

Money Matters!

Planning...for your future...since 1987



Tennyson C. Shifley, CLU®, ChFC®, CAP®
Financial Advisor
Shifley and Associates
801 Staghorn Lane
Waxhaw, NC 28173-7563
Phone: (704) 846-8871
tenny@shifleyassociates.com
shifleyassociates.com



Happy New Year! We continue to pray for peace, love, and hope for the world in this new year. May 2024 bring you a world of opportunities!

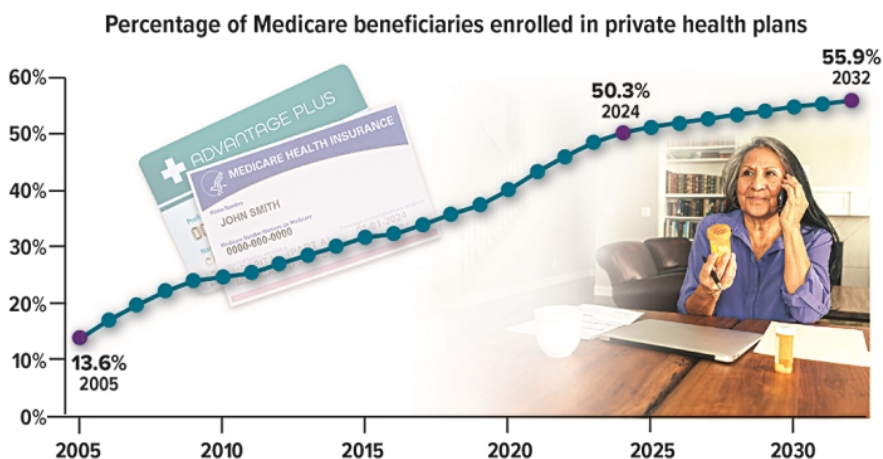
We've enclosed a 2024 Key Numbers Summary with this newsletter. This summary, along with a more comprehensive 2024 Key Numbers document, can be found on our website, along with timely financial articles, useful calculators, and informative videos. Check it out!

We are grateful for your continued referrals, introductions, and your confidence! If any of your family or friends have financial concerns or questions, or have recently had a death in the family, we would be happy to talk with them. While we can't guarantee that we will accept everyone as clients, we will gladly spend a few minutes on the phone with them to try to help.

Tenny, Glen, Lois, and Andrew

Rising Enrollment in Medicare Advantage Plans

The percentage of Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in private Medicare Advantage (MA) plans has risen steadily since 2005, when higher payments from Medicare to private health insurers enabled them to offer more attractive plans to consumers. About half of Medicare beneficiaries are projected to be enrolled in private plans in 2024, with growth slowing in succeeding years. MA plans can help reduce out-of-pocket expenses and might cover services not covered by Medicare, but they often have limited networks and may require approval to cover certain medications and services.



Sources: 2023 Medicare Trustees Report (data projected for 2023 to 2032); 2013 Medicare Trustees Report

Do You Have These Key Estate Planning Documents?

Estate planning is the process of managing and preserving your assets while you are alive, and conserving and controlling their distribution after your death. There are four key estate planning documents almost everyone should have regardless of age, health, or wealth. They are: a durable power of attorney, advance medical directive(s), a will, and a letter of instruction.

Durable power of attorney

Incapacity can happen to anyone at any time, but your risk generally increases as you grow older. Consider what would happen if, for example, you were unable to make decisions or conduct your own affairs. Failing to plan may mean a court would have to appoint a guardian, and the guardian might make decisions that would be different from what you would have wanted.

A durable power of attorney (DPOA) enables you to authorize a family member or other trusted individual to make financial decisions or transact business on your behalf, even if you become incapacitated. The designated individual can do things like pay everyday expenses, collect benefits, watch over your investments, and file taxes.

There are two types of DPOAs: (1) an *immediate* DPOA, which is effective at once (this may be appropriate, for example, if you face a serious operation or illness), and (2) a *springing* DPOA, which is not effective unless you become incapacitated.

Advance medical directive(s)

An advance medical directive lets others know what forms of medical treatment you prefer and enables you to designate someone to make medical decisions for you in the event you can't express your own wishes. If you don't have an advance medical directive, health-care providers could use unwanted treatments and procedures to prolong your life at any cost.

