

FROM THE WEALTH STRATEGY GROUP

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In these recent months, many of us have experienced flickers of unexpected brightness, including new insights into who we are, what we value, and our own personal adaptability.

FAMILY MATTERS:

Contemplating Change, Moving Forward

Several months into the pandemic, many of us have become all too accustomed to witnessing the rising toll of sickness, unemployment, isolation and even death. This has been, and remains, a time of uncertainty and anguish for individuals and families affected directly and indirectly by the COVID-19 virus. Yet in these recent months, many of us have also experienced flickers of unexpected brightness, including new insights into who we are, what we value, and our own personal adaptability when forced to make new plans and change well-established patterns..

Now, as we hope for a sustainable path toward recovery, many of us are starting to contemplate in what ways, if any, we can apply what we have experienced to develop new plans for the future.

In discussions with our clients, members of our Wealth Strategy Group have encouraged individuals, couples and families to focus on five key areas of contemplation: family, acts of charity, health, time and assistance. We learned from their questions and comments and feel fortunate to be in a position to provide the professional guidance needed and share our insights with you.

FAMILY

The reality of a mandated quarantine has literally and figuratively brought people together. For many, the people coming together were family members; parents, children, brothers and sisters, sheltering in place. For those living apart from family, isolation and social-distancing brought about innovative ways to bring about togetherness (no time like the present to learn to Facetime and Zoom).

The adage “*distance makes the heart grow fonder*” may ring true for all of us placing a higher value on family connection and physical proximity to family. In fact, the definition of family may have changed, enveloping a broader network of helpful distant relatives, friends, colleagues or anyone who took time to help and would do it again without question.

No matter your circumstance, contemplation about family can bring shifts in your thinking around where family sits in your priorities and plans for your future.

Question	Planning consideration
Is geographical proximity to family more important to you than you realized previously?	Tax impacts—state of residency
Are there people not currently in your estate plan you’d like to include?	Estate Plan conversations
Do you have new insights into whom you would trust with sensitive matters—and whether that person would be available?	Trustee designations
Have you become aware of challenges in your family that you would like to support with financial assistance?	Trust amendments

ACTS OF CHARITY

At its core, the COVID-19 pandemic is a health crisis. However, it has triggered so much more in terms of financial, emotional and physical need that, at times, its implications are hard to comprehend. The personal experience of being part of a global crisis has shifted many individuals view of the world we now live in. We have all borne witness to selfless acts of first responders, healthcare providers, caregivers and essential service providers—powerful testaments to true sacrifice.

We are far from knowing what services, venues and programs that we once took for granted will survive in the post-pandemic world, yet we remain optimistic. The simple acts of patronizing local businesses, donating the costs of tickets for cancelled performances and assisting the unemployed find work are now examples of simple acts of charity. How has your charitable intent shifted?

Question	Planning consideration
Are there organizations or causes you want to support in your estate plan?	Charitable donation tax planning
Are you ready to make the shift from "charitable giving" to "philanthropy" (the difference being a clear strategy) in one or more areas?	Family mission statement
Are there family members, friends, small businesses you want to help financially?	Non-tax related causes and how best to optimize through personal financial planning.

HEALTH

The random nature, unknowns and speculation associated with the health threat of COVID-19 have provided a reality check for us all. Access to healthcare at a critical time was a real issue for all people as nations worked together to "flatten the curve." Coming out of the pandemic, the lessons we learned about who is most vulnerable, health-wise, and that no one nation or system is infallible provide a sobering view of our own and our loved-ones' mortality and livelihood. What changes around your health and personal lifestyle may be up for consideration?

Question	Planning consideration
Do you need to update any "do not resuscitate" provisions that would keep you from receiving ventilator support, if needed for COVID-19 treatment?	Living will
Has anything changed about whom you'd trust to make health decisions in the event of your incapacitation?	Health agent designations
Are you looking to change your daily routine -- for example, to get more sleep, eliminate a long commute by working from home or getting serious about your work/life balance?	Impacts of taking a lower-paying job, now. Or, financing more permanent work-at-home space.
Is proximity to quality healthcare an issue?	Financing a change in residence; evaluating tax consequences of new domicile

TIME

Imagine had someone told you, amid the optimism of fall of 2019, that by the spring of 2020 nearly all financial markets would have fallen to dramatically lower levels, many millions would be unemployed, schools would be closed, businesses and restaurants would be shuttered and that quarantines and social-distancing (what's that?!!) would be the norm. What would have been your response?

No one can predict the future. But we can prepare for the future. As wealth advisors, we encourage individuals to hope for the best but plan for the worst. A near-worst-case scenario has happened. If the experience has prompted you to reevaluate how you spend and value your time, are there changes you want to make before proceeding forward?

Question	Planning consideration
Were there panic-induced investment decisions made (or not made) during the throes of the pandemic that should be revisited?	Discussion with your Advisor including cash flow modeling and/or reallocation
Is early retirement either more or less important to you?	Cash flow modeling, including health insurance expense
Are you wondering whether your goal of early retirement is still possible?	Modeling and budgeting
Are there savers/investors in your life – with longer time horizons -- for whom investing now could potentially benefit from a recovery in the markets?	Engage adult children or other younger individuals with investable assets in a discussion with your advisor

ASSISTANCE

You are not alone. While your circumstances and experiences caused by the pandemic are unique to you, the road back to recovery will take a shared compassion and common understanding of the tools, techniques and strategies that can help chart your new course or reestablish a foothold in progressing toward your wealth goals. There are legal, accounting and wealth advisory professionals around you with knowledge of new legislation, relief measures and common ground from which to build your go-forward strategy. Use them!

Question	Planning consideration
Is my will and other related estate plan documents aligned with my current viewpoint?	Schedule a conversation with your legal and wealth advisory professionals. If possible, make it a group discussion.
Are retirement distributions, without penalty, something I should be taking advantage of while the window of opportunity exists?	Cash flow modeling, including health insurance expense
Given low basis, should I be considering a conversion of my traditional IRA to a Roth?	Contact your wealth advisor to discuss and/or model a conversion scenario.

IN CONCLUSION

As we collectively progress toward a different and less unsettled future, there's a lot to think about. Take time to consider the many facets of your life that have been affected adversely as well as those that may have benefited from stepping back from established patterns. And, if you feel a change is needed, don't hesitate to reach out to discuss with your wealth advisor or any member of your wealth management team.

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