Finance your future

50 money moves you can make right now

Policygenius

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A complete guide to managing your financial health and thriving in 2022 and beyond. Our e-book helps you get organized, take action and prepare for the future. For more financial advice, money news and money moves, look out for our Policygenius Money newsletter.

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The 2022 landscape

What a year 2021 has been. Despite the lingering COVID-19 pandemic, the economy is continuing to move forward, rebounding from last year's recession. Vaccinations are on the rise. Schools and businesses are reopening. The housing and car market turned red hot, and the stock market reached new highs. Employment is ticking up and workers are switching jobs at unprecedented rates. Interest rates remain at record lows, driving consumer spending.

Despite all this good news, Americans are still as stressed as ever about their personal finances. A survey by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority found that 60% of Americans report feeling anxious when thinking about their finances. Many cite a lack of assets and insufficient income, high debt, money management challenges, and low financial literacy as sources of their anxiety.

With 2022 right around the corner, it's more important than ever to take control of your finances and make smart money decisions to set yourself up for the future. Here's our complete list of money moves to make in 2022 and beyond.

Get prepared

1. Assess your current plan

2020 taught us to expect the unexpected. Millions of people are adjusting to a new financial reality after pandemic-related shutdowns and economic devastation.

Now's the time to revisit your strategy. Take stock of your finances over the past 18 months and set new priorities for the coming year. Reassess how the current landscape affects your financial priorities. If 2020 knocked your finances for a loop, now is the time to rebuild and get back on solid footing. This may require a financial tune-up, a major overhaul or completely starting from scratch.

Still don't quite know how to identify your goals? Imagine yourself 10 years from now. Do you want to be your own boss? Pay off your mortgage? Or completely debt-free? It's important to know your goal before getting started.

Make sure to keep your emotions in check and make sure all decisions line up with these long-term objectives instead of being swayed by the headlines. Setting up actionable metrics — like putting $10,000 into a 529 plan or saving $15,000 for a new car — can motivate you to tackle your goals.

2. Adapt your budget

Budgeting isn't just something you do when money is tight. Keeping track of your spending and saving can help you monitor progress to your longer-term goals and empower you to make smart financial decisions. If you don't have a budget, now is the time to make one.

If you're struggling to follow a budget, here are some simple ways to stay out of the red each month:

1. It's tempting to put spending before saving. But saving should always come first. Automate regular contributions to your savings account so you don't forget.
2. Focus on your pitfalls. It's likely that only one or two budget categories are the major offenders, like takeout or an online shopping habit. Focus on reducing spending in those categories instead of overhauling your entire budget.
3. Keep it simple. Try the popular 50/30/20 budget, which has you organize your budget into three simple buckets: needs, wants, and savings.
4. Put your card on ice. Leave your credit card at home or have it available for emergencies only, which will curb impulsive spending.

Persistence is key. Like with any habit, adjusting to a budget takes time. Don't get frustrated if you don't get it completely right the first couple of months.

3. Talk to your partner

Couples who talk regularly about money are more likely to have a financially harmonious relationship. Staying financially transparent with your partner can help avoid negative surprises.

Here are some easy ways to start doing money better with your partner:

- Have some empathy. Try to take your partner's perspective into consideration when having a money conversation. This will help you understand where they're coming from, and help you both better address your problems together.

- Make a plan. This includes building a budget that works for both of you. Include fixed expenses (like mortgage payments) and discretionary spending, track how much you're spending and adjust when necessary. Once you have a budget in place, begin considering longer-term goals, like buying a house or preparing for retirement.
- Schedule regular money talks. Checking in with each other about money regularly (even if it's just once a month) can help couples get on the same page and avoid negative surprises.
- Visit a professional. Financial therapists can help you make sense of financial friction in your relationship and set a game plan for the future.

4. Follow financial news

It can seem time-consuming to educate yourself on personal finance. But developing good financial sense doesn't need to take hours.

An easy way to stay informed is via newsletters or podcasts. They can provide a digestible explainer on current events, and may give you a new perspective on how to get out of debt, invest or grow your wealth.

5. Download a personal finance app

There's an app for just about anything, including personal finance. Depending on the app, users can set goals, track bills, and build a nest egg. Many apps link to your bank accounts and give a holistic view of your finances so you'll always know what you're spending, what you're saving, and how you're stacking up against your new recession-based goals.

When it comes to investing apps, robo-advisors like Betterment or Wealthfront are designed to provide personalized investing advice, using artificial intelligence in place of human advisors. Online brokers like Robinhood and Stash allow you to trade and manage stocks on your own. And spare change apps like Acorns invest automatically, so you can grow your money without thinking about it.

