

PERSPECTIVES

W I N T E R 2 0 1 8 E D I T I O N

SAFEGUARD YOUR CREDIT

*Protect Yourself from Fraud and
Safeguard Your Financial Life*

START 2018 WITH THESE FINANCIAL RESOLUTIONS

4 Tips for Sticking to
YOUR GOALS

Warm & Cold Winter
Vacation Destinations

WINTER WELCOME

Happy New Year!

This time of year always reminds us to look back on the prior year as well as think about what we want to do in 2018. Here at FSG we celebrated another great year in 2017, thanks to you, and your continual support!



Are you thinking of New Year's resolutions? We have some tips in this newsletter for making those resolutions stick. We would challenge you to make one resolution that means something to you, and that you can be reminded of it daily. As an example, that might be getting up a little earlier each day to read or meditate. It might be to eat a healthy breakfast to start the day. We put way too much pressure on ourselves to set these goals and then we beat ourselves up for not keeping them. Keep it simple.

Here at FSG, our goals are to always improve on how we serve you. We are always open to ideas or comments from you as to what we can do differently that makes a difference in your life. Please do not hesitate to call or email any ideas.

We have some great upcoming events this year. We will be sharing tax reform news, educating and updating you on Social Security rules, as well as some health and fitness gatherings. Be on the lookout for these dates.

As always, all of us here at FSG appreciate the honor of helping you make the most of your financial life.

Warm Regards,





FINANCIAL STRATEGIES GROUP



Our amazing FSG team at the Broward Walk to End Alzheimer's



Team FSG contributed \$40,000 to the 2017 Alzheimer Broward County walk



A night out at the Broward Center with Scott & Linda Justin



Celebrating Hank in Nashville in November!



AVOID
IDENTITY THEFT
AND SAFEGUARD YOUR CREDIT

Identity theft in the United States is on the rise, with record amounts of people being affected. In 2016 alone, 154 million people were victims of identity fraud—a year-over increase of 16%—with \$16 billion stolen.¹ As our financial lives increasingly go online, protecting our credit is more important than ever.

The 2017 Equifax credit breach, which affected at least 143 million people in the United States, exposed serious vulnerabilities in identity protection.² And while no single fix exists to control identity theft, a variety of actions can help protect your identity and credit. Follow this guide for key ways to safeguard your credit and prevent identity theft.

FREEZE YOUR CREDIT ACCOUNTS

If you believe that you have been a victim of identity theft—or are susceptible to being a victim—a first step to consider is freezing your credit accounts.

Your credit report provides detailed information about you. If someone hacks into your credit, you can have everything from your Social Security number to your account details stolen. By freezing your credit accounts, you will:

- Halt banks and credit companies from pulling your report.
- Prevent others from gaining access to your sensitive information.³

To freeze your credit, you will need to contact each credit-reporting company individually. Married couples should keep in mind that both spouses have individual credit records to protect.

You can take additional steps like these to safeguard your credit:

- Check your credit report and look for behavior you do not recognize.
- Monitor your credit cards and bank accounts to catch odd charges.
- Place a fraud alert on all sensitive accounts to warn creditors.⁴

CONTACT CREDIT BUREAUS

Freeze your account with service online or call the following numbers:

EQUIFAX

800-846-5279

EXPERIAN

888-397-3742, automated

714-830-7000, live

TRANSUNION

800-916-8800

Source: <https://www.nextadvisor.com/blog/2012/11/20/what-are-the-phone-numbers-of-equifax-experian-and-transunion/>

PROTECT YOUR ONLINE ACCOUNTS

Today, nearly everyone is online in one way or another—from banking to shopping and more. As we spend more of our lives digitally connected, we end up creating a bunch of different online accounts. In fact, the average person in the United States has as many as 150 online accounts that need passwords. And by 2020, the average person is projected to have on average 300 accounts.⁵

With vulnerabilities abounding online, protecting your accounts from hacking and identity theft is no longer something to avoid.

1. PASSWORDS

To responsibly manage your passwords, follow these tips:

- Aim to use 10–12 characters.
- Combine numbers, symbols, and capital letters within the middle of your password, not the end.
- Create new passwords for different accounts.
- Avoid using easily guessed words, such as dates, family names, or pet names.

