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HW

THE Gold Standard

THE WEALTHOLOGIST'S WISDOM

Name Your Misogi

I've been thinking a lot about how easy it is to let a year happen to you instead of choosing it on purpose. 2026 feels especially meaningful for me because I turn 50, and it's putting me in a reflective mindset in the best way. I want to be more intentional about the decisions I make, the time I protect, and the experiences I create with the people I love.

"Intentional" doesn't have to mean complicated. In fact, the biggest shifts usually come from a few clear commitments that you actually follow through on.

Each year, I use two simple frameworks to keep myself honest.

First is a **Misogi**. It comes from a Japanese tradition and has been modernized into a personal challenge: choose one thing so meaningful and difficult you might fail, and let it stretch you. The goal isn't perfection. Its growth. In 2026, my Misogi is an epic family adventure, something that challenges all of us, bonds us, and gives us a shared story we'll be telling for years.

Second is **Kevin's Rule**: plan a mini adventure every other month. That's six unique experiences a year. Over twenty years, that's 120 memories you can actually picture. For me, four of those mini adventures will be personal weekend trips designed around other people. One with my wife. One with each daughter. One with my dad. Each one planned around what fills their bucket, not mine. Turning 50 doesn't have to be about me. I want it to be about the people who matter most.

There's a financial parallel here. The clients who feel the calmest and most confident aren't guessing. They're intentional. They simplify accounts, maintain appropriate cash reserves, align investments with tangible goals, and make smart tax moves before deadlines force the issue. Optionality is the result, but intentionality is the cause.

So here's my invitation for 2026: choose your intention. Name your Misogi. Schedule your six mini-adventures. And pick one financial move that creates more margin and confidence this year.

Send your Misogi and one mini-adventure to **chris.hobart@hobartwealth.com**. I would love to hear about the epic adventures that lie ahead for each of you!

Chris Hobart
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COREY SUNSTROM, CFP®

Sequence of Return Risk in Retirement

Most retirement anxiety does not come from bad math. It comes from bad timing.

You can do all the right things for decades. Save consistently. Invest sensibly. Avoid obvious mistakes. Then retire and still feel like the rug might get pulled out from under you if markets stumble at the wrong moment. That uneasy feeling has a name, even if it sounds a little academic. Sequence of return risk.

Here is the plain English version. It is not just what the market returns over your lifetime that matters. It is when those returns show up.

Picture two retirees who look identical on paper. Same age. Same savings. Same annual spending. Over a 30-year retirement, both earn the same average return. One retires into a rocky market and takes a few hits early. The other gets some strong years right out of the gate and sees the bad years later. Even though the math averages out the same, their outcomes do not. The one who hits turbulence early is far more likely to feel squeezed, stressed, or forced to make changes they did not plan for.

Why? Because retirement flips the script.

When you are working, market drops are annoying but manageable. You are adding money, not taking it out. In retirement, withdrawals start immediately. If markets fall early, you are pulling income from a shrinking base. Less money stays invested to recover when markets eventually rebound. That combination of early losses plus ongoing withdrawals can quietly do long term damage.

The first five to ten years of retirement are the most sensitive. That is when the plan is most exposed. A rough stretch can lead to smaller rises in income later, tighter travel budgets, or second-guessing spending decisions. Often these adjustments show up as small lifestyle changes rather than dramatic cutbacks. Fewer trips. Delayed projects. More hesitation. It is not failure. It is timing.

The flip side matters too. Strong early returns can create momentum. When markets cooperate early, portfolios grow while withdrawals are still relatively modest. That flexibility can fund more freedom later, whether that is experiences, gifts, or legacy planning. Same plan. Different order. Very different feeling.

The good news is this risk is manageable. You cannot control markets, but you can control how exposed your plan is to early volatility.

One of the simplest tools is a short-term reserve. Keeping one to three years of planned withdrawals in cash or very short-term bonds creates breathing room. When markets dip, income is already set aside. No forced selling. No panic decisions. Think of it as a shock absorber, not a market prediction.