Budgeting apps are for people who don't want to build their own spreadsheet. With a few clicks, you can track your spending, saving, and investing anywhere. But which is the best? That depends on what you're looking for. Some apps are loaded with features, while some just offer the basics. Some apps are more hands-on with reminders and coaching, while some just leave you be. Whichever your preference, there's likely a budgeting app for you. The best part? Many of them are free.

6. Boost your savings ratio

Consumer spending is up as Americans start shelling out on travel, dining out, and other experiences. But just because you may be spending more doesn't mean you should abandon your savings goals. Basic personal finance advice encourages you to save at least 20% of your paycheck each month. But it's a good idea to aim higher, even when the economy is growing.

There's no one-size-fits-all savings plan. How much to save depends on your financial picture, family situation and future goals — but the pandemic is a good reminder to have a savings stockpile on hand. Breaking down your goal into manageable steps will make building a year-long emergency fund less daunting. Figure out a schedule that works for you and commit to contributing the funds you've set aside for emergency savings until you reach your goal.

Consider small changes, like brewing coffee at home or skipping takeout, and adopt new habits, like cooking at home or doing your own repairs. Continue to monitor your savings plan and make adjustments as needed.

7. Build an emergency fund

Financial emergencies range from life-altering, like a house fire, to mundane, like a broken appliance. Last year, many workers lost their jobs, while others were confronted with medical debt. While you may have gotten through 2020 on solid financial footing, the next emergency could be right around the corner.

To prepare for these unplanned expenses, everyone should have an emergency savings fund that acts as a financial safety net. An emergency fund is savings set aside to help cover unexpected bills. Emergency funds can also help cover your regular expenses should you lose your job or have your income cut. The common rule of thumb was to save three to six months' worth of expenses, but you may want to save even more. Some experts now recommend having six to 12 months of savings on hand.

To set your emergency savings goal, recalculate all essential monthly expenses — food, rent, bills, transportation, and other necessities may change during a recession — and multiply by the number of months you want to save. Keep in mind the number is flexible and based on your financial needs. The key is to strive for enough to cover unexpected emergencies without neglecting other priorities. If you dipped into your savings account last year, prioritize building it back up.

8. Embrace liquidity, but not too much

During a recession, keeping your money more readily available makes sense. But now that we're back in a bull market, consider growing your money faster in exchange for less liquidity.

If you keep all your money in cash, you'll lose out on interest earnings and be more inclined to spend money on hand. Leave it in a bank or high-yield savings account until you need it. High-yield savings accounts are typically offered by online banks and have lower expenses. An important note: Interest rates have fallen drastically. High-yield savings accounts are hovering below a 1% annual percentage yield, as of Q4 of 2021, down from close to 3% a year ago. Still, interest rates are higher than traditional savings accounts, and definitely higher, and safer, than keeping your money in physical form.

The safest option besides a traditional savings account is bonds, which are loans to a corporation or the government with an understanding you will be paid back with interest after a certain amount of time. These are lower-risk investments but you can still lose money.

9. Lock in higher rates

Similar to bonds, certificates of deposit are one-time investments that mature over a period of time. You'll see rates between 1% and 1.35% for CDs stretching from a few months to a few years. The longer the duration the higher the yield. Unlike bonds, you're not at risk of losing the money you put in. You can withdraw funds from a CD but you'll face heavy penalty fees.

These accounts typically offer higher interest rates than high-yield savings accounts, but you can't touch the money until the term is up. Like we suggested above, make sure you have some accessible savings in a traditional savings account, but since the economy is stronger, you may be fine leaving some of your savings in an inaccessible place in exchange for growth. You may want to consider a CD to achieve one- to five-year goals, like buying a car or putting money down on a house.

Other savings alternatives include a 529 plan, 401(k) plan, stock portfolio or individual retirement account (which we'll talk about later). But again, these accounts aren't as liquid as a traditional savings account and shouldn't be used for emergency savings.

10. Try a money market fund

Some investments are (almost) entirely risk-free, making them a good place to grow your savings without the potential for complete loss. Two options are money market accounts and money market funds.

Money market accounts offer high returns in exchange for a large initial deposit, which will then determine your interest rate. You'll also need to maintain a high balance or risk a minimum balance fee. Similar to other savings accounts, you can make up to six transactions per month, not including ATM withdrawals. You can also write a check against the balance.

Money market funds are made up of several individual investments that are low risk and pay out regularly. The most common investments are Treasury bonds, cash and commercial paper (a debt issued by a corporation). In general, you can get a rate of return that's 1% or more, but it's important to remember that every mutual fund has a set management fee.