2. TRANSACTIONS

Protect online financial transactions by doing the following:

- Update your operating software to remove security vulnerabilities.
- Shop on encrypted websites that protect your information through “https” URLs.
- Never use public Internet access, which is easy to hack, to make financial transactions.
- Avoid unsolicited offers that prompt you to act fast for a deal.⁶

SECURE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

A Social Security number (SSN) is an individual’s unique government-issued ID. And since SSN’s creation in 1936, the number has become the go-to personal identifier used by many companies and organizations.⁷ As a result, it is also now a key target for people trying to steal someone’s identity. Once someone has your SSN, the ability to do real harm to your financial life compounds.

Here are ways you can secure your Social Security number and safeguard your credit:

- Do not carry your Social Security card in your wallet. Memorize the number, and put the original card in a safe place.
- Report concerns about a compromised Social Security number by calling the Social Security Administration fraud line at 877-IDTHEFT (877-438-4338). For deaf and hard-of-hearing callers, call 866-653-4261.
- Never give your Social Security number by phone or online, unless you initiate the call and know the number is legitimate and the site is valid.

ONLINE FRAUD IS ON THE RISE

- **40% increase in Card-Not-Present (CNP) fraud fueled by increased online and mobile shopping**

- **50% increase in costs related to CNP fraud compared to Point-of-Sale fraud**

- **30% higher chance of fraud for e-commerce shoppers**

***Card-Not-Present means the shopper used no physical credit card in the transaction.**

Source: <https://www.javelinstrategy.com/press-release/identity-fraud-hits-record-high-154-million-us-victims-2016-16-percent-according-new>





MANAGE YOUR CREDIT CARD

Paying with credit cards is a common method for making daily purchases, since these transactions typically are more secure than debit cards. Credit cards can offer more overall legal protection, as well as liability for stolen or lost cards, among other perks.⁸

While the United States is implementing chip credit cards to combat identity theft, the crime is not going away anytime soon. In fact, year-over, stolen credit card information is the top crime committed against households. And for those who are affluent and between 34 and 54 years old, their chances of identity theft increase.⁹

From how you store your card to how frequently you check your account, managing your credit requires action. Here are some ways to secure your credit card information:

VICTIM OF CREDIT CARD FRAUD?

Report the crime by going online to [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov). This process can eliminate the need to file a police report.

YOU WILL RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING:

1. Your personalized recovery plan
2. Prefilled letters from the government to send to merchants, banks, and other affected entities
3. Your Identity Theft Report, an official government statement about the crime

Source: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2017/04/most-identity-theft-victims-dont-need-police-report>

1. ACCOUNT DETAILS

- Write only the last four digits of your account number in the check memo line when paying your bills.
- Never write your account number on the outside of a payment envelope.
- Shred all sensitive documents that you no longer need to save.

2. OVERSIGHT AND MONITORING

- Review your accounts regularly to identify irregular activity.
- Monitor your credit by requesting a credit report every 4 months, rotating between a different agency each time.
- Keep a list of your credit card numbers and their toll-free customer service numbers in a safe place at home.

Ultimately, safeguarding your credit requires you to take extra precautions across a variety of financial matters. While no single step can totally shelter you, protecting yourself online and offline will put you on a better path to financial security.

¹<https://www.javelinstrategy.com/press-release/identity-fraud-hits-record-high-154-million-us-victims-2016-16-percent-according-new>
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⁷<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-06-01/identity-theft-feeds-on-social-security-numbers-run-amok>

⁸<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/050214/credit-vs-debit-cards-which-better.asp>

⁹<http://news.gallup.com/poll/196802/americans-credit-card-information-getting-hacked.aspx>



Start 2018

With These Financial

New Year's Resolutions

Each new year is a chance to reflect on the past 12 months and plan for the future. In fact, 41% of Americans usually make New Year's resolutions.¹ And while 80% of resolutions fail by February, making them can put you on a better path to creating the future you desire.² People who explicitly make New Year's resolutions are 10 times more likely to meet their goals.³

