



## McCarthy & Cox

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**Hope you can join us for the 5th Annual McCarthy & Cox Cares Charity Golf Outing on Thursday, June 22 at Darby Creek. This annual fundraiser jointly supports McCarthy & Cox Cares and The Elizaveta Fund.**

**Dad - You didn't tell me how to live, you lived and let me watch you do it! Happy Father's Day!**

**Ju ne's question: Your \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the tools used by lenders to evaluate your creditworthiness.**

**May's question: Rolling a LUMP SUM into a traditional IRA postpones taxes until withdrawals are taken later in retirement.**

Remember we are grateful for the opportunity to serve you and the greatest compliment you can pay us is introducing us to others nearing retirement.

### Thank You -

Tom, Jim, Ryan & Mark

### The Good Life - Issue 101 - June 2017

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Expect the Unexpected: What to Do If You Become Disabled

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# The Good Life

## Plan Smart, Live Well

### Four Numbers You Need to Know Now



When it comes to your finances, you might easily overlook some of the numbers that really count. Here are four to pay attention to now that might really matter in the future.

#### 1. Retirement plan contribution rate

What percentage of your salary are you contributing to a retirement plan? Making automatic contributions through an employer-sponsored plan such as a 401(k) or 403(b) plan is an easy way to save for retirement, but this out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach may result in a disparity between what you need to save and what you actually are saving for retirement. Checking your contribution rate and increasing it periodically can help you stay on track toward your retirement savings goal.

Some employer retirement plans let you sign up for automatic contribution rate increases each year, which is a simple way to bump up the percentage you're saving over time. In addition, try to boost your contributions when you receive a pay raise. Consider contributing at least enough to receive the full company match (if any) that your employer offers.

#### 2. Credit score

When you apply for credit, such as a mortgage, a car loan, or a credit card, your credit score is one of the tools used by lenders to evaluate your creditworthiness. Your score will likely factor into the approval decision and affect the terms and the interest rate you'll pay.

The most common credit score that creditors consider is a FICO® Score, a three-digit number that ranges from 300 to 850. This score is based on a mathematical formula that uses information contained in your credit report. In general, the higher your score, the lower the credit risk you pose.

Each of the three major credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) calculates FICO® scores using different formulas, so you may want to check your scores from all three (fees apply). It's also a good idea to get a copy of your credit report at

least annually to check the accuracy of the information upon which your credit score is based. You're entitled to one free copy of your credit report every 12 months from each of the three credit reporting agencies. You can get your copy by visiting [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com).

#### 3. Debt-to-income ratio

Your debt-to-income ratio (DTI) is another number that lenders may use when deciding whether to offer you credit. A DTI that is too high might mean that you are overextended. Your DTI is calculated by adding up your major monthly expenses and dividing that figure by your gross monthly income. The result is expressed as a percentage. For example, if your monthly expenses total \$2,200 and your gross monthly income is \$6,800, your DTI is 32%.

Lenders decide what DTIs are acceptable, based on the type of credit. For example, mortgage lenders generally require a ratio of 36% or less for conventional mortgages and 43% or less for FHA mortgages when considering overall expenses.

Once you know your DTI, you can take steps to reduce it if necessary. For example, you may be able to pay off a low-balance loan to remove it from the calculation. You may also want to avoid taking on new debt that might negatively affect your DTI. Check with your lender if you have any questions about acceptable DTIs or what expenses are included in the calculation.

#### 4. Net worth

One of the key big-picture numbers you should know is your net worth, a snapshot of where you stand financially. To calculate your net worth, add up your assets (what you own) and subtract your liabilities (what you owe). Once you know your net worth, you can use it as a baseline to measure financial progress.

Ideally, your net worth will grow over time as you save more and pay down debt, at least until retirement. If your net worth is stagnant or even declining, then it might be time to make some adjustments to target your financial goals, such as trimming expenses or rethinking your investment strategy.



**A large majority of caregivers provide care for a relative (85%), with 49% caring for a parent or parent-in-law.**

**Source: Caregiving in the U.S. 2015, National Alliance for Caregiving**

## What It Means to Be a Financial Caregiver for Your Parents

If you are the adult child of aging parents, you may find yourself in the position of someday having to assist them with handling their finances. Whether that time is in the near future or sometime further down the road, there are some steps you can take now to make the process a bit easier.

### Mom and Dad, can we talk?

Your first step should be to get a handle on your parents' finances so you fully understand their current financial situation. The best time to do so is when your parents are relatively healthy and active. Otherwise, you may find yourself making critical decisions on their behalf in the midst of a crisis.

You can start by asking them some basic questions:

- What financial institutions hold their assets (e.g., bank, brokerage, and retirement accounts)?
- Do they work with any financial, legal, or tax advisors? If so, how often do they meet with them?
- Do they need help paying monthly bills or assistance reviewing items like credit-card statements, medical receipts, or property tax bills?

