

Investment Insights

The Power of Perspective

Winter 2023

Why are we more likely to choose a bowl of pasta over a healthy salad when we're hungry? Neuroeconomics suggests that we often make different choices when overtaken by emotional impulses, and this can impact our investment decisions.

Much of economic theory has been based on the notion that individuals act in rational ways. After "Black Monday" (1987), when the markets fell more than 20 percent with no apparent economic driver, the field of behavioural economics — the study of how human emotion affects economic decision making — gained traction. As it turns out, we are not biologically wired to make the best decisions because the part of our brain that tells us to act rationally can easily be overtaken by emotional impulses. We tend to be in one of two emotional states, hot or cold, and less rational decisions are often made in the hot state. So, when we're not hungry (cold), we may opt for a healthy salad, but when hungry (hot), we're likely to choose the pasta instead.

Likewise, our brains react similarly in investing. When we are threatened by the possibility of losses, fear can take over often impairing a balanced perspective and our ability to think positively about the future. This was prevalent in 2022, when excessive pessimism dominated the markets. As one market pundit noted, perception swung from "flawless to hopeless," and, for many, the urge to react may have felt overwhelming. How about you? Do you allow emotions to impact the way you invest?

As we enter 2023, many of the challenges faced in 2022 remain, including persistent inflation, higher interest rates and continuing central bank tightening policies in their pursuit to slow economies and rein in inflation. While this has prompted new worries over what a slowdown might look like, let's not forget that uncertainties will always be with us. Our challenge as investors is to keep perspective.

While economies need to slow for inflation to moderate, we may be well positioned to endure these times. Our financial systems continue to be healthy; most companies and individuals are not heavily indebted, a previous driver of more serious downturns. Labour markets have been strong, though this has complicated central bank efforts to slow inflation. And, after a difficult year, consider also that the markets can discount the direction of the economy well ahead of time. Most important, corporate profits and economies continue to grow over the long term, and this isn't likely to change.

In the short term, there will always be down months, quarters or even years in the financial markets. During these times, keeping perspective and not being swayed by emotion is important. Behavioural economists suggest that some of the best investors have mastered the art of treating their feelings as reverse indicators: Excitement is a cue to consider selling; fear indicates it might be time to buy. Others choose to focus less on the financial news or checking portfolios, leaving day-to-day investing to those of us who are here to manage it. Remember, we are here to provide support to keep you on course.

In this season of resolutions, why not resolve to be aware of the effects that emotions can have on our investing ways? Use the power of perspective to your benefit.

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To Our Clients:

After a difficult year for the financial markets, we look forward to a better 2023. The year that has passed reminds us that building wealth doesn't always follow a steady course. While it's never easy to endure down-market periods, as we show on page 3, they are a normal part of investing. It has also been a return to more reasonable fair market valuations, which should be seen as healthy.

As we begin another year, don't overlook the importance of continuing to position assets to benefit the future. A new year brings opportunities to contribute to tax-advantaged accounts like the TFSA and RRSP, and this may be an opportune time.

We would like to express our gratitude for entrusting us with your financial matters. May the year ahead be filled with health and happiness.

Brad

Avoid These Five RRSP Pitfalls

Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) season is just around the corner. Given equity market performance in 2022, it may be an opportune time to contribute to your RRSP.

Beyond the importance of growing funds for retirement, avoiding certain practices can help to save tax or create a bigger nest egg for the future.

1. Withdrawing funds to pay down debt — Consider the implications of making taxable withdrawals from the RRSP to pay down short-term debt. You may be paying more tax on the RRSP withdrawal than you'll save in interest costs. In addition, once you make a withdrawal from the RRSP, you won't be able to get back the valuable contribution room — unlike the TFSA, where contribution room resets itself in the following calendar year.

2. Contributing losers in-kind — In order to fund the RRSP, some investors may choose to move investments from non-registered accounts. If you are considering making in-kind contributions to the RRSP, be careful not to transfer investments that have declined in value. You will be deemed to have sold these investments at fair market value when transferring them to the RRSP, yet any capital loss is not deductible. Instead, consider selling them on the open market and contributing cash to the RRSP so you can claim the capital loss (and be aware of the superficial loss rules if you plan on repurchasing them).