If you are looking to make changes for 2018, start with your financial life. Our finances can impact nearly every area of our lives—and can mean the difference between living with comfort and calamity. To help you get started, here are some financial New Year’s resolutions to consider:

№1 Identify Your Financial Goals

When people set goals, they often have a better outlook on their futures. In a recent study, at least 50% of people who set goals felt their situations would greatly improve in 4 years—while only 12% of people without goals felt similarly.⁴

That said, according to one study, only 45% of people generally know what they want to achieve in their financial lives.⁵ This statistic is a bit alarming, considering consumer debt is on the rise and the majority of people have not saved enough for retirement.⁶

TOP 10-YEAR FINANCIAL GOALS

- Pay down debt (58%)
- Save more money (53%)
- Avoid further debt (42%)
- Save for vacation (31%)
- Open a retirement account, or ramp up contributions to an existing one (28%)

- Buy or lease a car (27%)
- Buy a home (23%)
- Start a business (10%)
- Save to have children (8%)
- Save for a wedding (8%)

Source: <https://www.fool.com/investing/2017/10/20/americans-top-10-financial-goals-and-why-some-of-t.aspx>

You can create a clearer perspective on your future by taking steps to identify your short- and long-term goals.

Short-Term Goals

These are financial items that you want to address in the near future but bring immediate expenses. You can typically meet these goals within a few months.

Examples include the following:

- Paying down student loans
- Saving for a wedding
- Buying insurance
- Taking a vacation ⁷

Long-Term Goals

These are the financial items that affect the bigger scope of your life. These goals may take years or even decades to achieve.

Examples include the following:

- Paying back your mortgage
- Saving for a child or grandchild’s education
- Creating retirement income
- Launching a business ⁸

№2 Use a Budget

A budget is one of the most effective ways to manage finances, yet only 41% of people use one.⁹ By having a budget, however, you can gain financial clarity. Think of it like a financial blueprint: You identify the foundation of all your expenses and income and from there create the framework for your true spending abilities.

Without a clear understanding of the money that revolves in and out of your life, you may end up spending more money than you actually have. From there, a domino effect can occur—affecting your ability to meet financial needs, like paying bills and saving for retirement. And once you have gaps in your cash flow, taking on debt can become an easy—yet risky—solution.

You can take control of your finances and avoid reactionary decisions by creating and using a budget. Here are some tips for making a budget that works:

- Use a tracking system that helps you easily see money that goes in and out. Spreadsheets, budgeting apps, or accounting software are especially helpful tools.
- Track every single daily expense to accurately manage your available money. A helpful method is to make all purchases with the same manner (such as a credit card). This process simplifies record keeping.
- Budget each month, rather than with your bimonthly paycheck. By focusing on 0, rather than 14, days at a time, you can take a longer-term view of your financial standing without going too far into the future.
- Identify fixed and variable costs so you better know how expenses ebb and flow. Fixed costs are things like your mortgage or health insurance; variable costs are items like utility bills.¹⁰

6 REASONS TO HAVE A BUDGET

1. Focus on long-term goals
2. Support realistic spending
3. Fund retirement
4. Prepare for emergencies
5. Fix bad spending habits
6. Minimize worry

Source: <http://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/1109/6-reasons-why-you-need-a-budget.aspx>

№3 Protect Your Credit

The 2017 Equifax breach reminded us that we must properly manage our credit and Americans need to know how to better protect themselves. One study revealed that 34% of people have never checked their credit reports, despite the fact that around 70% own a credit card.¹¹

And while preventing identity theft is a prime reason to better protect your credit, it is just one spoke in the wheel. From paying bills responsibly to regularly checking your credit report, here are steps to make sure you keep your credit profile safe and in tip-top shape.