11. Control your subscriptions

Streaming subscriptions like Netflix and Spotify have been popular for years. Direct-to-consumer box services, for necessities like coffee and paper towels to niche products like bagels and whiskey, had been steadily growing in popularity. But thanks to the pandemic, they've taken off, occupying a bigger share of Americans' wallets.

While many subscription prices seem innocuous, costing less than $20 a month, those charges can add up. Individuals spent an average $640 a year on digital subscriptions, streaming services, cloud storage, dating apps, and online productivity tools, according to a report from the New York Times and Mint.

Begin by identifying how many subscriptions you're signed up for and what they're costing. If you have many different subscriptions, it can be difficult to keep track of them all. Apps like Trubill or Outflow can help automatically track recurring purchases and help you cancel or, in some cases, negotiate lower costs.

Determine how much you use each subscription and if its use is worth the cost. If you signed up for a free trial, set up a cancellation reminder to avoid being charged.

12. Monetize old stuff

Take stock of your assets. This includes the obvious like real estate and investments, but smaller personal belongings, like furniture also hold value. Got an old couch you never use? Or perhaps you're due for a closet clean-out? Your unwanted stuff can make cash to put toward your new money goals.

Try selling used clothing on websites like Poshmark, Thredup, and Tradesy, and old books on Bookscouter (or your local used book store). For all other belongings, including furniture and electronics, try Amazon, eBay, Craigslist, or Facebook Marketplace. Just about anything can be sold on Amazon and eBay, though both companies charge a fee to sell an item. Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace, on the other hand, are free to list, but you must arrange the payment and delivery method.

13. Look for discounts & rewards

Extra funds can beef up your emergency fund, pay off debt, or go toward another money goal. Discounts are a small way to get there.

For the financially savvy, discounts can be found just about anywhere you look. For example, if you're an Amazon Prime member, you can qualify for free shipping, audiobooks, cash rebates, Whole Foods deals and more. Discounts can be job-specific; for example, military members and nurses may get discounts on specific items, like car insurance. Discounts can also be seasonal, like back-to-school freebies and deals.

Maximize your money

14. Leverage bonuses

If you received a windfall recently, like a tax refund or stimulus payment, put it to good use. First, use the money to pay off debt — focus on unpaid bills that can have a lasting impact on your credit like cable, phone, utilities, or credit card debt, and then look at larger debt payments like your mortgage or student loans.

Next, consider your savings. If you dipped into your emergency fund this year, a bonus can be a good way to replenish it. If you have enough in an emergency fund and your bills are squared away, you can bolster your retirement account. Up the contributions to your 401(k), open an investing account with a robo-advisor or start an individual retirement account.

15. Claim tax breaks

The IRS has dozens of tax credits and deductions you can claim to reduce your tax liability. Credits are subtracted from the amount of taxes owed for the year, while deductions are subtracted from your income before calculating your taxes.

Understand all the credits and deductions available to you. When it comes to deductions, remember you can choose either standard deduction, which doubled in size after 2017, or itemize your deductions. You can't do both. Itemize your deductions only if they are greater than the standard deduction. It may help to talk to a tax professional about your best options.

16. Claim tax breaks

The child tax credit is available to parents — and in 2021, there were a number of changes made to the policy via the American Rescue Plan Act. The 2021 maximum credit, which is fully refundable, is $3,600 per child aged five or younger and $3,000 per child between the ages of six and 17. Those who were eligible for the 2021 CTC also received monthly advance payments, worth up to $300 per month per child. While those additional payments are set to run out in December 2021, House Democrats are proposing extending the program through 2025.

Another tax-advantaged account for families is the dependent care flexible spending account, offered as an optional benefit through an employer. The tax savings are the biggest advantage of using a dependent care FSA, which you can use to pay for dependent care. It's usually a no-brainer if your employer offers one and you'd be paying for care anyway.

Keep in mind an FSA eliminates taxes on expenses up to an annual limit ($10,500 for individuals and married couples in 2021). Any expenses outside the limit are paid out-of-pocket with after-tax dollars, and you must use the funds in your FSA by the end of the year or you will lose them.

17. Claim tax breaks

An updated W-4 can save you thousands throughout the year — especially if you relocated during the pandemic. The form tells your employer how much to withhold from each paycheck for taxes. If you overpay during the year, you will get a refund when you file your tax return. Sounds nice, but that refund is your money the government was holding on to, interest-free.

If you don't pay enough throughout the year, you will owe a bill come tax season. By filling out your W-4 properly and by updating it regularly, you can maximize your take-home pay and avoid a big refund or bill.

18. Maximize your 401(k)

If you are worried you haven't saved enough for retirement up to this point, you aren't alone. Millions of Americans are in the same boat, and 15% have no retirement savings whatsoever. You can start catching up on retirement savings if you earn income and have some time before reaching retirement age. It's important to act quickly because the sooner you get started, the greater potential earning power your savings will have.

