

**JAN
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2025**



HAPPY 2025 TO ALL!

A Message From Your SFG Team

Dear Clients and Friends,

Happy New Year! As we look back on the past year, we're filled with anticipation for the opportunities that 2025 will bring. The start of a new year is a perfect time to set fresh resolutions and plans for the months ahead.

For over 4,000 years, people have celebrated the new year by making promises to improve themselves or their behavior.¹ And it's no surprise why: While sticking to New Year's resolutions can be challenging, research shows that making them can increase your chances of success by more than tenfold.² Whatever goals you set for the year, remember that progress is made one step at a time. A small setback doesn't mean it's the end—every step forward brings you closer to your goals.

As we say farewell to the previous year, we're thinking of you and wishing you and your loved ones a year filled with peace, good health, and happiness. Thank you for the trust and confidence you've placed in us. We are truly grateful for the privilege of serving you, now and in the years ahead.

While financial planning is at the core of what we do, what we're truly known for is guiding you to live out retirement on your terms. If you have any questions or need support to stay on track with your financial goals, we're here for you. Feel free to reach out anytime. Together, let's make 2025 a fantastic year!

Sincerely,
Bryan, Lucy, and team

[1]<http://www.history.com/news/thehistory-of-new-years-resolutions>
[2]<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1>



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THAT TIME OF YEAR

New Year, New Estate Plan: How to Refresh Your Strategy for 2025

A new year presents the opportunity to refresh and recalibrate various aspects of our lives. One area to revisit is your estate plan.

Now is the perfect time to help ensure your estate plan is aligned with any changes in your financial landscape, family dynamics or legal requirements. Here's how to effectively update your estate planning strategy.

Assess Financial Changes – First, closely examine your current financial situation. This involves aligning your estate plan with financial goals for 2025.

Create an inventory of your assets and liabilities to get a picture of your net worth. Evaluate the performance of your investments and consider whether your current strategies are still effective or need adjustment. Review beneficiary designations on all accounts to ensure they reflect your intentions.

Address outstanding debts or liabilities that could impact your estate. Consider strategies for paying down significant debts, as these can affect the distribution of your assets.

Evaluate Family Dynamics – Family circumstances can shift over time, making it crucial to reassess your estate plan in light of any changes. Whether it's a new marriage, divorce, birth or death, each event can have implications on asset distribution and guardianship arrangements.

Review existing trusts and consider adjustments to accommodate these changes.

Open communication with family is vital. Discuss your estate

plans to ensure clarity about their roles and expectations. This dialogue can prevent misunderstandings and ensure that your wishes are respected.

Consider Legal Updates – Staying informed about changing legal standards and tax laws is critical to maintaining an effective estate plan.

Review all existing documents, such as wills, trusts and powers of attorney. Ensure that these documents comply with current laws and accurately reflect your wishes. Pay attention to changes in estate tax laws, as these can significantly impact your planning strategies.

Don't overlook health care directives and living wills. Keep documents up to date to ensure that your health care preferences are honored.

Refresh Your Plan – Establish a routine to check and update your estate plan periodically to reflect any life changes or new financial objectives.

A robust estate plan starts with setting clear, achievable objectives. Consider both short-term and long-term goals. Consulting with financial advisors and estate planning attorneys can provide insights tailored to your situation.

The Bottom Line – Refreshing your estate plan at the beginning of the year allows you to be proactive in securing your financial future and helping ensure confidence for yourself and your loved ones.

Neither the firm nor its agents or representatives may give tax or legal advice. Individuals should consult with a qualified professional for guidance before making any purchasing decisions.

5 Easy-to-Care-for Indoor Plants

Indoor plants enhance the beauty of your home and can offer benefits for your health. They improve air quality, boost your mood and create a soothing environment. Start with these plants and enjoy the wonders of nature indoors without the stress of demanding upkeep.

1. Snake Plant

The Snake Plant is known for its tall, sturdy leaves with diverse patterns. It's a great air purifier and requires minimal sunlight. Allow the soil to completely dry out between waterings.

2. Pothos

Pothos, with its heart-shaped leaves and long vines, is perfect for those who may forget to water occasionally. It can adapt to various lighting conditions but prefers low to medium indirect light. Water when the top inch of soil is dry.

3. ZZ Plant

The ZZ Plant has glossy, dark green leaves and is highly drought-tolerant, making it ideal for low to



moderate indirect light. Water every 2-3 weeks and let the soil fully dry out between waterings.

4. Spider Plant

Spider Plants have arching green leaves that hang down, making them visually appealing. They are also easy to propagate, making it easy to expand your indoor garden. They prefer bright, indirect light but can tolerate low light. When watering, keep the soil slightly wet and avoid overwatering.

5. Peace Lily

The Peace Lily is elegant with its dark green leaves and white flowers. It's particularly effective at removing toxins from the air. They usually prefer low to medium indirect light and should avoid direct sunlight. Water weekly and keep the soil consistently wet.