- Pay bills—such as utility, credit card, mortgage, and others—when they're due. When you fall behind, your credit score reveals reported delinquencies and will decrease your rating.
- Maintain low balances on credit cards to keep your score high. The higher your balance, the worse your credit score will be. Aim to keep charges below 30% of your credit limit, even when you can pay off the full amount each month.
- Control your debt, which can account for up to 30% of your credit score. Any loan or lines-of-credit balances that you carry will hit your score hard, so create a strategy for paying down your debt. And do not take on new debt unless you absolutely must.
- Check your credit score to identify both the quality of your credit and any suspicious activity. By watching your credit, you can proactively do damage control, should you find errors or odd behavior in your report. Plus, by knowing your score, you can identify whether you need to strengthen your credit profile.¹²

No matter the resolutions you choose to make, remember that you are in control of your financial decisions and goals and ability to reach them. Setting resolutions can help you clearly identify the financial changes you want to make and create a strategy. By choosing to improve your financial life in 2018, you can be on a path toward the experiences and dreams you envision.

Sources:

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² <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-years-resolutions-courses-2016-12>

³ <http://www.statisticbrain.com/new-years-resolution-statistics/>

⁴ <https://www.debt.com/2017/americans-struggle-financial-goals/>

⁵ <http://www.businessinsider.com/sc/financial-goals-guide-2017-6>

⁶ <http://www.npr.org/2017/09/12/550250789/americans-borrowing-hits-another-record-time-to-worry>

<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/23/americans-are-saving-poorly-for-retirement.html>

⁷ <https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/finance/short-vs-long-term-goals/>

⁸ <https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/finance/short-vs-long-term-goals/>

⁹ <http://money.cnn.com/2016/10/24/pf/financial-mistake-budget/index.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.investopedia.com/university/budgeting/basics2.asp>

¹¹ <https://www.fool.com/credit-cards/2017/10/13/if-you-think-the-equifax-data-breach-is-scary-chec.aspx>

¹² <https://www.thebalance.com/maintain-good-credit-score-960513>

Our finances can impact nearly every area of our lives—and mean the difference between living with comfort and calamity.



4 Tips

for Sticking to

Your Goals

With a new year ahead of us, many people will set new goals to inspire action for change. But simply listing out goals you care about is not going to help you reach them. With some purposeful effort in the right direction, however, you can become all that you aspire to be. To start, follow these 4 tips:

1. Set motivating goals

When setting short and long-term goals, make sure you pick ones that motivate you. In fact, 93% of people who set irrelevant goals are unable to turn them into action.¹ Further, our brain has two different types of motivation: internal and external. Internal motivation is when something feels personally rewarding, like the confidence you feel from losing weight. External motivation is when we do something to earn or avoid something, such as 1st place in a baking contest.² So make sure that the goals you set truly motivate you, and know which type of motivation will drive you to act.

2. Focus on approach versus avoidance

The brain has specific areas for goal setting. The left side of the brain is where we create and process “approach” goals. These focus on creating desirable outcomes, such as having more energy during the day from regular exercise. The right side of the brain is where we create and process “avoidance” goals. These help us avoid a particular outcome, such as eating more fruits and vegetables to avoid diabetes. And the avoidance goals are the ones that can be the most detrimental to progress. Why? Studies show that these goals correlate with negative traits like procrastination and low self-esteem. When setting your goals, opt for ones that focus on approach to boost your positivity and success.³

3. Write out what you want to achieve

Only 4% of people take time to write out their goals.⁴ Yet not focusing on our goals can quickly derail any progress, causing us to lose 30% of our capacity and performance potential.⁵ A helpful way to stick to short- and long-term goals is to write them out. By doing so, you can see the things you want to achieve and revisit tangible items as the days go by. In fact, one study found that people who write out goals had a 76% higher success rate than those who just think about them.⁶ You can improve your odds by making an effort to put pen to paper and outline the goals you care about.

4. Embrace habits that lead to your goals

Meeting your goals is one thing—creating new habits that boost your ability to meet your goals is another trait entirely. Our brains store habits and goals differently. And the orbitofrontal cortex is directly responsible for the ability to turn hopeful goals into bona fide habits. To trigger your brain’s ability to create habits and meet your goals, you must be consistent. Whatever objective you are trying to meet, identify the habits that will support action—and do these actions at the same time and in the same way each day. For example, to publish a novel by year’s end (goal), you must write for an hour each morning (habit). With regularity, your habits will soon stick.⁷

A variety of factors can hurt or help your ability to reach your goals. But by starting with these 4 tips, you will identify what you aspire to reach and develop an ability to follow through and act.