### Make sure your parents have the necessary legal documents

In order to help your parents manage their finances in the future, you'll need the legal authority to do so. This requires a durable power of attorney, which is a legal document that allows a named individual (such as an adult child) to manage all aspects of a person's financial life if he or she becomes disabled or incompetent. A durable power of attorney will allow you to handle day-to-day finances for your parents, such as signing checks, paying bills, and making financial decisions for them.

In addition to a durable power of attorney, you'll want to make sure that your parents have an advance health-care directive, also known as a health-care power of attorney or health-care proxy. An advance health-care directive will allow you to make medical decisions according to their wishes (e.g., life-support measures and who will communicate with health-care professionals on their behalf).

You'll also want to find out if your parents have a will. If so, find out where it's located and who is named as personal representative or executor. If the will was drafted a long time ago, your parents may want to review it to make sure their current wishes are represented. You should also ask if they made any dispositions or

gifts of specific personal property (e.g., a family heirloom to be given to a specific individual).

### Prepare a personal data record

Once you've opened the lines of communication, your next step is to prepare a personal data record that lists information you might need in the event that your parents become incapacitated or die. Here's some information that should be included:

- **Financial information:** Bank, brokerage, and retirement accounts (including account numbers and online user names and passwords, if applicable); real estate holdings
- **Legal information:** Wills, durable powers of attorney, advance health-care directives
- **Medical information:** Health-care providers, medication, medical history
- **Insurance information:** Policy numbers, company names
- **Advisor information:** Names and phone numbers of any professional service providers
- **Location of other important records:** Social Security cards, home and vehicle records, outstanding loan documents, past tax returns
- **Funeral and burial plans:** Prepayment information, final wishes

If your parents keep some or all of these items in a safe-deposit box or home safe, make sure you can gain access. It's also a good idea to make copies of all the documents you've gathered and keep them in a safe place. This is especially important if you live far away, because you'll want the information readily available in the event of an emergency.

### Don't be afraid to get support and ask for advice

If you're feeling overwhelmed with the task of handling your parents' finances, don't be afraid to seek out support and advice. A variety of local and national organizations are designed to assist caregivers. If your parents' needs are significant enough, you may want to consider hiring a geriatric care manager who can help you oversee your parents' care and direct you to the right community resources. Finally, consider discussing the specifics of your situation with a professional, such as an estate planning attorney, accountant, and/or financial advisor.

## Expect the Unexpected: What to Do If You Become Disabled



**About 20% of Americans live with a disability, and one in four of today's 20-year-olds will become disabled before retiring.**

**Source: SSA, Disability Facts, 2017**

**The average age of SSDI recipients in 2015 was 54.**

**Source: Fast Facts and Figures About Social Security, 2016**

In a recent survey, 46% of retirees said they retired earlier than planned, and not necessarily because they chose to do so. In fact, many said they had to leave the workforce early because of health issues or a disability.<sup>1</sup>

Although you may be healthy and financially stable now, an unexpected diagnosis or injury could significantly derail your life plans. Would you know what to do, financially speaking, if you suddenly became disabled? Now may be a good time to familiarize yourself with the following information, before an emergency arises.

### Understand any employer-sponsored benefits you may have

Disability insurance pays a benefit that replaces a percentage of your pay for a designated period of time. Through your employer, you may have access to both short- and long-term disability insurance. If your employer offers disability insurance, be sure to fully understand how the plan works. Review your plan's Summary Plan Description carefully to determine how to apply for benefits should you need them, and what you will need to provide for proof of disability.

Short-term disability protection typically covers a period of up to six months, while long-term disability coverage generally lasts for the length of the disability or until retirement. Your plan may offer basic coverage paid by your employer and a possible "buy-up" option that allows you to purchase additional coverage.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 40% of private industry workers have access to short-term disability insurance through their employers, while 33% have access to long-term coverage. For both types of plans, the median replacement amount is about 60% of pay, with most subject to maximum limits.<sup>2</sup>

### Consider a supplemental safety net

If you do not have access to disability insurance through your employer, it might be wise to investigate other options. It may be possible to purchase both short- and long-term group disability policies through membership in a professional organization or association. Individual policies are also available from private insurers.

You can purchase policies that cover you for life, until age 65, or for shorter periods such as two or five years. An individual policy will remain in force as long as you pay the premiums. Because many disabilities do not result in a complete inability to work, some policies offer a rider that will pay you partial benefits if you are able to work part-time.

Most insurance policies have a waiting period (known as the "elimination period") before you can begin receiving benefits. For private insurance policies, this period can be anywhere from 30 to 365 days. Group policies (particularly through your employer) typically have shorter waiting periods than private policies. Disability insurance premiums paid with after-tax dollars will generally result in tax-free disability benefits. On the other hand, if your premiums are paid with pre-tax dollars, typically through your employer, your benefit payments may be taxable.

