



Saving for retirement: 'You should let your money work for you'

Starting early: The value of being fiscally literate at a young age for retirement



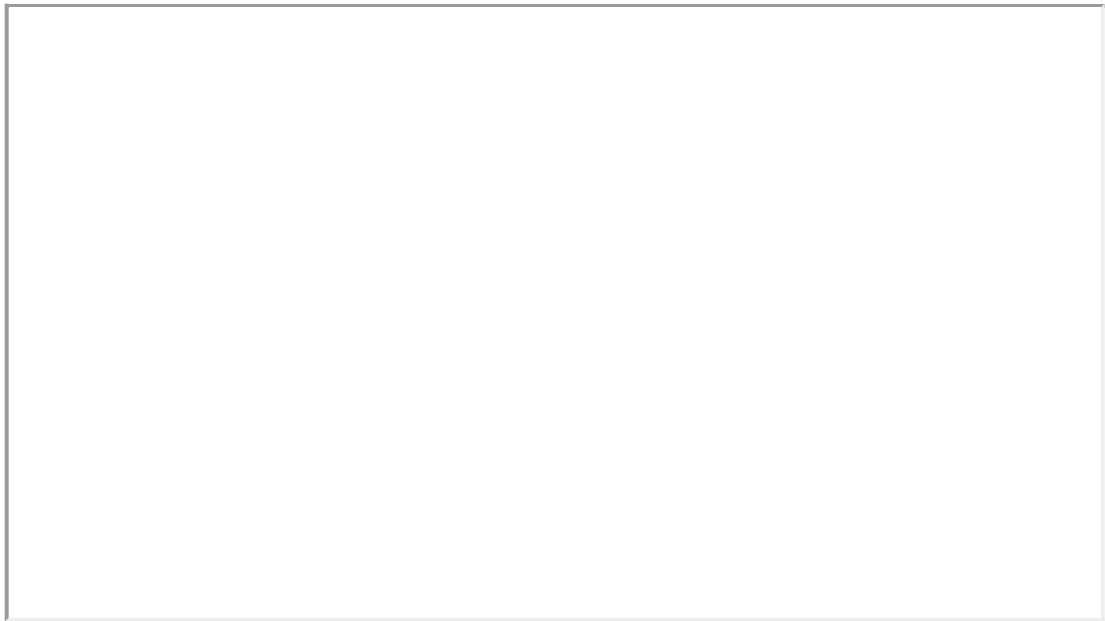
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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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MAY 6, 2019

6:30 AM



Nathan Zurisko is the guy who stays behind with questions after the talk by the company retirement plan adviser while everybody else drifts back to their offices.



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Where are the funds invested, he wants to know. What is the level of risk?
How much are the fees?

The questions may seem unusual from someone so early in a career, but they're just common sense, the 29-year-old Mr. Zurisko said. He and wife Heather, 31, work hard for their money — why shouldn't they care about how it's spent?

Like Mr. Zurisko's questions, the couple's investment and money management strategy is built on the kind of common sense principles that experts often echo.

"We're trying to do our best and learn as best we can about being fiscally literate," Mr. Zurisko said. "You should let your money work for you."

Being financially literate for the Zuriskos, who own a home in Indiana Township, means disciplined household budgeting and personal spending, and making sure their financial adviser understands the couple's investment goals.

It also includes starting to save for retirement at a time when most young couples are distracted by other concerns, said the Zuriskos' financial adviser, Matt Yanni, principal at Wexford-based Yanni & Associates Investment Advisors LLC.

"Nate is an exception," Mr. Yanni said. "Many folks entering the workforce in their 20s may not have the foresight to save in general, let alone to save for retirement."

Mr. Zurisko, director of business development at an East Stroudsburg, Pa.-based flavor and fragrance ingredients supplier, said he and his wife, a spokeswoman for an O'Hara Township medical device company, are complementary in their investment approach. He is more open to taking risks while his wife tends to be more conservative, so their impulses balance.

Mr. Zurisko's lessons in fiscal discipline began early.

Growing up in the blue-collar town of Springdale, 18 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, he worked for his father, a self-employed roofer. He remembers the grueling heat of summer, the long days. "It was very much an eye-opener," he said.

Heather's late father was a business owner who taught her the basics of smart money management.

Living within your means is the first rule, Mr. Zurisko said, followed by setting goals and working toward them through regular saving, always taking the long view. The value of investments can dip in the short term, but starting early offers the long investment horizon needed to recover losses and get back on track.

“If you’re patient and stick to your strategy, in the long run, the investor is always going to win,” Mr. Zurisko said.

Taking advantage of an employer’s 401(k) match is a must, he said. “That’s free money and you don’t pass it up.”

A well-balanced portfolio is the couple’s next principle. In addition to traditional 401(k) accounts the Zuriskos have through their employers, the couple opened Roth accounts, which allow maximum retirement savings contributions of \$6,000 for 2019.

People older than age 50 can add another \$1,000 in “catch-up” savings for the year. High-income earners, who otherwise would be ineligible, can use an alternate vehicle called a “Back Door Roth” to create an account.

Roth accounts, which allow tax-free interest growth and withdrawals at retirement from after-tax contributions, can be a matter of personal preference, Mr. Yanni said.

“In most instances, my preference is, if you’re Roth eligible, it’s Roth,” he said. “But there are some specific circumstances when a 401(k) account is preferable,” including tax considerations.

In addition to their retirement accounts, which combine stocks and bonds to limit risk, the Zuriskos are weighing a real estate investment to complement their portfolio.


Personally and professionally, finance is a continuing lesson for Mr. Zurisko, who graduated with an undergraduate business degree from Bucknell University and begins work on an MBA at Duke University in the fall.

He’s never forgotten that lesson he learned from working with his father: “The blood and sweat that goes into earning that dollar.”

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First Published May 6, 2019, 6:30am

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