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⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marciaturner/2016/12/31/want-to-achieve-your-goals-this-year-start-by-doing-this/#214ecafa4d29>

⁵ https://www.incimages.com/uploaded_files/inlineimage/AchieveYourGoals_32950.pdf

⁶ <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/always-give-your-new-year-resolutions-heres-how-make-them-foolproof-1598729>

⁷ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-truisms-wellness/201610/the-science-accomplishing-your-goals>

As the fall season fades and winter descends, people from around the United States are preparing to take seasonal vacations. Depending on which region of the country you live in, you may be craving time away in a warm- or cold-weather destination. Whether you want a holiday getaway, a skiing retreat, or another family-friendly trip, adventure abounds.

To help you plan your next winter vacation, here are some destinations to keep in mind:

SCENIC TOUR— AURORA WINTER TRAIN, ALASKA RAILROAD

For those who like to take in the beautiful scenes of a snowy winter, consider a vacation traveling on the Alaska Railroad. A top winter destination in *National Geographic*, a trip on the Aurora Winter Train will take you through a variety of backdrops that reflect the magic of the season. The train operates from mid-September to mid-May and winds you through the scenic back country of one of America's most remote states.

What to Do | You can stop in different locations and see everything from the aurora lights to an ice museum. The Aurora Winter Train also has travel packages available. Trips to consider include the following:

- See the aurora borealis (and hear its crackling noise!) overnight in Fairbanks.
- Go ice climbing or dogsledding in Anchorage.
- Visit the remotely located Winterlake Lodge on the Iditarod National Historic Trail.¹

ISLAND GETAWAY — HOLIDAY IN HONOLULU, HAWAII

Soaking up the sun and waves is a perfect way to beat the cold-season blues. Honolulu offers a laid-back, sun-filled experience that both parents and kids will enjoy while embracing the season's festivities. In fact, the Honolulu holiday spirit puts them on the top of lists as one of the best holiday destinations.

What to Do | Fun awaits for all family members in Honolulu. Things to do include the following:

- Bask in the glittering city center with their month-long lights display, Honolulu City Lights.
- Watch its holiday-themed Electric Lights Parade, and take pictures with an island-themed Santa.
- Visit the Bishop Museum, often considered the world's best Polynesian anthropological museum.²

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WARM



← WINTER VACATION DESTINATIONS



SKI RESORT— KEYSTONE, COLORADO

If your family's the type that waits all summer for ski season to arrive, then consider putting Keystone on the top of your winter vacation list. With an impressive 2,718-foot vertical, Keystone is a popularvail resort property nestled in the great skiing mountains of Colorado. As one of the top family-friendly ski resorts in the United States, Keystone built its excitement around ongoing family fun through "Kidtopia." And if you book through the resort directly, kids even ski for free.

What to Do | In addition to skiing, families can find a variety of ways to keep everyone happy. Here are a few things to consider:

- Take a Mountaintop Family Adventure Tour with views of the Continental Divide.
- Eat out at their unique Dinner Sled Ride, and listen to live cowboy and folk tunes.
- Refresh in their spa and with yoga and exercise classes.³

COLD

ATIONS ACROSS THE U.S.

NATURE EXPERIENCE — EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK, FLORIDA

From nature hikes to animal watching and beyond, the Everglades has plenty to keep you busy. Listed as a top winter destination by Fodor's Travel, the Everglades is America's largest subtropical wilderness, with 1.5 million acres to explore. Outdoor adventures abound, and the cooler season has less humidity and insects, as well as lower water levels that lure woodland animals out of hiding. Plus, the Everglades is a prime spot for migrating birds each winter, and even panthers and alligators call this park home. If you want to take in the beauty of nature in a warm climate, this could be the trip for you.

What to Do | You can camp in the park to immerse yourself in wilderness or stay at nearby lodging. Things to do include:

- Climb the 65-foot observation tower in Shark Valley for an impressive view of the glades.
- Go paddling to explore the mangroves in Nine-Mile Pond.
- Take a boat tour, and see manatees, dolphins, and crocodiles.⁴

Whatever adventure your family craves, now is a great time to pull away for the season and reinvigorate with new experiences. From cold to warm weather, you can find the perfect trip awaiting.

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