A convenient way to contribute is through your employer's 401(k), a qualified retirement plan employers open to help their employees save. Contributions are tax-advantaged and earnings build up over time, thanks to compounding interest. If you're able, consider contributing more: Even just boosting contributions by a percentage point can lead to big gains over time. You can give up to $19,500 in 2021, with an additional $6,500 for workers over 50. And if your employer offers 401(k) matching, take advantage of it, or else you're leaving money on the table.

Other ways to maximize your retirement plan? Avoid withdrawing funds early (and let compounding interest do its thing). If your employer offers multiple investment options for your 401(k), pick funds with low fees. Many retirement savings plans also allow you to automate your contributions, either directly from your paycheck or automatic deposits from your bank account. This can help you stay on track with contributions.

19. Roll over your old 401(k)

If you're one of the millions of workers who quit or switched their jobs, make sure you're bringing your retirement savings with you. When you leave a job, you're no longer allowed to make contributions to that employer's 401(k) plan or take advantage of company matching. For this reason, people generally roll over a 401(k) when they change jobs or retire.

While there are many options for what to do with your existing 401(k), it often makes sense to roll it over for convenience, affordability, or greater investment choices. Moving your 401(k) into another plan could save you money in the long run or give you more freedom. Lower fees and a broader selection of investments in an independent retirement account or another employer-sponsored plan are two big motivators for a rollover.

If you're moving to a new employer, you may want to roll your old 401(k) into your new employer's plan. Your investments can continue to grow in a tax-advantaged plan, your retirement plan won't be split between multiple accounts and you can continue to make contributions as you always have.

You can also roll your 401(k) balance into an IRA, a tax-advantaged savings plan that lets you contribute and invest funds on your own, outside of your employer. IRAs can be useful when you don't have access to an employer-sponsored plan or you're maxing out your 401(k) contributions and you want to save more. They also might have lower fees and greater investment options than a 401(k).

20. Open an IRA

If you don't have access to a 401(k), or wish to save more, consider an individual retirement plan. You can contribute up to $6,000 in 2021, or $7,000 if you're 50 or older. Contributions to a traditional IRA are pre-tax and there are no income limits.

You have more control over the investments in an IRA than a 401(k), and you don't have to worry about rolling over funds if you lose your job or change careers. Contributions to traditional IRAs also reduce your tax burden (which comes in handy during tough financial times).

Another option is the Roth IRA, a savings account funded with after-tax dollars. You'll pay taxes up front on contributions, so you won't have to pay taxes on money you withdraw in retirement, unlike 401(k)s or traditional IRAs. The tax advantages of Roth IRAs are beneficial if you expect to retire in a higher tax bracket than you're in now, which is common since many people earn more later in their careers than at the beginning.

21. Create a college savings plan

If you're a parent or expecting, it's a good time to start thinking about your child's academic future — especially as college costs continue to rise. If you want to help your child afford a future college education, you can start while they're young. The earlier you get started, the more you can help reduce the financial burden.

There are many ways to save for a child's future education. You can open a traditional savings account, a high-yield savings account to keep up with inflation, a college-focused plan. A smart way to save for college is via a 529 plan, a tax-advantaged savings account that helps with education expenses, including college and private secondary education. Every state offers its own 529 plan, but participants can choose plans across state lines.

Whether you have a specific goal in mind or just want to save as much as possible, starting early can help you get there. Add a college savings contribution to your monthly budget, but make sure it's realistic and doesn't take away from other priorities.

22. Make credit card debt a priority

The good news: Credit card debt fell in 2020, as increased savings from staying at home made it possible for many Americans to pay down their balances. If you still have stubborn credit card debt lingering, now is the time to get rid of it for once and for all. Credit card debt is one of the more insidious forms because interest rates are high, so you'll want to prioritize getting it under control. There are a couple of ways to do so.

One popular way is the snowball method: If you have multiple loans, pay off the higher-interest loans first, starting with the one with the lowest balance. Not only will it give you a sense of completion, you'll also save on the interest those loans would have cost you in the future. But don't forget to make the minimum payment on the other loans to avoid going into default, which will hurt your credit.

Even if you're paying down debt, many experts agree it's important to prioritize saving. Focus first on loading up your emergency fund with one month's worth of living expenses. After that, turn to your debt.

23. Tackle student loan debt

Debt can be a major financial burden if you're trying to save for a financial goal like retirement. Student loan debt especially stands in the way of financial prosperity for many Americans. Many students take out loans to pay for higher education, but as tuition costs have risen, borrowing for college has become a costly investment that can take a lifetime to pay off. The average student loan debt in 2020 was $36,510, which is 67% higher than it was a decade ago.

