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Why Pessimism Can Prevail

Against the backdrop of market volatility that has greeted investors in 2018, so too has come a wave of pessimism. The narrative may have shifted, but what has really changed?

The Canadian economy continues to perform well. Jobless claims are still at near lows; the manufacturing sector has performed well. Strong U.S. growth, combined with a lower loonie, has helped to support our exports, which rose to an all-time high in April. Our resource-based economy is expected to benefit from rising oil prices, which have reached their highest levels since 2014.

In the U.S., corporate earnings growth has been impressive; the first quarter marked the best growth since 2011, largely due to recent tax cuts. This has also triggered an increase in capital spending.

Even the threat of nuclear war appears to have diminished, in stark contrast to just one year ago. North Korea's apparent move towards denuclearization is good news for the world, and one less geopolitical tension to create volatility in the markets.

So why all the pessimism? We are in the late innings of the business cycle and this economic expansion has been more prolonged than most. During periods of imminent change, pessimism often emerges. After all, pessimism is persuasive. A Harvard study showed that pessimism is perceived to be more "expert", intellectually seductive and competent. Daniel Kahneman, who won a Nobel Prize for his work on cognitive psychology, showed that people respond more strongly to loss than gain. Optimism often means staying the course, which appears oblivious to risks. Pessimism requires action, which appeals to human nature, as people are more inclined to want to take action.

In This Issue

Index Asymmetry? 2
Protecting Your Digital Footprint 2
Is Your Will Valid? 3
Navigating the New Passive Income Rules 4

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But think about just how much opportunity would have been missed if you had followed the underlying pessimistic narrative over recent years. Even in 2009, the media was claiming that equity markets had reached their peak!

This is not to say that there aren't challenges. While the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently upgraded the global growth picture, Canada's growth has slowed this year. Our global competitiveness, an important engine for economic growth, continues to be threatened: the Trans Mountain pipeline situation is a recent example. For now, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations are ongoing and the U.S. continues to impose tariffs globally, adding to trade uncertainty. As interest rates continue to rise, Canada's debt load, as well as those of individuals, becomes more obvious.

Yet, the backdrop remains positive. A repeat of 2017's strong global equity environment, where volatility was almost non-existent, global growth was robust and interest rates were kept low, is unlikely. It shouldn't come as a surprise that things have slowed in comparison, but keep perspective. While pessimism may be prevalent, there are plenty of reasons for continued optimism.

The Case for Diversification

Index Asymmetry

Throughout 2017, while it seemed as though record highs were being reported by the media in the U.S. every few weeks, the comparatively sluggish movements of the TSX left much to be desired. This had some investors asking: why is the market performance of Canada and the U.S. so different?

The composition of Canada's benchmark stock index is quite different from the U.S. major indices. The Canadian market is predominantly resource based, with over 65 percent of the S&P/TSX Composite index represented by only two sectors: resources and financials.[1] In the U.S., the S&P 500 is more balanced, with over 70 percent represented by technology, financials, health care and consumer goods sectors. The other major U.S. index, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DOW), consists of only 30 blue-chip stocks, chosen because they are large and successful companies.

The strong performance of the U.S. market over recent times has been largely driven by the technology sector and S by solid corporate earnings, an improving manufacturing sector and a strong job market. Canadian markets, on the other hand, have been hindered by lower oil prices and weaker resources demand (although it will be interesting to see how this changes with recent increases in oil prices). During the commodities "supercycle", when commodity prices boomed from 2000 to 2011, the situation was quite the opposite: there were periods in which Canada's stock market outperformed that of the U.S. (see chart).

The Dangers of Chasing the Index

During positive market times, it may be easy to forget that stock markets are inherently risky. Seeking to achieve higher returns often involves taking on more risk. For example, while indices are important market indicators, a portfolio fully invested in equities would, in many cases, be considered high risk.

As it is never possible to predict market performance at any particular time, diversification helps to manage downside risk. The performance of companies, sectors, asset classes and geographies will vary over time. It is worth repeating that a well-constructed portfolio uses diversification to help temper the effects of change.

Your portfolio has been built with your personal circumstances and risk tolerance in mind, with the objective of preserving and growing wealth to meet your goals. While it may be hard not to focus on index gains, do not lose sight of the fact that your portfolio is well-positioned to help support you on the path to financial success, whatever the immediate course of the markets.

Performance of TSX, S&P & DOW During Commodities Supercycle[1]

Index	Change from Jan. 2000 to Dec. 2006
S&P/TSX Composite	53.4%
S&P 500	-3.5%
DOW	8.4%

1. 12/31/99 to 12/29/06 (prior to 2007/08 financial crisis). Figures from Bloomberg.

