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THE Gold Standard

THE WEALTHOLOGIST'S WISDOM

The Human Side of AI

AI is everywhere right now. It is changing how people work, communicate, learn, and make decisions. Some of that is exciting. Some of it is a little unsettling. As a dad with daughters, I find myself thinking about it a bit differently. I do not just think about what AI will be able to do. I think about the kind of world my girls will grow up in because of it.

There is no question AI can make life more efficient. It can help us move faster, sort through information, and take friction out of everyday tasks. In many ways, that is a good thing. We all have plenty competing for our time and attention. If technology can help lighten that load, it is worth paying attention to.

At Hobart Wealth, we are open to that. We believe AI can be a helpful tool when used the right way. It can support better organization, stronger communication, and smarter use of time. But to us, it will always be just that, a tool. Our clients are not looking for a machine to know them, understand their goals, or guide them through major life decisions. They are looking for trusted people who know them personally and care deeply about getting it right.

That is why I do not believe the goal should be a world that is simply faster, more automated, and less personal. I believe the best use of AI is to make life more human, not less.

If AI can take some of the repetitive tasks off our plates, maybe it also gives us something back. More time to think. More time to listen. More time to be present. More time for meaningful conversations, better judgment, and deeper relationships. In that sense, the real promise of AI is not just productivity. It is the possibility of creating more room for wisdom, connection, and care.

That also means being clear about what AI cannot do. It cannot replace character. It cannot replace discernment. It cannot replace empathy, trust, or love. It can offer information, but it cannot provide meaning. That part still belongs to us.

As technology continues to evolve, I hope we do not lose sight of that. I want my daughters to grow up in a world that embraces innovation without giving up what makes us human. A world where powerful tools are used wisely, but where relationships, values, and real connection still matter most.

AI is likely to shape the future in many ways. The real question is whether we will let it pull us further away from each other, or use it to create more space for what matters most. My hope is that we choose the second path.



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COREY SUNSTROM, CFP®

Getting Ahead of the "Widow's Penalty"

Most people assume their tax bill will go down after losing a spouse. Fewer paychecks, one less Social Security check, a simpler financial life. On paper, that makes sense. But what I see in real life is usually the opposite. Income doesn't always drop as much as expected, but the tax brackets you're working within get tighter. Same dollars, less room to spread them out, and over time that quiet shift can cost more than people realize.

While you're married, you're filing jointly, which gives you wider tax brackets. After the first death, that typically goes away. Now you're filing single, and those same income streams like IRA withdrawals, interest, dividends, and rental income are being pushed through narrower brackets. It doesn't take much for someone who was comfortably in a mid-level bracket as a couple to find themselves bumped into a higher one individually, even if their income went down.

During the year of a spouse's passing, though, you still have some control before that shift fully sets in. I don't bring this up because I think anyone should be making big financial decisions in the middle of a difficult season. Quite the opposite. But I've seen enough situations where a little thoughtful planning during that window made a meaningful difference years down the road.

One of the most impactful areas to think about is how you handle retirement accounts, specifically whether it makes sense to do a Roth conversion. If you've built up a large balance in pre-tax accounts, those dollars are eventually going to be taxed. The question is whether you recognize that income on your terms or let it show up later when the system is less forgiving. That final year filing jointly often gives you more room to move some of those dollars into a Roth at lower rates than you may see in the future. I think of it like using the space available to you. Not forcing anything, just being intentional.

This is also where charitable giving can quietly become a powerful tool. If giving is already part of your life, this may be a year to be more deliberate. Pairing a Roth conversion with a larger gift can help offset some of the added income. Whether that's donating appreciated investments or bunching a few years of giving into one, it's a way to align something you care about with a more efficient tax outcome.

At the same time, this is one of the best opportunities you'll have to reassess your portfolio. Over time, most portfolios get messy. A stock grows too large, old funds stick around, accounts pile up. Normally, fixing that creates a tax bill, so people put it off. But in a year like this, you may have more flexibility to clean things up. That could mean reducing concentrated positions, simplifying holdings, or moving away from high-cost or tax-inefficient investments. It's also worth asking if the portfolio still fits the life you're living now.

The other area that doesn't get much attention, but should, is your home. Even if you have no intention of moving, getting a formal appraisal shortly after your spouse passes establishes a clear value for the property. If you ever sell later, that number matters. Without it, you're left trying to reconstruct value years after the fact, which is far more difficult.