Paying off your student loan debt is a multi-year commitment, just like a savings goal. If you're unhappy with your student loan interest rates, you may want to consider researching student loan consolidation or refinance services. Once you've prioritized your monthly debt contributions and compare that with your monthly bills, you can figure out how much to put toward other goals like retirement, investments, and an emergency fund.

24. Monitor credit

Your credit score helps you qualify for loans and credit cards, and a better score can mean lower interest rates, cheaper insurance and more. Watching your credit on a regular basis helps you know where you stand.

Regularly read your credit report and identify any mistakes or inaccuracies, which hurt your credit if not reported. Request your credit report via AnnualCreditReport.com. The three credit bureaus — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — are offering free weekly reports through April 2022.

Don't forget about your credit card statements. Your credit card statement includes information like changes to your account or late payment warnings. It also includes most recent transactions, helping you identify any fraudulent charges and track spending.

25. Boost your credit score

As we said before, a good credit score can indirectly save you money on things like insurance premiums and mortgage interest rates. A high score indicates you're likely to pay back a loan, which creditors love to see. The biggest risk to your score is late or missed payments. Your payment history accounts for 35% of your credit score, so prioritize paying all of your bills on time and in full whenever possible.

If your credit score recently took a dip, you'll need to act fast if you'd like to get a mortgage or loan within the next year. Your credit score may be standing in the way since it's the first thing a lender looks at when making a credit decision.

Disputing mistakes on your credit report is one way to boost your credit. But the most important action is to pay off any credit card balances and shore up any delinquent accounts. Try to limit new credit inquiries. They account for about 10% of your score, but too many in a short timeframe aren't a good look, and lenders might think you're desperate for credit and prone to overspend.

26. Open another credit card

With the U.S. economy slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, consumer demand is up for credit cards. Lenders are loosening their requirements and offering new rewards to attract new customers, making now a good time to consider getting a new card. Some credit cards come with additional rewards, from travel miles to cash back on groceries.

Applying for a credit card is relatively easy — it takes just a few clicks. But it helps to be strategic. Avoid the initial temptation of the sign-up bonus when weighing different cards. It's a great perk, but it's a one-time deal that doesn't offer much benefit in the long run. A card that doesn't offer a bonus but has better points or cash back rewards may work better for your needs.

If you travel frequently, you may want to prioritize a credit card with travel points over one that offers cash back. On the other hand, if you're planning on using your credit card for necessities like gas and groceries, a card with cash back rewards focused on those spending categories makes more sense for you.

Pay attention to other features outside rewards, like credit limit and interest rates. Above all else, make sure you can handle the added financial responsibility of another credit card. If you don't think you can pay off your balance in full each month, avoid applying.

Larger money moves

27. Or increase your credit limit

Another important reason to get a credit card is if you're frequently going over your credit utilization ratio, or the amount of credit you have at a given time. Using too much of your available credit will also affect your score, which is why it's best to keep your credit card balances low. For example, if your total credit limit is $10,000 and you have a balance of $1,000, then your credit utilization ratio is 10% ($1,000 divided by $10,000). Ideally, you want to keep your utilization ratio below 30%. Lower utilization — 10% or less — may be necessary for a perfect score.

You shouldn't open another credit card if you're unable to pay off your debt — but if you can responsibly manage increased spending, it may be a good idea to get another card to keep your utilization ratios low.

28. Refinance your mortgage

Mortgage rates fell significantly in 2020 to historic lows. While they've slightly risen in the past few months, it's still a good time to consider refinancing if you haven't already. Refinancing means taking out a new mortgage loan with lower rates and monthly payments in place of your old one. Most people refinance to get lower interest rates, but there are other benefits to refinancing your mortgage, like getting a shorter loan term or changing the type of loan, like switching from an adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM) to a fixed-rate one. You can also receive a part of your home's equity as cash.

Refinancing a mortgage can lead to a lower or higher monthly mortgage payment, depending on your goals. Generally, refinancing saves you money in the long term — but the up-front costs (you'll have to pay closing costs again) could cancel out any monthly savings or delay them too far in the future to make a difference. That's why it's key to look at your long-term financial goals and do some cost comparison before refinancing to see if it's worth it for you.

29. Buy a home

Thinking of buying a house? So is everyone else. It's a hot real estate market, and doesn't seem to be cooling down anytime soon. Home prices are at a record high. The median price of an existing home sold in March 2021 was $329,100. That's a 17.2% increase from March of last year, according to the National Association of Realtors.

If you're financially stable and can take on a mortgage, maybe it's time for you to buy. While the market is tight, it's difficult but not impossible to secure a home. Renters may also want to consider home buying as a way to build equity.