Protecting Yourself

Your Digital Footprint

A survey done five years ago by Visa Inc. revealed some concerning statistics about the personal information individuals disclose online. Almost half of respondents listed their birthday on social media, with 20 percent listing their home address. Most surprisingly, seven percent said that they had shared their social insurance number![1]

Have we become more careful in recent years? Since this survey, the average time Canadians spend online has more than doubled to over 24 hours per week.[2] Given this increased presence, we should be mindful about managing our digital footprint.

Your Digital Footprint: What is it?

Your digital footprint consists of the trail you leave behind as you use the internet. When you pay bills, make online purchases, do a web search or participate in social media, you disclose information including where you are (a computer IP address or smartphone location), the websites you visit and your social circles.

Many people understand that by using online services, you relinquish a certain level of privacy. But the Facebook scandal earlier this year highlighted that organizations may be using more of our information than we realize. This is a good reminder that everything has a price. What may appear to be free can have hidden costs: if you aren't paying for the product, consider that you may actually be the product. Many companies build profiles based on our digital footprints and monetize that information. While this data is frequently used for commercial purposes to track, customize and market to you, there is also the risk that criminals can use this information for unscrupulous purposes, such as to steal your identity.

Managing Your Digital Footprint

Completely eliminating your digital footprint may be difficult, if not impractical, so here are some ideas to better manage it:

- ***Develop basic "digital hygiene".*** Don't post sensitive information. Create boundaries for your online presence, such as using a separate credit card for digital purchases.
- ***Close/delete old accounts.*** Try searching for yourself online: you may find old profiles/accounts that have been forgotten.
- ***Enable privacy settings*** to make data less accessible to others.
- ***Delete cookies on your system.*** Online sites can leave cookies that track your movements and allow targeted ads.
- ***Update antivirus software*** to protect your information.
- ***Make changes to data.*** If you can't delete information, use pseudonyms or modify your data to help conceal your identity.

1. visa.com/blogarchives/us/category/security/index.html; 2. theglobeandmail.com/news/national/concerns-raised-as-report-suggests-canadians-spending-more-time-online/article34360751/; 2011

A Look Back in Time

Are You 89.5% Richer?

Thirty years ago, new loonies were lining our pockets, Brian Mulroney was prime minister and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was newly signed, which would pave the way for the North American Free Trade Agreement. Who would have thought that 30 years later, we would be in talks to rescue it from its demise?

Since that time, the average family income has risen by 89.5 percent, which is slightly higher than inflation. According to the Bank of Canada, the consumer price index (CPI), the Bank's measure of inflation, increased by 88.8 percent, or an average of 2.14 percent per year. CPI is calculated by comparing the price of a government-assembled basket of goods and services.

But how has our buying power really changed? The chart lists the prices of select items in 1988 and 2018. One thing is certain, housing prices have dramatically risen over the years. Today, the price of a Canadian home is over nine times the average income (although back in 1988, a five-year fixed mortgage rate was around 12 percent, so borrowers paid almost three times as much interest on every dollar borrowed[1]). At the same time, many technological amenities have become more affordable — televisions are not only cheaper, they are larger and lighter!

The good news? Since 1988, investors have seen the S&P/TSX Composite Index gain over 369.1 percent. Even during this period, there were four bear markets that collectively lasted 48 months; two of which saw market drops of over 40 percent. Over the next 30 years, these same growth prospects are likely. The equity market continues to be one of the best ways for investors to grow wealth over the longer-term.

Changes in Prices of Select Items: 1988 & 2018[2]

	1988	2018	Change
Cdn. Family Income (Avg.)[3]	37,118	70,336	*+89.5%*
Cdn. House (Avg.)[4]	$129,702	$652,400	*+403.0%*
Sony Bravia Television[5]	$1,599 (32")	$899 (55")	*-43.8%*
Top Apple Computer[6]	$9,150	$6,299	*-31.2%*
Microwave[5]	$580 (680W)	$140 (1100W)	*-75.9%*
Bottle of Dom Perignon[6]	$85.25	$231.95	*172.1%*
Big Mac Hamburger[7]	$2.05	$6.55	*+219.5%*
University Tuition (Avg.)[3]	$1,464 (1990)	$6,571	*+348.8%*
Consumer Price Index[8]	70.4	132.9	*+88.8%*
S&P/TSX Composite Index[9]	3,331.62	15,627.90	*+369.1%*

1. CANSIM Table 027-0015; 2.1988 data: Report on Business Magazine, April 2012, pg. 13; 2018 data as of 3/3/18; 3. Statistics Canada; 4. CREA; 5. bestbuy.ca; 6. LCBO; 7. economist.com; 8. Bank of Canada; 9. Close at May 2.

Estate Planning: Is Your Will Valid?