### Review the Social Security disability process

The Social Security Administration (SSA) pays disability benefits through two programs: the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSDI pays benefits to people who cannot work due to a disability that is expected to last at least one year or result in death, and it's only intended to help such individuals make ends meet. Consider that the average monthly benefit in January 2017 was just \$1,171.

In order to receive SSDI, you must meet strict criteria for your disability. You must also meet requirements for how recently and how long you have worked. Meeting the medical criteria is difficult; in fact, according to the National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives (NOSSCR), about two-thirds of initial SSDI applications are denied on their first submission. Denials can be appealed within 60 days of receipt of the notice.<sup>3</sup>

The application process can take up to five months, so it is advisable to apply for SSDI as soon as you become disabled. If your application is approved, benefits begin in the month following the six-month anniversary of your date of disability (as recorded by the SSA in your approval letter). Eligible family members may also be able to collect additional payments of up to 50% of your benefit amount.

SSI is a separate program, based on income needs of the aged, blind, or disabled. You can apply to both SSI and SSDI at the same time.

For more information, visit the Social Security Disability Benefits website at [ssa.gov](http://ssa.gov), where you will also find a link to information on the SSI program.

<sup>1</sup> [2016 Retirement Confidence Survey](#), Employee Benefit Research Institute

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, [National Compensation Survey](#), 2016

<sup>3</sup> [NOSSCR](#) web site, accessed March 2017



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## What is a funeral trust?

A funeral trust is an arrangement entered into with a provider of funeral or burial services. Prepaying funeral expenses may allow you to "lock in" costs for future funeral or burial services at an agreed-upon price. The funeral home sometimes serves as trustee (manager of trust assets), and you usually fund the trust with cash, bonds, or life insurance. A revocable funeral trust can be changed and revoked by you at any time. An irrevocable trust can't be changed or revoked, and you generally can't get your money out except to pay for funeral services.

Irrevocable funeral trusts may also help you qualify for long-term care benefits through Medicaid. For example, these trusts may be funded with assets that would otherwise be countable resources for Medicaid (i.e., included in determining Medicaid eligibility). They are often sold through insurance companies, in which case they are typically funded with life insurance. And you can fund the funeral trust right before entering the nursing home — there's no "look-back" period for these transfers, unlike the case with certain other transfers that can

cause a delay in the start of Medicaid benefits.

Another advantage of funding your trust with life insurance is that the trust will have no taxable income to report, because life insurance cash values grow tax deferred. Otherwise, income from trust assets may be taxed to you as the grantor of the trust, unless the trustee elects to treat the trust as a qualified funeral trust by filing Form 1041-QFT with the IRS, in which case trust income is taxed to the trust.

But what happens if you want to change funeral homes, or the facility you selected goes out of business? Does your irrevocable trust allow you to change beneficiaries (e.g., funeral homes)? Are trust funds protected from creditors of the funeral home? State laws regulating prepaid funeral trusts often require funeral homes to keep trust assets separate from their own business assets, keeping them safe from funeral home creditors. And most irrevocable trusts are transferable to another funeral home should the initial business fail or you change funeral homes.

There are expenses associated with the creation of a trust and the purchase of life insurance, and benefits are not guaranteed.



## What happens to my property if I die without a will?

If you die without a will, your property will generally pass according to state law (under the rules for intestate succession). When this happens, the state essentially makes a will for you. State laws specify how your property will pass, typically in certain proportions to various persons related to you. The specifics, however, vary from state to state.

Most state laws favor spouses and children first. For example, a typical state law might specify that your property pass one-half or one-third to your surviving spouse, with the remainder passing equally to all your children. If you don't have children, in many states your spouse might inherit all of your property; in other states, your spouse might have to share the property with your brothers and sisters or parents.

But not all property is transferred by will or intestate succession. Regardless of whether you have a will, some property passes automatically to a joint owner or to a designated beneficiary. For example, you can transfer property such as IRAs, retirement plan benefits,

and life insurance by naming a beneficiary.

Property that you own jointly with right of survivorship will pass automatically to the surviving owners at your death. Property held in trust will pass to your beneficiaries according to the terms you set out in the trust.

Only property that is not transferred by beneficiary designation, joint ownership, will, or trust passes according to intestate succession. You should generally use beneficiary designations, joint ownership, wills, and trusts to control the disposition of your property so that you, rather than the state, determine who receives the benefit of your property.

Even if it seems that all your property will be transferred by beneficiary designation, joint ownership, or trust, you should still generally have a will. You can designate in the will who will receive any property that slips through the cracks.

And, of course, you can do other things in a will as well, such as name the executor of your estate to carry out your wishes as specified in the will, or name a guardian for your minor children.

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