This isn't about doing everything. It's about recognizing that this one year carries more flexibility than most, and a few well-timed decisions can have a ripple effect for years. My role in moments like this is to help you focus on what matters, move at the right pace, and make sure opportunities don't quietly pass by.

THE GOOD LIFE

Pack Like a Pro: Eight Tips for Your Next Trip

Retirement is the perfect time to explore the world, but packing can feel like a chore.

With a little planning and a few clever strategies, you can travel lighter, smarter and with less worry. Here's how:

- **Roll With It:** Roll your clothes instead of folding them to save space and reduce wrinkles. Bonus: You'll see everything at a glance.
- **Divide and Conquer:** Packing cubes are a game-changer. Sort by clothing category for quick access.
- **Double Duty:** Choose neutral, multi-purpose clothing that mixes and matches effortlessly. Create more outfits with fewer items!
- **Fill the Gaps:** Don't waste space with bulky shoes. Stuff them with socks, belts or small accessories.
- **Stay Dry and Tangle-Free:** Zip-top bags contain toiletry spills and keep electronics organized.



- **Wear the Bulky Stuff:** Save suitcase space and weight by wearing your heaviest items, like jackets or boots, while traveling.
- **Plan for Souvenirs:** Leave room for treasures or pack a foldable duffel or tote to contain overflow.
- **Keep Essentials Close:** Medications, IDs, a phone charger and a first-aid kit belong in your carry-on for accessibility and security.

YOUR ADVENTURE AWAITS

Travel is often at the top of retirees' wish lists, but logistics can be a drag. Shift your focus to the journey and follow these packing tips ahead of your next getaway.



HOW TO ...

Ways to Help Keep Your Financial Goals on Track During the Summer

Summer often brings a shift in routines, with vacations and seasonal expenses taking center stage. Though it's a time to relax and enjoy, it's also easy to lose sight of long-term financial goals. Here are some ways to help stay focused while enjoying the season.

REVISIT YOUR BUDGET

Review monthly expenses and identify areas where you can cut back to help accommodate seasonal costs. Use budgeting tools to track spending in real time. Set specific spending limits for activities such as dining out or entertainment.

PLAN AHEAD

Break down larger expenses into smaller, more manageable savings goals, and look for ways to help save on summer costs. Book travel early, use rewards points and take advantage of discounts.

AVOID DIPPING INTO RETIREMENT FUNDS

Using retirement savings for short-term expenses can jeopardize your long-term financial confidence. Instead, consider using things such as emergency funds for unexpected costs or cash back rewards to offset expenses.



DOLLARS & SENSE

Put Your Money Where Your Values Are

In today's financial landscape, investing is no longer just about the bottom line — it's about making a difference. For many of us, the legacy we leave behind is just as important as the wealth we build. This shift in mindset has fueled the rise of values-based investing, often seen in strategies such as socially responsible investing (SRI) and environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria.

This approach can allow you to support causes you care about — whether it's renewable energy, board diversity or ethical labor practices — while pursuing financial returns. But before you overhaul your portfolio, it is critical to weigh the benefits against the potential drawbacks. Is aligning your money with your morals always the smart financial play?

THE CASE FOR VALUES-BASED INVESTING

For proponents, this strategy can offer a “double bottom line” — financial profit and social impact — such as investing in companies that prioritize sustainability, ethical labor practices and environmental impact over short-term profit maximization.

- **Alignment With Personal Beliefs:** The most immediate benefit is knowing your savings are not funding industries you may oppose, such as tobacco, weapons manufacturing or fossil fuels.
- **Enhanced Risk Management:** Companies with strong ESG practices often demonstrate better long-term resilience. By prioritizing ethical governance and environmental stewardship, these firms may avoid costly regulatory fines, lawsuits and public scandals that could harm stock prices.
- **Potential for Competitive Returns:** The myth that ethical investing guarantees lower returns is fading. Many ESG funds have performed competitively against traditional indexes, particularly as the global economy shifts toward sustainability.¹

THE POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS

Value-based investing is not without hurdles. It requires a careful eye to help ensure your retirement goals remain on track.