Every so often, we hear stories about the consequences of not having a valid will. Recently in the U.S., a man who died without immediate family left what he believed to be a handwritten will that passed his $4 million apartment to his beloved doorman. The problem? The "will" wasn't dated or notarized, a requirement for its validity in his jurisdiction. Sadly, his belongings will likely transfer to his only blood relative who was never the intended beneficiary.[1]

If you die "intestate", meaning that no will has been put in place, or, if your existing will is not valid, the assets will be divided according to rules set out by your province of residence (which may vary significantly; for instance, some provinces do not recognize common-law spouse status under their intestacy rules).

This division may not be what you intend. There may even be additional costs to the estate, perhaps a huge tax bill that could have been avoided with some forethought. The process is also likely to create delays in settling your estate. These situations can make it difficult for your intended beneficiaries.

You can prepare a will yourself by using a pre-printed kit, through an online service, or, in some provinces, by writing it by hand (a hand-written "holographic will" is valid only in certain provinces). However, the old English proverb comes to mind: "penny-wise, pound foolish". The money you save now may seem insignificant if your estate incurs legal fees to complete its settlement.

Creating an effective will can be a complex legal task. Are you

certain that your will contains no errors in form, such as in witnessing, that could invalidate it? Does it comply with current provincial legislation? Do your instructions account for certain contingencies, such as taking care of minors or a complex blended family? If you have assets located outside of Canada, have you properly accounted for them? Have tax consequences been considered? If your will has not been correctly drafted, your estate may not be distributed according to your intent.

It is time well spent to take steps to ensure the validity of your will for the sake of your beneficiaries. It may also be a good time to review the beneficiary designations for assets that do not pass through your will, which may include registered accounts or insurance (not applicable in QC). If you need support, or would like an introduction to an estate planning specialist, please call.

1. abcnews.go.com/US/doorman-vows-fight-nephew-court-late-mans-handwritten/story?id=55094484;

Business Owners: Navigating the New Passive Income Rules

If you are a business owner, you've likely been watching closely as the federal government makes changes to close perceived tax loopholes. In the most recent federal budget, measures were introduced that focus on a business owner's ability to earn passive income within a corporate structure by limiting the company's capacity to claim the $500,000 small business deduction (SBD).

In general, passive investment income in excess of $50,000 in a taxation year will reduce the SBD by $5 for every $1 of passive income earned, meaning that the SBD will be fully eliminated once passive income earned reaches $150,000. For purposes of the new rules, passive investment income, now termed Adjusted Aggregate Investment Income (AAII), includes amounts such as net taxable capital gains, interest income, rental income and portfolio dividends.

As a business owner, here are some strategies that may be helpful in deciding how to allocate assets in your corporation, including ideas that may be useful in managing the impact of these changes:

- **Retirement Plans** — Establishing an Individual Pension Plan (IPP) or Retirement Compensation Arrangement (RCA) may be a prudent use of corporate funds to plan for retirement. When conditions for each type of plan are met, income earned in such plans will not impact AAII.
- **Exempt Permanent Life Insurance** — An exempt permanent life insurance policy may be a way to use the assets of a corporation to earn a level of tax-sheltered income which can eventually be payable to beneficiaries. Funds deposited into the policy may have the potential to grow, while providing flexibility; funds may be accessed by borrowing against the policy's cash value, keeping in mind that there may be tax consequences depending on the type and size of the loan.
- **Portfolio Changes** — The types of investments held within a company's portfolio may impact the AAII. Investments that pay interest or dividends will generate AAII each year, whereas investments in equities could be held for the long term to defer capital gains and would only impact AAII when the security is disposed of (with only 50 percent of the gain included in AAII). Investments that make return of capital distributions would not impact AAII when the payments are received; however, be aware that a return of capital distribution reduces the cost basis of the asset, thereby increasing the amount of the capital gain that is included in AAII when the asset is eventually sold.

- **Timing** — If the corporation has significant unrealized gains, planning the timing of the realization of the gains may be helpful. Where other types of passive income earned in the year within the corporation are below the $50,000 threshold, realizing capital gains over multiple years may help to smooth the income impact on AAII. In other scenarios, realizing gains in a single year may lead to elimination of the SBD in a particular tax year, but doing so may help to preserve the SBD for subsequent taxation years.
- **Other Tax Considerations** — Extracting investments from the company may trigger corporate tax on unrealized gains. Personal income tax will be applicable if the payment is in the form of dividends or salary. However, where the corporation has a balance in its capital dividend account, funds could be extracted in a tax-efficient way by declaring the payment a tax-free capital dividend. A repayment of a loan made by a shareholder to their corporation can also be made on a tax-free basis.

Navigating the new passive income rules may be challenging. Each of the strategies outlined above come with specific potential benefits and costs. A qualified tax advisor can assess the tax impact and suggest the best solution for your particular situation.

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