3. Claiming the deduction in the wrong year — With any RRSP contribution, you're entitled to a tax deduction for the amount contributed so long as it is within the contribution limit. Keep in mind that you don't have to claim the tax deduction in the year that the contribution is made.

You may carry it forward if you expect income to be higher in future years such that you may be put in a higher tax bracket, potentially generating greater tax savings for a future year.



4. Neglecting to update

beneficiary designations — It may be beneficial to review account beneficiaries (in provinces where applicable) on a periodic basis, especially in light of major life changes. For example, in the event of separation or divorce, be aware that named beneficiaries may not be revoked, depending on provincial laws. Therefore, the designation of an ex-spouse may still be in effect.

5. Withdrawing from a Spousal RRSP — For couples in which one spouse will earn a high level of income in retirement, while the other may have little income, a Spousal RRSP may be a valuable income-splitting tool. However, don't forget that the attribution rules generally apply to a Spousal RRSP. If the higher-income spouse has made contributions to the Spousal RRSP in the year, or in the immediate two preceding years, and if funds are withdrawn from the plan, they may be taxed to the higher-income spouse, as opposed to the lower-income Spousal RRSP owner.

RRSP Contribution Deadline: March 1, 2023, for the 2022 tax year. Contributions are limited to 18 percent of the previous year's earned income, to a maximum of \$29,210 (for the 2022 tax year).

In Brief: Upcoming Changes for Investors

Change is imminent! Here are a few upcoming changes to be aware of for the year ahead:

2023 TFSA dollar limit: \$6,500. As a result of increasing inflation, the 2023 Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) dollar limit will rise to \$6,500, bringing the eligible lifetime amount to \$88,000. The annual dollar limit hasn't increased since 2019, so don't overlook the opportunity for tax-free growth.

Adjustments for inflation. If there is any good news that can come with high inflation rates, it may be the adjustment that will increase many government income tax and benefit amounts. This is the largest increase in many years due to higher inflation rates. Many adjustments will take effect on January 1, such as the TFSA dollar limit (see above). However, others, such as income-tested benefits like the GST/HST tax credit or the child disability benefit, will take effect on July 1, as this coincides with the beginning of the program year for these benefits.

Indexation Increase Per Year, 2019 to Current

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
2.2%	1.9%	1.0%	2.4%	6.3%

It will also increase our tax brackets. If the thresholds are not indexed to

inflation, an increase in income would mean higher taxes paid and a loss of purchasing power. This was evident when Alberta de-indexed its tax brackets in 2019, effectively forcing Albertans to pay \$646 million more in taxes from 2020 to 2022.¹ Alberta will resume indexing for the 2022 tax year.



For more information on the indexation adjustment, please see: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/frequently-asked-questions-individuals/adjustment-personal-income-tax-benefit-amounts.html>

Trusts: Delay in reporting requirements. If you hold a trust, it was expected that new reporting requirements would be put in place this year, requiring most trusts to file a tax return. In the federal government's 2022 Fall Economic Update, the effective date was pushed back to taxation years that end after December 30, 2023. As such, reporting will not be required for the 2022 year. This is the second time that the date has been changed since the proposal was introduced.

1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-taxes-indexation-inflation-1.6510978>

Preserving the Longevity of Wealth Across Generations

While intergenerational wealth planning may not be for everyone, consider that creating a lasting legacy can be one of the greatest gifts you leave behind.

