were either somewhat or very confident in their ability to afford retirement, up from 60% in 2017. Among retirees surveyed in 2018, 75% were confident, down from 79% in 2017.

Source: 2018 Retirement Confidence Survey, EBRI

¹ Guarantees are contingent on the claims-paying ability and financial strength of the annuity issuer. Generally, annuity contracts have fees and expenses, limitations, exclusions, holding periods, termination provisions, and terms for keeping the annuity in force. Most annuities have surrender charges that are assessed if the contract owner surrenders the annuity. Withdrawals of annuity earnings are taxed as ordinary income. Withdrawals prior to age 59½ may be subject to a 10% federal income tax penalty.

Each year, the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) conducts its Retirement Confidence Survey to assess both worker and retiree confidence in financial aspects of retirement. In 2018, as in years past, retirees expressed a higher level of confidence than today's workers (perhaps because "retirement" is less of an abstract concept to those actually living it). However, worker confidence seems to be on the rise, while retiree confidence is on the decline. A deeper dive into the research reveals lessons and tips that can help you build your own retirement planning confidence.

Create a foundation of predictable sources of income

Workers surveyed expect to rely less on traditional sources of guaranteed income — a defined benefit pension plan and Social Security — than today's retirees. More than 40% of retirees say that a traditional pension plan provides them with a major source of income, and 66% say that Social Security is a primary source. Yet just one-third of today's workers expect either a pension or Social Security to play a big role.

Understand how Social Security works.

Although nearly half of today's workers say they have considered how their Social Security claiming age could affect their benefit amount, the median age at which they plan to claim benefits is 65. Moreover, less than a quarter of respondents say they determined their future claiming age with benefit maximization in mind. Why does this matter? It's because the vast majority of today's workers won't be able to collect their full Social Security retirement benefit until sometime between age 66 and 67, depending on their year of birth. Claiming earlier than that results in a permanently reduced benefit amount. To help ensure you make the most of your Social Security benefits, take the time to understand the ramifications of different claiming ages and strategies before making any final decisions.

Consider creating your own "pension" income.

Eight in 10 workers in the EBRI survey hope to use their defined contribution plan assets [e.g., 401(k) or 403(b)] to purchase a product that will provide a guaranteed stream of income during retirement. Depending on individual circumstances, this could be a wise move. To help provide yourself with a steady stream of income, you might consider annuitizing a portion of your retirement plan assets or purchasing an immediate annuity,

a contract that promises to pay you a steady stream of income for a fixed period of time or for life in exchange for a lump-sum payment.¹

When combined with your Social Security benefits, the payments received from an immediate annuity can help ensure that your everyday "fixed" expenses are covered. Any additional assets can then be earmarked for future growth potential and "extras," such as travel and entertainment.

Pay attention to your health — and health-care costs

Health. The EBRI survey revealed a correlation between health and retirement planning confidence. For example, 60% of today's workers who are confident in their retirement prospects also report being in good or excellent health, while only a little more than a quarter of those who are not confident report similar levels of health. Moreover, 46% of retirees who say they are confident also say they are in good health, compared with just 14% of those who are not confident.

The lesson here is pretty straightforward: Healthy habits may pay off in healthy levels of confidence. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, exercise, get enough sleep, and take steps to minimize stress. And don't skip important preventive checkups and lab tests. Keep in mind that even the most diligent savings strategies can be thrown off track by unexpected medical costs.

Health-care costs. The percentage of retirees who are at least somewhat confident that they will have enough money to cover medical expenses in retirement has dropped from 77% in 2017 to 70% in 2018. And four out of 10 retirees say that health-care expenses are at least somewhat higher than they expected. However, retirees who have estimated their health-care costs (39% of respondents) are more likely to say their expenses are about what they expected them to be. On the other hand, just 19% of workers have calculated how much they will need to cover their health expenses in retirement.

If you have not yet thought about how much of your retirement income may be consumed by health-care costs, now may be the time to start doing so. Having at least a general idea of what your medical expenses might be will help you more accurately project your overall retirement savings goal.

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What is the federal funds rate?

The federal funds rate is the interest rate at which banks lend funds to each other from their deposits at the Federal Reserve (the Fed), usually overnight, in order to meet federally mandated reserve requirements. Basically, if a bank is unable to meet its reserve requirements at the end of the day, it borrows money from a bank with extra reserves. The federal funds rate is what banks charge each other for overnight loans. This rate is referred to as the federal funds effective rate and is negotiated between borrowing and lending banks.

The Federal Open Market Committee sets a target for the federal funds rate. The Fed does not directly control consumer savings or credit rates directly; it can't require that banks use the federal funds rate for loans. Instead, the Fed lowers the federal funds rate by buying government-backed securities (usually U.S. Treasuries) from banks, which adds to the banks' reserves. Having excess reserves, banks will lower their lending rates for overnight loans in order to make some interest on the excess reserves. To raise rates, the Fed sells securities to banks, decreasing the banks'

reserves. If enough banks need to borrow to meet overnight reserve requirements, banks with extra reserves will raise their lending rates.

The federal funds rate serves as a benchmark for many short-term rates, such as savings accounts, money market accounts, and short-term bonds. Banks also base the prime rate on the federal funds rate. Banks often use the prime rate as the basis for interest rates on deposits, bank loans, credit cards, and mortgages.

The FDIC insures CDs and bank savings accounts, which generally provide a fixed rate of return, up to \$250,000 per depositor, per insured institution. The principal value of bonds may fluctuate with market conditions. Bonds redeemed prior to maturity may be worth more or less than their original cost. Investments seeking to achieve higher yields also involve a higher degree of risk. U.S. Treasury securities are backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government as to the timely payment of principal and interest.

Source: Federal Reserve, 2018



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