WAYS TO

Set S.M.A.R.T. Financial Goals

With the start of the new year, it's a great time to reassess your finances and set goals. However, many people find it challenging to stick to their goals. Without a clear roadmap, it's easy to lose motivation. S.M.A.R.T. goals provide structure and clarity, making it easier to stay inspired and on track.

S.M.A.R.T. Goals Are:

- **Specific:** Goals should be clear and precise, such as reducing monthly expenses by \$500.
- **Measurable:** Quantify your goals with specific numbers, percentages or deadlines to track your progress. A measurable goal might be "save \$500 a month."

- **Achievable:** Set realistic goals that consider your current situation. Realistically assess income sources and expenses.
- **Relevant:** Your goals should align with your objectives and values, like budgeting for health care or travel.
- **Time-bound:** Break your goals into short-term and long-term benchmarks. For instance, "achieve expense reduction within six months."

Use S.M.A.R.T. goals to give yourself a clear plan and help turn your aspirations into achievable plans.



DOLLARS & SENSE

Risky Business: Aligning Risk With Reward

Understanding your risk tolerance is essential in investing, and it's important to reevaluate it regularly. Your comfort level with investment fluctuations may shift as market conditions and personal circumstances change. Periodically checking your risk tolerance helps ensure your portfolio aligns with your current goals and feelings about risk.

Over the past few years, especially in 2023, we've seen some interesting trends in the market. The Morningstar US Market Index jumped an impressive 26.4%¹, and by the fourth quarter of 2024, the S&P 500 returned an average of over 20% YTD². This market rally, largely fueled by technology and growth stocks¹, might have pushed your portfolio into riskier territory than you are comfortable with. During these market booms, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement and ride the wave without checking if the increased risk fits your comfort level. However, it's important to take a step back and reassess your risk exposure.

Determining your risk tolerance involves personal insights and objective measures. Investors typically begin with risk assessment questionnaires that consider age, income stability, investment goals and financial responsibilities. It's important to align your investments with your financial aspirations, whether that's buying a home, funding your grandkids' education or traveling the world in retirement (or all of the above).

Don't overlook the psychological aspect — how you perceive risk and react emotionally to market fluctuations matters greatly. Additionally, practical factors like your investment timeline and income stability can influence your risk tolerance. By considering all these elements together, you'll better understand the level of risk that feels right for you.

To help ensure your portfolio is allocated correctly according to your risk tolerance, start with these actionable steps:

- 1. Assess Your Risk Tolerance:** Take a moment to reflect on how much risk you're comfortable taking. Are you more of a conservative investor, or do you lean toward higher risk for potentially greater rewards?
- 2. Review Your Current Portfolio:** Look at your current investments. Are they aligned with your risk tolerance? A mix of asset classes can help balance out risk.
- 3. Diversify:** If you find that your portfolio is heavily weighted in one area, consider diversifying across different asset classes — like stocks, bonds and real estate. This helps spread risk and can enhance your potential returns.
- 4. Set Clear Goals:** Identify your financial goals. Knowing what you're aiming for can guide your investment choices and help you decide how much risk you should take.
- 5. Regular Check-Ins:** Just like checking your suitcase before a trip, schedule regular reviews of your portfolio. This will help you make necessary adjustments to stay on track with your risk tolerance and goals.

Following these steps helps ensure your investment strategy stays aligned with your financial objectives and risk tolerance.

¹ Tom Lauricella and Lauren Solberg. Morningstar. Jan. 2, 2024. "15 Charts on the Surprise 'Everything Rally' for 2023." <https://www.morningstar.com/markets/15-charts-surprise-everything-rally-2023>. Accessed Oct. 2, 2024.

² Curvo. Sept. 2024. "Historical performance of the S&P 500 index." <https://curvo.eu/backtest/en/market-index/sp-500?currency=eur>. Accessed Nov. 11, 2024.

Chill Out: Ways to Save This Winter!

For many, winter months can be especially expensive. Due to higher heating and energy use, gift-giving, festive events and health care for seasonal illnesses, everyone is looking for effective ways to save money. So, how can you save money during the winter?

In winter, flights and accommodations typically become more affordable due to decreased travel during the colder months. Airlines and hotels often offer enticing discounts and packages to attract customers during this time, leading to better deals for those who choose to travel in the off-season. These deals can make it easier for families and individuals to travel in the winter months rather than the more popular travel periods. Also, consider having friends or family pet-sit to help you avoid the high pet boarding costs, which can add up quickly during extended absences.

To stay warm at home during the colder months, use energy-efficient space heaters and heated blankets. These are designed to heat specific areas of your home, making them an economical choice. Smart thermostats can also help reduce energy expenses by allowing you to program your heating system to lower the temperature while you're asleep or away from the house, ensuring that energy is only used when necessary.

Planning potluck gatherings for holiday meals can also cut expenses. When each guest contributes a dish, it eliminates the need for one person to



provide an entire meal, spreading the cost and effort among everyone. And by rotating hosting duties, everyone can enjoy the event without placing the financial burden on a single individual, making the celebration more inclusive and enjoyable for all.