Many of us have heard the statistic: Family wealth is often lost within three generations (the “shirtsleeves curse”). Studies suggest that it takes the average recipient of an inheritance just 19 days before they buy a new car.¹ What are high-net-worth families doing to help prevent this loss? There has been an increasing focus on intergenerational wealth planning, with the objective of supporting wealth longevity. This involves getting existing generations to meet about their finances, to align them with your financial goals and values so that they can be passed along to the generations to come. Here are some steps that you can take as part of this planning process:

Start with a plan and document it. Start by thinking about your vision for your wealth for the generations to come. The plan should set out goals and provisions for how you wish the funds to be used, accessed and replenished. For instance, you may wish for family members to invest in themselves to gain the experience needed to create and grow wealth, using funds for higher education or a business’ start-up or expansion. Others may wish to leave endowments to a charity. Once you determine your goals and provisions, it is important to formally record them as this document will be passed along to future generations.

Communicate your plan. Once the plan has been documented, it should be communicated to family members. Often, parents keep their finances and related values to themselves, missing the opportunity to pass along their ideals to children. While specific financial details need not be disclosed, sharing your vision is intended to be a catalyst for meaningful discussions. Some families use this plan to form a family constitution that can help future generations carry forward your intentions.

Engage in regular meetings.

Regular family meetings are intended to help cultivate family values based on your vision for your wealth. If wealth has been carefully built up through the generations, it may involve exploring family history. Or, meetings may be used to educate children about finances or managing money, or introduce high-level strategies to carry out the intergenerational plan, such as teaching about a family business or giving strategy. These meetings may also identify gaps where planning may be needed to ensure your vision can be carried forward.



Consider protection tools. You may determine through family meetings that beneficiaries need support. Certain tools can support beneficiaries in meeting your goals, or protect future wealth in situations in which beneficiaries may not be capable. For example, a trust can put assets under the control of a responsible trustee, with the terms of the trust specifying the conditions, timing and amount of distributions to be made to heirs. Other tools, such as life insurance, can protect and grow assets while also providing access to cash. Having a support system of trusted professionals may help to ensure a successful generational wealth transfer, especially when heirs may not have the skill set to independently manage funds.

Monitor the plan’s success. By having ongoing meetings with family members, you will be able to identify and address any concerns as they arise. You can also continue to define and refine family roles to ensure that your plan has a greater chance of being successfully fulfilled.

If you need help exploring this, or other estate planning options, please call.

1. <https://financialpost.com/personal-finance/retirement/inheritance/how-to-help-prevent-your-heirs-from-blowing-through-the-family-fortune>

Markets Go Up & Down: There’s Nothing “Average” About Returns

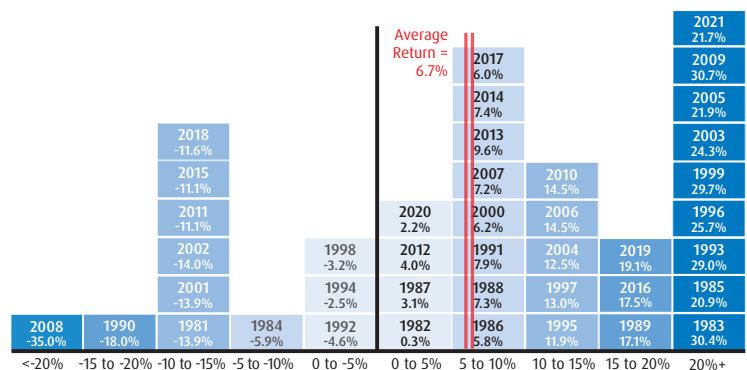
“In the short run, the market is a voting machine. But in the long run, it is a weighing machine.” — Benjamin Graham¹

2022 was a difficult year for the markets: a reminder that the markets can go down just as they go up. Yet, this is a normal part of the investing cycle. As the chart (right) shows, in the short term, investors should expect a wide range of outcomes, including negative annual performance.

While we often talk about “average” returns for the market, it’s worth repeating that annual returns often do not fall close to this average. Consider the wide dispersion of annual returns of the S&P/TSX Composite Index since 1981. Annual returns were less than the long-term average return of 6.7 percent (red line) in 19 out of 41 years. And, 29 percent of the time, annual returns were negative.

Given the variability of returns from year to year, it’s worth remembering that time in the markets, not timing, plays an important part in investing.