THE GOOD LIFE

The Art of Connection: Staying Social in Retirement

Staying socially active is not just about having fun; it supports your mental, emotional and even physical health.[1] This makes retirement the perfect time to focus on nurturing meaningful relationships.

Building New Friendships
Stepping out of your comfort zone can lead to wonderful new connections. Try joining a local club based on your interests, attending community events or taking a class to meet like-minded people. Platforms like Meetup or various Facebook Groups are excellent resources for finding local activities and connecting with individuals who share your passions.

Maintaining Existing Relationships
Nurturing long-standing friendships is just as important. Make an effort to stay in touch, even if distance is a factor. Schedule regular phone calls, plan a weekly coffee meetup or set up a video chat to catch up with old friends and share your life updates.

Participating in Community Activities
Getting involved in your community is a fantastic way to stay engaged and meet new people. Consider volunteering for a cause you care about, joining a hobby group like a book club or a gardening circle, or signing up for a fitness class. These activities offer a natural way to connect with others who share your passions.

[1] *World Health Organization. June 30, 2025. "Social connection linked to improved health and reduced risk of early death." https://www.who.int/news/item/30-06-2025-social-connection-linked-to-improved-heath-and-reduced-risk-of-early-death. Accessed Oct. 3, 2025.*

HOW TO ...

Taming the Paper Tiger

Having documents ready and accessible makes managing finances easier and speeds up meetings with your advisor. Here are two effective methods to simplify this process.

One In, One Out
This rule focuses on preventing paper accumulation. Whenever a new statement or document arrives. like a new monthly bank statement, the oldest equivalent document is reviewed and shredded.

This prevents clutter and forces consistent review of financial paperwork; keeps filing systems lean; and simplifies the task of purging old files.

Action Box
This involves separating documents based on the task required. Three trays or boxes are used: "To do," "To file" and "To shred." All incoming mail is immediately sorted into one of these boxes.

This offers a clear way to manage incoming paperwork. You won't miss bills, and documents get filed or thrown out on time.

DOLLARS & SENSE

From Health Care to Wealth Care: Unlock the Power of Your HSA

If you have a Health Savings Account (HSA), you know it helps cover out-of-pocket health care costs. But your HSA can also strengthen your retirement plan. By mid-2025, HSA assets reached $159 billion, with a 30% year-over-year jump in investments.[1] More people are seeing HSAs as more than just a place to stash cash for copays.

Here's how you can maximize your HSA.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT HSA STRATEGY

Everyone's financial situation is different, so consider how to use your HSA:

- **The "Pay-As-You-Go" Approach**
  If cash flow is tight or you're cautious with investments, contribute enough to cover yearly health costs. You'll get a tax break for money you spend anyway, without market risk involved. It's straightforward and safe, helping with short-term needs, even if it doesn't build a large nest egg.
- **The "Balanced Saver" Plan**
  If you can, max out your HSA while keeping your funds in low-risk, interest-earning accounts (like savings or money markets). Your money grows gradually as a backup for future medical costs. This option keeps things predictable.
- **"Go for Growth" — The Long Game**
  Treat your HSA like a retirement account: max your contributions, invest in growth assets and pay health costs from your checking account. Save receipts and reimburse yourself later after your investments grow. Compounding earnings can mean a bigger payoff.

WHY AN HSA BELONGS IN YOUR RETIREMENT PLAN

Analysts say HSA assets could reach $208 billion by 2027.[2] If you invest and let it grow, your HSA can cover future health expenses, one of retirement's biggest costs. Unlike 401(k)s or IRAs, there's no age when you must withdraw from your HSA and no required minimum distributions.[3] That means true flexibility and continued, tax-free growth.

Plus, your HSA can pay for Medicare premiums, long-term care insurance, dental and more.[4] Flexibility to use funds for many eligible medical costs makes your HSA a consistent resource through retirement.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Your HSA is more than just a doctor visit safety net. With top-tier tax benefits and investment potential, it can boost your retirement strategy. Whether you're conservative or growth-minded, there's a way to make your HSA work for you.

Want to review your current HSA approach? Consider reaching out to your financial professional about ways to fit this versatile account into your financial plan.