			2		5			
2		4				5	9	
	3					7		
		5	7			1	4	
	7		9		8		6	
	2	9			1	3		
		7					2	
	5	8				6		1
			1		3			

BRAIN GAMES

Sudoku

Game Rules

Fill in each square with one of the numbers 1 to 9 such that no number repeats in any row, column or 3 by 3 box. Grade is Easy.

FAMILY TIME:

KICK OFF THE NEW YEAR BY BUILDING AN ULTIMATE TIME CAPSULE



Building a time capsule is more than just gathering items; it's about capturing the essence of the present for future reflection. What better way to celebrate the new year than creating a time capsule with your children and grandchildren? Consider making a playlist of everyone's favorite songs to listen to while assembling the capsule or turn the activity into a mini party with snacks and drinks.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO GET STARTED



CHOOSING A CONTAINER

Select a durable, waterproof container to protect the contents. It could be a sturdy plastic box or a metal tin.



DECIDING ON A BURIAL LOCATION

If you bury the capsule, find a safe spot in the garden or backyard. Alternatively, you can store it in a dry and accessible place indoors.



SETTING A FUTURE DATE

Decide when you'll open the capsule. It could be a milestone birthday, a significant anniversary or a future New Year's Eve.

WHAT TO INCLUDE



HANDWRITTEN LETTERS

Have everyone write a note about their hopes and dreams for the future.



PHOTOS

Capture moments from recent family gatherings or everyday life.



ARTWORK

Let the children contribute their latest masterpieces.



SMALL TOYS OR TRINKETS

Include items that hold special significance.



NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

Choose headlines or articles from the day you seal the capsule.



BOOKS

Select a favorite book or a bestseller from the year.



MUSIC PLAYLIST

What were the No. 1 songs from last year? What was everyone's favorite?



BUCKET LIST

Set some goals for the coming year. How many will you check off before you open the capsule?

Building a family time capsule is a creative way to usher in the new year, offering a precious gift to your future selves — and it doesn't have to be a one-time event. Consider making this a lasting family tradition. Remember to keep each capsule to compare how much you all grow and change from year to year!

The Art of Couponing: How to Save Money Like a Pro

In today's economy, shoppers are turning to couponing to stretch their dollars further. With effective techniques, couponing can significantly cut shopping expenses. If you are a couponing novice, here are some tips to start saving.

Where to Find Coupons

Numerous resources are available for finding coupons. Store websites often have printable coupons or digital offers for members. Newspaper inserts are also a reliable source with a variety of store coupons. Prefer digital? Use coupon apps for easy access to deals and cashback. Also, check manufacturer websites for printable coupons or promo codes.

Stack Your Coupons

Imagine buying a desired product at a fraction of the price through coupon stacking. Combine both manufacturer and store coupons on the same item to maximize savings.



Join Store Loyalty Programs

Do you frequently shop at the same store? Join their loyalty program! These programs offer exclusive discounts and promotions for members, rewarding frequent shoppers with redeemable points. Each purchase brings you closer to great deals.

Time Your Purchases With Store Sales

Pro couponers watch flyers and online deals to time coupon use with "buy one, get one free" offers or clearance sales. This is especially effective during holiday sales or seasonal clearances for bigger discounts.

Buy in Bulk

Consider how much you could save by buying essentials in bulk and using coupons to reduce costs. Focus on nonperishables like paper goods, canned items, rice, pasta and household supplies.


BRAIN GAMES

ANSWER KEY:

7	9	1	2	6	5	8	3	4
2	8	4	3	1	7	5	9	6
5	3	6	8	9	4	7	1	2
8	6	5	7	3	2	1	4	9
1	7	3	9	4	8	2	6	5
4	2	9	6	5	1	3	8	7
9	1	7	5	8	6	4	2	3
3	5	8	4	2	9	6	7	1
6	4	2	1	7	3	9	5	8



RECIPE HOMEMADE HOT APPLE CIDER

cut here 

This hot apple cider is seasoned with cinnamon sticks, cloves, allspice berries, orange and lemon for a cozy drink. Start with only six strips each of the orange and lemon peel, and adjust to taste.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 cups apple cider
- ¼ cup real maple syrup
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 6 whole cloves
- 6 whole allspice berries
- 1 orange peel, cut into strips
- 1 lemon peel, cut into strips

HOW TO MAKE IT:

1. Pour apple cider and maple syrup into a large stainless-steel saucepan.
2. Place cinnamon sticks, cloves, allspice, orange peel and lemon peel in the center of a washed cheesecloth; fold up the sides of the cheesecloth to enclose the bundle and tie it up. Drop the spice bundle into the cider mixture.
3. Place the saucepan over moderate heat and cook until cider is very hot but not boiling, about 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Remove cider from the heat. Discard the spice bundle.
5. Ladle cider into big cups or mugs, adding a fresh cinnamon stick to each serving if desired.

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Know someone who could use some financial guidance? Anyone who is important to you is important to us. The greatest compliment is to be introduced to a new client by one we currently serve. Thank you for not keeping us a secret!

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UPCOMING DATES

JANUARY

01 Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Opens

01 New Year's Day

20 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

FEBRUARY

02 Groundhog Day

14 Valentine's Day

17 Presidents Day



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