There are three types of advance medical directives. Each state allows only a certain type (or types). You may find that one, two, or all three types are necessary to carry out all of your wishes for medical treatment.

- A living will is a document that specifies the types of medical treatment you would want, or not want, in a particular situation. In most states, a living will takes effect only under certain circumstances, such as a terminal illness or injury. Generally, one can be used solely to decline medical treatment that "serves only to postpone the moment of death."
- A health-care proxy lets one or more family members or other trusted individuals make medical decisions for you. You decide how much power your representative will or won't have.
- A do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order is a legal form, signed by both you and your doctor, that gives

health-care professionals permission to carry out your wishes.

Will

A will is quite often the cornerstone of an estate plan. It is a formal, legal document that directs how your property is to be distributed when you die. Your will should generally be written, signed by you, and witnessed. If you don't leave a will, disbursements will be made according to state law, which might not be what you would want.

There are a couple of other important purposes for a will. It allows you to name an executor to carry out your wishes, as specified in the will, and a guardian for your minor children.

Most wills have to be filed with the probate court. The executor collects assets, pays debts and taxes owed, and distributes any remaining property to the rightful heirs. The rules vary from state to state, but in some states smaller estates are exempt from probate or qualify for an expedited process.

Letter of instruction

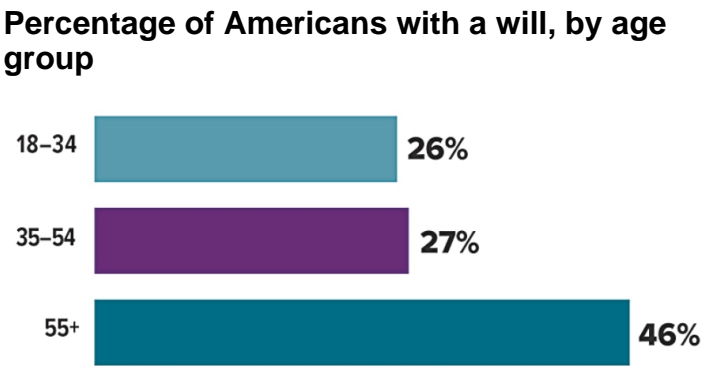
A letter of instruction is an informal, nonlegal document that generally accompanies a will and is used to express your personal thoughts and directions regarding what is in the will (or about other things, such as your burial wishes or where to locate other documents). This can be the most helpful document you leave for your family members and your executor.

Unlike your will, a letter of instruction remains private. Therefore, it is an opportunity to say the things you would rather not make public.

A letter of instruction is not a substitute for a will. Any directions you include in the letter are only suggestions and are not binding. The people to whom you address the letter may follow or disregard any instructions.

Take steps now

Life is unpredictable. So take steps now, while you can, to have the proper documents in place to ensure that your wishes are carried out.



Source: Caring.com, 2023

Can Your Personality Influence Your Portfolio? New Research Points to Yes

Academic researchers have been exploring how investors' personalities might affect their financial decisions and wealth outcomes.

In one study, three finance professors (Dr. Zhengyang Jiang from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, Cameron Peng from the London School of Economics, and Hongjun Yan from DePaul University's Driehaus College of Business) surveyed more than 3,000 members of the American Association of Individual Investors — a relatively sophisticated group of market participants. These researchers examined correlations between five personality traits and the investors' market expectations and portfolio allocations.¹

Another study (by Mark Fenton-O'Creevy from The Open University Business School and Adrian Furnham from the BI Norwegian School of Management) involved more than 3,000 U.K. participants. These authors looked for correlations between the same five personality traits and three measures of wealth: property, savings and investments, and physical items.²

The Big Five

Both studies were designed around the "Big Five" model of personality, which has long been used by psychologists to measure people's personalities and identify their dominant tendencies, based on five broad traits. These traits are openness to experience (curious and creative), conscientiousness (organized and responsible), extraversion (sociable and action-oriented), agreeableness (cooperative and empathetic), and neuroticism (emotionally unstable and worry-prone).

Each participant was rated on a spectrum for each trait according to how they answered survey questions, the results of which typically capture how individuals differ from one another in terms of their preferences, feelings, and behaviors.