[1,2] Devenir. Oct. 9, 2025. "2025 Midyear Devenir HSA Research Report." https://www.devenir.com/research/2025-midyear-devenir-hsa-research-report/. Accessed Oct. 14, 2025.

[3,4] Rob Williams. Charles Schwab. March 12, 2025. "Potential Long-Term Benefits of Investing Your HSA." https://www.schwab.com/learn/story/potential-long-term-benefits-investing-your-hsa. Accessed Oct. 14, 2025.

THE SCOOP

Travel Trends for 2026

As you map out your adventures for the new year, the world of travel is evolving in exciting ways. Whether you're planning a grand tour or a quiet getaway, here are three trends shaping travel in 2026.

AI Travel Agents

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a popular tool for building itineraries, booking hotels and finding the best deals. According to survey specialists Kantar, "40% of global travelers have already used AI-based tools to plan their trips, and 62% are open to using them in the future."[1] Although AI is a helpful tool, rely on your own research to create your final itinerary.

Discovering Hidden Gems

Travelers are sick of arriving at their dream destination, only to find it teeming with other tourists. In response, they're seeking out underrated spots to avoid the crowds. This shift toward discovering new (and sometimes cheaper) places allows for more authentic connections with the locale — without the long lines and disgruntled residents.

The Rise of Slow Travel

The fast-paced tour is giving way to a more relaxed approach. Travel expert Simon Mayle told Forbes that there is a renewed interest in slow transport and an appetite for destinations that combine nature, culture and family connection.[2] This trend means choosing meaningful experiences over checking off a list and taking the time to really savor your vacation.

[1] Steve Wigmore. Kantar. Feb. 6, 2025. "When machine meets wanderlust: The role AI plays in tourism." www.kantar.com/inspiration/research-services/the-role-ai-plays-in-tourism-pf. Accessed Sept. 29, 2025.

[2] Laura Begley Bloom. Forbes. Aug. 26, 2025. "The 26 Best Trips For 2026, According To Travel Experts." www.forbes.com/sites/laurabegleybloom/2025/08/21/the-26-best-trips-for-2026-according-to-travel-experts/. Accessed Sept. 29, 2025.

5	3	2	6	5	3	3	8	11
5	5	2	9	5	3	1	3	1
11	8	6	5	2	2	5	9	6
4	1	4	9	2	13	1	4	4
2	7	6	1	1	1	3	8	5
3	8	4	4	12	2	3	6	6
5	6	11	4	1	13	5	3	5
5	8	4	7	3	2	4	1	8
5	1	10	5	5	7	6	11	2

BRAIN GAMES

15 Up

Game Rules

Each puzzle must be divided into regions totaling 15. The regions can be any shape as long as all the cells touch each other. Use a pen or pencil to draw the boundaries around groups of cells all adding up to 15.

Winter Refresh

Remodeling Tips To Warm Your Space

Winter is the perfect time to make your space warmer, cozier and more inviting. From sealing drafts to adding personal touches, small changes can have a big impact on your comfort. These simple tips will help you refresh your home and keep out the winter chill.

Draft Defense: Keep the Cold Out

Winter often means higher energy usage, but a few smart upgrades can help keep your home cozy without breaking the bank. Start by sealing any drafts or leaks that let warm air out. Weatherstripping around windows and doors and caulking gaps in walls, floors and ceilings creates a barrier that locks in heat.

Your windows might also be working against you. A 2020 study published in Joule found that "in winter, windows are responsible for 30% of energy loss."[1] You can combat this by installing heavy-duty plastic film on your windows to reduce heat loss and keep your heating bill in check. It's a simple, cost-effective solution that makes a big difference.

Getting Rug-Snug

When temperatures drop, you'll spend more time inside. Make it warm and inviting! Start by focusing on the heart of your living space: the fireplace. You don't have to replace it with a new one to enjoy its charm. Think about upgrading the mantle or simply rearranging seats or couches to make it the center of the room if it isn't already. Don't forget the floors! Area rugs aren't just stylish; they're also great insulators. Adding a thick wool or plush rug to your living room or bedroom can help trap heat and keep your feet toasty on chilly mornings.