S&P/TSX Composite Index Annual Returns Since 1981



Source: S&P/TSX Composite Index Annual Returns (not including dividends reinvested), 1981 to 2021.

1. This is to suggest that in the short term, market returns are much more a reflection of our human nature. However, over the longer term, they are correlated to fundamentals like corporate earnings and economic growth.

For 2023: Dealing With Volatility

With the central banks expressing their intent to continue their tightening policies, we expect ongoing volatility in 2023. Are there ways to help deal with the volatility?

For those who pay regular attention to the markets, if they've felt more volatile over recent times, you're not mistaken. Periods of greater volatility tend to coincide with market drawdowns and 2022 was no exception. There were 102 days in which the S&P 500 Index had a move of one percent or more, significantly higher than in previous years (chart, right).*

Periods of downward volatility tend to be difficult, even for the best of us. Modern behavioural scientists suggest that we feel the pain of loss about twice as much as the pleasure of a similar-sized gain. Even medical doctors agree that "market volatility is bad for your health," causing undue stress, generating feelings of worry and sometimes leading to poor decision making.¹

Today's new concern: an earnings recession?

As we move into 2023, we expect periods of volatility to continue. With persistent inflation, the central banks are expected to continue raising rates to bring down inflation. Rate hikes are intended to slow the economy, which has prompted new concerns over a potential earnings recession.

While slowing the economy will put downward pressure on corporate earnings, there are reasons to keep perspective. Over the longer term, the stock market is driven by fundamentals such as corporate earnings. While the biggest bear markets often coincide with the largest declines in earnings,² history has also shown that changes in fundamental drivers, like earnings, may not necessarily lead to the same outcome. For instance, in the 1980s, earnings didn't grow that much, yet the markets would post significant gains (chart, above). Indeed, there are many paths that the economy and markets can take. What if economies slow and inflation can be reeled in, yet labour markets remain relatively strong? What if earnings don't fall much during the economic slowdown?

Are there ways to help manage the volatility?

While it would be ideal to be able to hedge against the risks of slower earnings, inflation, rising rates or a recession, doing so would likely lead to a portfolio that offers a limited chance of upside. No one can consistently anticipate the timing of these changes, so, as advisors, we act as risk managers using strategies to help manage through difficult times. This includes having a plan in place based on individual risk tolerance and goals, using a disciplined approach that emphasizes quality, diversification and asset allocation and making prudent changes where necessary. For investors, having the patience to see through these periods is important. The same doctors suggest focusing less on our portfolios and instead getting exercise, eating healthy and engaging in activities like sports or meditation to worry less about volatility; all good resolutions as we start a new year. After all, "attitude and perspective go a long way in both your health and investing."

*When annualized. Data at 10/21/22. 1. <https://www.cbc.com/2015/09/09/market-volatility-is-bad-for-your-health-commentary.html>; 2. <https://awealthofcommonsense.com/2020/04/the-relationship-between-earnings-and-bear-markets/>

Incidence of Large Daily Moves: S&P 500

Year	Intrayear Drawdown	+/-1% Move	+/-2% Move	+/-3% Move
2022*	-25.4%	102	38	10
2021	-5.2%	55	7	0
2020	-33.9%	110	44	24
2019	-6.8%	38	7	1
2018	-19.8%	47	20	6
2017	-2.8%	8	0	0

*To Oct 21/22. <https://awealthofcommonsense.com/2022/10/animal-spirits-bear-market-math/>

Earnings Growth & S&P 500 Total Returns

Decade	Earnings Growth	S&P 500 Total Returns
1930s	-42.2%	-0.5%
1940s	157.8%	140.4%
1950s	46.1%	486.6%
1960s	70.5%	112.2%
1970s	157.1%	76.8%
1980s	53.9%	403.7%
1990s	110.6%	432.8%
2000s	5.8%	-9.1%
2010s	173.6%	256.7%

Source: awealthofcommonsense.com/2022/06/timing-a-recession-vs-timing-the-stock-market/



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