Be realistic when shopping. Make sure you are looking for homes you can actually afford. It's easy to get caught up in a whirlwind of bidding, but don't offer up money you don't have. Due to the competition, you may have to bid higher than the asking price on a house, so keep this in mind when evaluating your savings. Use a mortgage calculator to determine how much your monthly payment will be, but keep in mind there are lots of hidden costs that come with home ownership, like homeowners insurance and property taxes.

Next, get your finances in check. Mortgage lenders will typically look at your recent financial history, including your spending habits and credit score, to determine if you qualify for a loan. Try cleaning up your spending a few months prior to applying.

To stand out from other buyers, consider offering a big down payment. Making a larger down payment can also decrease the size of your mortgage loan. If you put down at least 20% you'll also avoid having to pay for private mortgage insurance, but you may want to consider offering more. Also, getting pre-approved by a mortgage lender before shopping shows sellers you're serious about buying a home. If possible, ask your lender if you can start the underwriting process, which is the process of approving your mortgage, early. Underwriting is one of the longest steps in the home-buying process, and sellers may be more willing to sell their home to someone who's one step closer to being approved.

30. Sell your home

As we said before, it's a great time to sell your home, as inventory is low. You may be able to set a more competitive price on your home. It's especially advantageous to make this move if you're looking to downsize. Mortgage rates are extremely low, so it's possible to secure a more affordable mortgage on your smaller space.

There are a few personal factors to consider when deciding whether to sell your home or not. The first is simply lifestyle changes. A new job, a growing family or the need to downsize are all good reasons to sell your home. Some lifestyle changes, such as a new career, may put you on a stricter timeline. Or maybe you may want to time the sale of your home to align with a financial event, such as buying a new home or retiring.

You should try to time your sale to get the best offer. Your specific region may differ based on local factors such as home availability, the job market and other conditions. You need to balance your ability to sell your home against your need to move out. If your ability to wait is unrestricted, you should sell your home at the ideal time to make the most money. If you need to unload your home quickly, you may not have the luxury of waiting for the right time.

There's a relatively new option for homeowners who want to sell their home but wish to avoid a lot of the typical work that comes along with it. iBuyers are private companies that can make an offer on a home in a very short time frame, with the intent on making repairs to generate a profit. Companies like Offerpad, Opendoor, and Zillow are buying homes directly from sellers without the need for scheduling multiple home showings or going through a long, complicated sales process.

31. Sell your car

It's a wonderful time to sell a car, thanks to low inventory and high prices. If you have a car to sell, the first thing you should do is get a few online estimates of your car's worth.

The fastest way to get rid of a car is to sell it to a dealership. But if you go this route, dealers may not be willing to pay fair market value for your car. After all, their goal is to buy your car for a cheap price so they can sell it for a profit. If you are interested in selling your car to a dealership, start by going to a dealer that sells the same make. You can always try an off-brand dealership if you're not happy with their offer. Take the time to ask around to see what various dealers are willing to pay.

You can also try and sell it yourself. Although selling your old car yourself requires some work, it can give you the chance to sell it for a fair price or even more than it's worth. You can try traditional selling methods such as newspaper ads but you're more likely to have success if you sell it online. Try websites like Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace that allow you to post an ad and sell for free.

If you'd like to buy a new or used car, you may be better off trading in your car rather than selling it. By trading it in, you can reduce the amount you need to pay for your new or used car and avoid the hassle of trying to sell your car on your own. The trade-in offer you receive will depend on the value of your car as well as whether the dealer already has similar cars in their lot, your car's condition, and whether repairs will need to be made. Remember that if you don't like the trade in offer you get, you have no obligation to accept it.

Lastly, you can try an online selling platform. Carvana and Vroom are two examples of online platforms that give you the chance to easily sell your car. After you get and accept an offer, Carvana and Vroom will pick up your car at a time that's convenient for you. Once your car has passed a quick inspection, you'll get paid on the spot.

32. Consider a career change

It's a job seekers market. Many employees are quitting and switching jobs in what's being called the "Great Resignation." Job openings hit a record-high 10.9 million in July, and there are record numbers of openings. Take a moment to evaluate your current job, and where you see yourself in the next few years. If you think you're ready to make a change, make sure you get organized first.

Create a written plan including your industry, companies of interest and any specifics you're looking for — including benefits, workplace culture, team dynamics, or office location. Update your resume if you haven't already. Think about parts of your work history that show your key contributions, including projects and initiatives you've led. You want a result-focused resume. Sign up for job alerts in your inbox, and apply to any jobs of interest as soon as possible.