Beat Back the Winter Blues

Sometimes, the winter season can snow you in. Turn cabin fever into creativity with a few simple projects. A fresh coat of paint in a bright color can make a room feel lighter. Use it to create an accent wall that draws attention to family photos or artwork. In tiled rooms, like the kitchen or bathroom, re-grout or re-caulk tiles for a clean, fresh look. DIY enthusiasts can invite the kids or grandkids over to help build a unique shelf or table that will have your family's fingerprints all over it.

[1] Yang Zhou et al. Joule. Nov.z18, 2020. Pages 2,458-2,474. "Liquid Thermo-Responsive Smart Window Derived from Hydrogel." https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2542435120304037. Accessed Oct. 10, 2025.

JACOB WOODRUM, CFA, CFP®

Income Growth Plus: Dividends While You Grow

Most of our readers know I'm originally from "Almost Heaven" West Virginia. After living in Charlotte for going on nine years, I'm still fascinated by how different the economies can be, especially when you look at rental real estate where I grew up versus where my family and I live today.

Back home, you can often buy a property for less, and that lower starting price can translate into stronger cash flow. In Charlotte, the purchase price is usually much higher, so the "free cash flow" might not look as exciting, but the tradeoff is stronger long-term demand, which can support appreciation. As with everything in life, there's always a give-and-take.

Income Growth Plus is built on that same idea: a dependable stream of dividend income today, paired with meaningful growth potential. The strategy blends roughly 60% stocks and 40% bonds to create a portfolio that aims to pay a reliable "rent check" through dividends, often in the neighborhood of what investors can earn on intermediate Treasury yields, while still participating in long-term market growth. Bonds help smooth out the bumps. Stocks help keep the portfolio moving forward over time.

The equity mix is another important difference-maker. This isn't simply an S&P 500 stand-in. Today's index is more top-heavy than many investors realize, with market results increasingly driven by a small group of mega-cap tech names.

That concentration has worked well recently, but it also means portfolios can become overexposed to AI/tech if that leadership cools off. Income Growth Plus is built to be less dependent on a handful of expensive names, with more emphasis on steadier, income-friendly areas like financials, utilities, and consumer staples, sectors that can often hold up better when market leadership rotates.

And while the portfolio seeks attractive income, it's not trying to "reach" for yield by taking high-yield debt-type risk. The goal is competitive dividends you can live with, plus growth potential you can stick with. For investors who want income now but still want to participate in long-term growth, Income Growth Plus can be a practical fit within a diversified plan.

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TEAM HIGHLIGHT

CHIP RANDALL & BRIAN COLAN

Chip and Brian form our Wealth Consulting team. Together, they host retirement workshops and events discussing Retirement Planning, Tax Strategies, and Estate Planning. Chip and Brian love working directly with clients and prospective clients to review their needs and concerns.

CHIP RANDALL

- *20+ years in Financial Services*
- *Lives with his wife, Dania, in Dilworth*
- *Has two dogs: Daisy and Islay, and a cat, Olliver*
- *Has been in Charlotte for 13 years*
- *Avid golfer and loves to travel*

BRIAN COLAN

1. Was a Registered Nurse for 14 years
2. Lives with his wife, Caite, in Mooresville
3. Has two cats: Scottie and Valentino, and a dog, Luca
4. NY Giants fan
5. Loves to ski

BRAIN GAMES

ANSWER KEY:

5	3	2	6	5	3	3	8	11
5	5	2	9	5	3	1	3	1
11	8	6	5	2	2	5	9	6
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2	7	6	1	1	1	3	8	5
3	8	4	4	12	2	3	6	6
5	6	11	4	1	13	5	3	5
5	8	4	7	3	2	4	1	8
5	1	10	5	5	7	6	11	2

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UPCOMING DATES

JANUARY

01 - New Year's Day

19 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Office Closed)

28 - Hobart Wealth LIVE

29 - Educational Workshop - South Park Library

FEBRUARY

04 - Educational Workshop - Davidson

10 - Educational Workshop - Cornelius

24 - 2026 State of the Markets - The Knight Theatre

25 - Retirement University

26 - Hobart Wealth LIVE