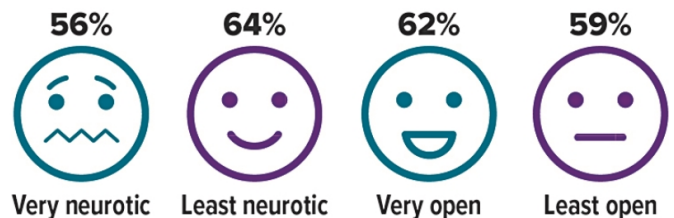
Meaningful results

The first study pinpointed two traits that were closely correlated with investors' market perceptions and investment behavior: openness and neuroticism. Investors who scored high for openness entertained the possibility of extreme market swings, but were more willing to bear the risk, and they allocated a larger share of their investment portfolios to stocks. Highly neurotic personalities were pessimistic about market performance, worried more about a potential crash, and had a smaller portion of their assets invested in stocks. Investors who scored higher on neuroticism and extraversion were more likely to buy certain investments when they became popular with people around them — which could easily take them down the wrong road.³

The second study found that conscientiousness was positively correlated with all three measures of wealth, even more so than education level, often because this personality type brings a diligent approach to saving and investing. Unfortunately, the traits of agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism were associated with lower lifetime wealth accumulation. Highly agreeable people may devote more of their money to helping others and might also be more vulnerable to financial scams, whereas extroverts could be more impulsive spenders.⁴

Both studies found common ground in one respect: highly neurotic investors tend to be risk-averse, and their volatility fears may cause them to have overly conservative portfolios.

Share of portfolio invested in stocks, by personality type



Source: *The Wall Street Journal*, May 19, 2023

Implications for investors

You might take some time to consider how your personality impacts the many financial decisions that you make in life. Becoming more self-aware may help you tap into your strengths and counter weaknesses that could prevent you from reaching your goals.

Even the most experienced investors can fall into psychological traps, but having a long-term perspective and a thoughtfully crafted investing strategy may help you avoid costly, emotion-driven mistakes. Also, discussing your concerns with an objective financial professional might help you deal with tendencies that could potentially cloud your judgment.

All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful. Although there is no assurance that working with a financial professional will improve investment results, a financial professional can provide education, identify appropriate strategies, and help you consider options that could have a substantial effect on your long-term financial prospects.

1, 3) "Personality Differences and Investment Decision-Making," National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2023

2, 4) "Personality and Wealth," *Financial Planning Review*, 2023

Don't Forget About Credit When Planning for Retirement

As you plan for retirement, you might not give credit a second thought, especially if your plan includes paying off your mortgage and other debts, and relying more on cash than credit. But retirement could last many years, and your need for credit doesn't necessarily disappear on your last day of work. At some point you may want to buy a second home, move to a retirement community, take out a home equity loan, or buy a vehicle; it's also possible you will face an unexpected expense. Keeping your credit healthy may help you qualify for a lower interest rate or better terms on a loan or credit card, or if a credit check is involved, even help you land a part-time job or obtain a better deal on auto insurance.

When it comes to getting credit, it's not growing older that matters — lenders can't deny a credit application based solely on age. The factors that affect your ability to get credit are the same as for younger people and include your debt-to-income ratio (DTI) and your credit score.

Lenders use your DTI to measure your ability to repay money you borrow. This ratio is calculated by totaling your monthly debt payments then dividing that figure by your gross monthly income. For example, if your retirement income totals \$6,000 and your debt payments total \$2,000, your DTI is 33%. What's considered a good DTI will vary, depending on lender requirements and loan type, but lenders generally look for a DTI of 43% or less.¹

If there's a reasonable chance you'll be applying for credit after you retire, consider what your DTI might be as you evaluate your retirement income needs or decide which debts to pay off. And think carefully about taking on new debt obligations, including co-signing a loan for a family member.

Another major factor lenders consider is your credit score. Retirement doesn't automatically affect your score, because credit reports only reflect your history of borrowing and repaying money, not your employment status or your salary. The three things that count the most toward your score are your payment history, the amount you owe on credit cards (including the percentage of available credit you're using), and the length of your credit history.² So continue to make credit card or loan payments on time (consider setting up autopay or reminders), aim to use no more than 10% to 30% of your credit limits, and consider the possible negative impact of closing accounts that you've had for years but no longer use.

Another way to help keep your credit healthy throughout retirement is to check your credit report regularly to spot errors or fraudulent transactions. You can order free copies of your credit report from Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion at the official site [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com).

1–2) Experian, 2023

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