Knowing the right person can help you find the opportunity you want. Set up informational interviews. Take the time to fully research them before reaching out, and be earnest in your request. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is up to date. It's often the first page that appears when someone searches your name online.

Now may be the time to take an online course to revamp your skills or acquire new ones. Learning new skills can set you apart from other candidates and better position you for a career change. Make a list of the skills you wish you had or are becoming vital in your industry, and research programs that fit what you're looking for. There are many courses and certificates available online (and some are free).

33. Think outside your area code

The pandemic forced a majority of the workforce to ditch the office and work from home. Many employers are considering making the change flexible or permanent. This means you can start searching for opportunities outside your immediate area. Rather than looking for jobs based on location, you can search based on skill set on job sites like LinkedIn, Monster, Indeed, or ZipRecruiter.

If you've always wanted to relocate, now is the chance to find work that will accommodate that wish. Many employees are considering moving. 80% of workers said they would relocate during the pandemic according to a survey released in April by Graebel, a relocation services provider. If you want to relocate, you may be able to negotiate housing assistance from your potential employer.

34. Beat the resume robots

A recent Harvard Business School survey found that 90% of employers use automated recruiting systems to manage the pipeline of job applicants. These systems use artificial intelligence and take recruiters' preferences into account. They make winnowing down a sea of applicants faster and more efficient, but they can also miss potentially good workers because they don't meet the all precise requirements recruiters tell the algorithm to look for.

To help keep your application from getting weeded out, try tailoring your resume to the specific job. This will take a little extra work, but it makes sense: Even jobs with similar titles might have slightly different requirements. It doesn't mean you have to rewrite your resume from scratch. Rearranging your resume and updating your executive summary to make sure it includes the top skill in the job description could be the difference between getting past the bots or getting cut.

You'll also want to make sure you're using the right keywords in your application, quantifying specific numbers and impact, and calling out hard skills. A classic way to get around resume algorithms is to make a connection with a human being at the company. When applying to any job, tap your network and see if anyone you know can make an introduction.

35. Negotiate job offers

You should always negotiate a job offer — if not, you're just leaving money on the table. You should have an idea of the salary and benefits you want before negotiating a job offer. Compensation is more than a salary. Consider a company's benefits package, including the retirement plan, insurance, paid time off, remote work, and stock options. Look for salary insights and workplace reviews on sites like Salary.com and Glassdoor.

If you've been lowballed on a job offer, don't say yes or no immediately. Take a few days to consider the position and review the benefits package. Make a list of your target salary, additional needs and any nice-to-haves, like more vacation days. Once you're comfortable with a specific arrangement, you can come back and tell the company you're ready to sign, which shows commitment to the role.

36. Start a side hustle or passive income stream

If you're saving up for a specific goal, like buying a home, or just want more security in retirement, passive income or a side hustle is a great way to increase your wealth.

Side hustles include driving for a ride-share service like Uber or Lyft, dog sitting or babysitting and running errands via TaskRabbit or Craigslist gigs. Or, make your passion a side hustle. Consider freelance writing or graphic design on the side. To get started, find your niche. Decide how much work you're willing to put in and whether the income you can earn will be worth the time. Above all else, make sure you have a structured plan to pay self-employment taxes: Keep track of your income and expenses and regularly set aside a percentage for Uncle Sam.

Passive income, like the name suggests, is income that requires little to no effort to maintain. While that sounds ideal, it's not a get-rich-quick scheme. It often takes work to get off the ground. Examples of passive income include renting out your home, investing, or selling a product online, like an e-book. The biggest advantage is the future freedom you'll earn once passive income starts rolling in. The extra money can help you retire early, increase your wealth and can protect you in the event of job loss. Similar to a side hustle, consider how much work you're willing to put in and the best path to get there. Remember, it may take some time to see results.

37. Revisit your investing plan with a robo-advisor

Learning to invest is a goal on many Americans' to-do lists, but the sheer amount of information can be overwhelming for beginners. The market is performing much better than it did in spring 2020, but it's still important to have a solid investing plan before buying. Consider how much risk you're willing to take on, your financial goals, and time horizon.

Robo-advisors provide services typically performed by larger financial institutions, but use computer algorithms to create and manage an investment portfolio. They bear the promise of being easy and simple to use. It will answer a couple questions about goals and risk, transfer your money and send you off to the investing races. Most robo-advisers allow users to set up automatic transfers and reinvest gains for you, so you can truly set it and forget it.

The big benefit of robo-advisors is the cost. Most have no initial start-up costs because they are passively managed — a buy-and-hold strategy that requires less active monitoring. Several robo-advisors don't charge administrative or management fees. There are some downsides, however: while robo-advisors may offer educational support, they don't know your personal situation, including biases and emotions, like a human financial advisor would. But if you already feel confident in your investing ability, a robo-advisor may be the way to go.