- **Higher Costs:** Specialized screening requires extensive research, which adds to costs. Consequently, many ESG funds carry higher expense ratios than standard index funds. Even small fee increases can eat into your retirement nest egg.
- **The “Greenwashing” Risk:** Not every fund labeled “sustainable” lives up to the hype. Some companies and funds exaggerate their eco-friendly credentials to attract capital in a practice known as greenwashing. Investors must look under the hood to ensure the holdings match the marketing.
- **Limited Diversification:** By excluding entire sectors, you inherently reduce your portfolio's diversification. During periods where traditional energy stocks surge, an ESG-heavy portfolio might lag behind the broader market.

FINDING YOUR BALANCE

Values-based investing offers a powerful tool for making a positive impact, but it requires diligence. The key is balance.

Please note: Your investment adviser representative may not create or market advisor-managed ESG models because if they use Funds of Funds (FoF's) or other third-party pooled investments, they may not be able to accommodate your ESG preferences.

¹Alana Benson. NerdWallet. Dec. 26, 2025. “ESG for Beginners: Environmental, Social and Governance Investing.” <https://www.nerdwallet.com/investing/learn/esg-investing>. Accessed March 2, 2026.

THE SCOOP

Summer Bucket List — on a Budget

Summer brings sun, relaxation and the creation of new memories year after year. But a great summer doesn't have to come with a high price tag. With a little creativity, you can fill your days with fun and fulfilling adventures that are both memorable and affordable.

EXPLORE LOCAL GEMS

Sometimes, you don't even have to leave the city to find great ways to spend the day. Local spots like museums and libraries offer affordable ways to explore right in your own backyard. Some local attractions even have free or discounted admission days throughout the season.

DIVE INTO CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Attend free outdoor concerts, art fairs or community theater performances. Try a new restaurant or eatery if your taste buds are also looking for a bit of adventure. Some towns even hold culture festivals to celebrate their heritage.

SAVOR THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Nature lovers can visit nearby parks, botanical gardens or nature reserves. If you're social, join a walking or hiking club for active outings. Local rivers or lakes can be great spots for birdwatching, fishing or kayaking.

TRAVEL WITHOUT THE HASSLE

If you want to go outside your hometown, try looking for spots that are less than a day's travel away. Ask around or look online for underrated locales that can satisfy your wanderlust. Skip the hotels and try nontraditional lodging, such as VRBO or Airbnb, for more unique experiences.



CREATE MEMORABLE MOMENTS WITH FAMILY

Sometimes the best memories to make are with family. Host a backyard potluck or barbecue and spur some inter-generational bonding by cooking together. If you're a grandparent, think of activities such as a treasure hunt or an outdoor movie night to keep your grandkids (and you!) entertained.

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

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.



BACKYARD BLISS

OUTDOOR GAMES FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Outdoor games are the perfect way to connect generations, from enthusiastic children to playful grandparents. With a bit of planning, your backyard can become a fun-filled arena for everyone.

CLASSIC GAMES WITH A CREATIVE TWIST

- **CORNHOLE:** Make it fun with “challenge shots,” such as tossing while standing on one foot.
- **RELAY RACES:** Add silly tasks — potato sack hopping or spoon-balancing water balloons.
- **RING TOSS:** DIY with pool noodles or glow sticks; use sand-filled bottles as targets.
- **WATER BALLOON TOSS:** Try catching balloons with buckets or towels for a cool spin.

SIMPLE DIY BACKYARD GAMES

- **GIANT GAMES:** Stack painted wood blocks for oversized Jenga, or roll big dice on a picnic blanket for Yard Yahtzee.
- **OBSTACLE COURSE:** Combine hula hoops, pool noodles and cushions for a customizable family challenge.
- **BACKYARD BOWLING:** Use filled bottles for pins and a ball you have on hand.
- **NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT:** Create a list of things for everyone to hunt for, such as a red leaf or a smooth rock.

ALL-AGES ACTIVITIES

- **PARACHUTE PLAY:** Use a big sheet to shake balls (“popcorn”) or play “cat and mouse.”
- **FRISBEE GOLF:** Aim for buckets or hula hoops as targets around the yard.
- **BALLOON VOLLEYBALL:** Set up a rope net; keep a balloon in the air for as long as possible.

Backyard games are about more than play. They create joy, connection and memories for all ages. Give these simple ideas a try, and start a tradition of outdoor fun with your family.

CLIENT HIGHLIGHT: DAN LIEBL

It's Not Too Late

In May 2004, Dan Liebl's life changed when he was diagnosed with colon cancer. A large tumor was removed, but the disease had already spread to two lymph nodes. His oncologist shared a difficult truth: statistically, only two out of five patients like him would survive five years.

Dan chose to see purpose instead of fear. "My heart goes out to those three families," he said. "When do we get started?"

He faced treatment with determination, completing chemotherapy by December 2004. What followed was more than recovery—it was reflection. He began to feel his experience could serve a greater purpose.

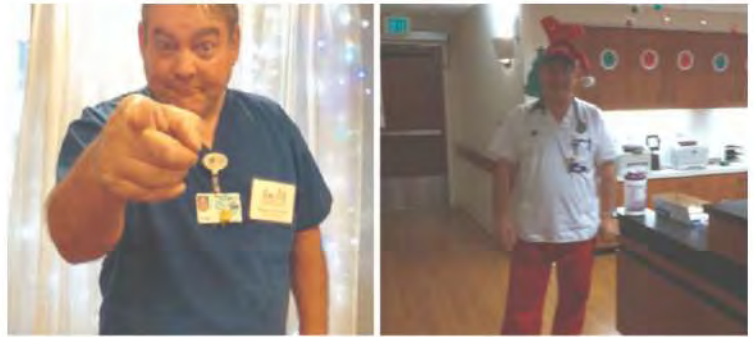
At a dinner with friends, Dan mentioned that if he were younger, he might have pursued nursing. Someone asked a simple question: why not now? With his wife's full support, he enrolled in school the very next day, turning adversity into action.

He earned his RN, built experience on a medical surgical floor, and later moved into an infusion unit—the same place where he had once been a patient. Years later, he worked alongside the very oncologist who had treated him.

When patients sat across from him, they saw more than a nurse. They saw someone who understood—someone who had walked the same path. Dan's presence offered comfort, strength, and hope in uncertain moments. The gratitude he received, in quiet words and heartfelt embraces, reflected the power of compassion and shared experience.

Dan's story reminds us that life's hardest chapters can become the foundation for something meaningful. Purpose can grow from pain, and new beginnings can start at any stage.

If you're at a crossroads—considering a new journey or long-delayed dream—remember: it's never too late to choose a life path that inspires you.



RECIPE MAPLE BLUEBERRY CRISP

A warm, comforting blueberry crisp with a sweet, bubbly filling and a buttery brown sugar crumble topping. It's simple to make and perfect served fresh from the oven, especially with a scoop of ice cream.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup cold butter
- 1 teaspoon almond extract

HOW TO MAKE IT:

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. In a large bowl, combine the blueberries, syrup, cornstarch, and cinnamon. Mix until evenly coated.
3. Transfer the blueberry mixture to a greased 8-inch square baking dish and spread evenly.
4. In a small bowl, combine the flour and brown sugar.
5. Cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs, then stir in the extract.
6. Sprinkle the crumb mixture evenly over the blueberry filling.
7. Bake for 35–40 minutes, or until the filling is bubbly and the topping is golden brown. If desired, serve with vanilla ice cream.

BRAIN GAMES

ANSWER KEY:

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

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UPCOMING DATES

MAY

- 10 - Mother's Day
- 14 - Educational Workshop - Estate Planning - Cornelius Library, NC
- 16 - Chris Hobart's Birthday
- 25 - Memorial Day - Offices Closed

JUNE

- 04 - Educational Workshop - Estate Planning - Fort Mill, SC
- 12 - Amy Vitale's Birthday
- 19 - Juneteenth - Offices Closed
- 21 - Father's Day

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The Week Ahead — Market Insights from Hobart Wealth

Fresh market perspective from Lead Investment Strategist Jacob Woodrum, your essential weekly briefing before the bell rings.

May 13 · May 27 · June 10 · June 24

Video Series

The Hobart Weekly — Insights, Outlooks & All Things Wealth

Our Senior Wealth Advisors break down what matters most in financial planning, delivered every week with clarity and confidence.

Updates

Hey Hobart! — Straight from Our Team

Quick-hit insights, timely announcements, and the latest from the people behind the scenes who make Hobart Wealth work for you.

Monthly Deep Dive

Inside the Portfolio with Hobart Wealth

Jacob Woodrum goes inside the numbers with monthly portfolio commentary designed to keep you informed, aligned, and ahead.

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