38. Avoid the hype

Social media platforms are a hub for hot money takes. Reddit, a community and content-driven platform, has recently been moving the market. For example, a group of investors used the platform to drive up the share price of GameStop, a brick-and-mortar video game retailer. The GameStop stock had enough hype to be officially dubbed a meme stock — a trendy stock that gains traction online and is usually popular among millennials.

Even if social media makes a stock look like a good investment, it's important to know what you're getting into. Meme stocks can generate a lot of money if you already own the stock or get in at just the right time, but it's not a great long-term strategy.

There will always be some risk investing in the stock market. The best way to protect yourself when trading individual stocks on apps is investing money you're willing to lose. It's also important to do your own research on stocks that get hyped up on the internet. Above all else, take a long-term approach. While there's never a guarantee investing will result in future gains, many people may benefit from simply riding out the dips in the market.

Protect your assets

39. Learn about crypto

Cryptocurrency is the hottest investment on the block these days — defined as digital money transferred online without a middleman. You've probably heard of Bitcoin or Ether, two popular types of cryptocurrency. Unlike cash, which is guaranteed by governments, cryptocurrency is backed by an open-source algorithm. But it is a currency, and since it's completely digital, cryptocurrency allows users to make anonymous payments with virtually no fees. Many use crypto as an investment, buying and trading the digital currency on apps like Robinhood or Coinbase, with the hopes of growing their wealth or making a quick buck.

If you're considering investing in crypto, make sure to only invest what you can afford to lose. Exactly what percentage of your portfolio should go into Bitcoin or Ether depends largely on your financial goals and risk tolerance — but make sure you understand just how risky these investments are. On the other hand, if you have some extra "fun" money and want to take a risk (and don't have a set time you need to withdraw the money), investing in cryptocurrency may be for you.

40. Make a financial climate change plan

Record-breaking wildfire seasons, stronger hurricanes, and historic cold snaps that hit Texas in early 2021 have given us a grim look at the new normal of climate change. Not only are these natural disasters putting human life at risk, they're also leading to billions of dollars in property damage. In fact, climate change may already be affecting your biggest investment, as rising sea levels are driving home prices down.

A home is likely the most expensive thing you'll ever buy. If you're worried about how climate change will affect the value of your home or the home you want to buy, do your research. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Sea Level Rise Viewer can show you how water levels up to 10 feet above present day will impact your home.

If your home or the home you want to buy is a flood risk, there are ways of protecting your property, but they range in cost. Simply cleaning your gutters can mitigate flooding by directing water away from your home. In many areas, homeowners have elected to elevate their homes, but that can cost as much as the home itself. If that cost doesn't outweigh the value of living there, it might be time to cut your losses and move. Some areas offer buyouts to people in flood-prone areas.

41. Re-shop homeowners insurance

As the impacts of climate change worsen, homeowners insurance is getting more expensive and harder to obtain in states that are considered to be at high risk of natural disasters. Many insurance companies are choosing not to insure homes in areas with increased risk of wildfires, hurricanes, and tornadoes, or are significantly increasing rates to make up for the unprecedented losses in recent years.

Being underinsured or uninsured can be financially dangerous if you were to get in an accident or suffer home damage — so it helps to shop around and understand what options you have. A survey by Policygenius found one in three

Americans have never re-shopped for better homeowners or car insurance coverage. If so, you could be leaving savings on the table.

Re-shopping can lead to lower premiums, but make sure you have enough coverage. Lower premiums are a good reason to shop around for a new policy, but you also want to keep your property and casualty coverage up to date. Basic homeowners insurance, for instance, doesn't cover damage from flooding or earthquakes. If your area has become more prone to these events in recent years, it's important to upgrade. Insurers commonly issue moratoriums on buying new policies when property damage is imminent.

42. & auto insurance

Re-shopping your auto insurance every year can help save money, as rates fluctuate. Shopping around with different insurance carriers will ensure you have the best rates possible. Shop for home and auto insurance at the same time, especially if you're bundling policies.

Most carriers offer discounts to customers who purchase multiple policies, but you won't necessarily get the best deal by tapping your car insurer for homeowners insurance (or vice versa). Consider using a broker to find you the best deal (and avoid combing through the fine print of multiple policies).

43. & health insurance

Shopping around for a lower rate applies to health insurance, too. Your employer's open enrollment period is an opportunity to change or update your existing employee benefits. Use this time to assess how your lifestyle and health needs may have changed over the past year. You may want to opt for coverage with lower premiums (but higher deductibles).

Employees who have recently been laid off can stay on their employer's health insurance plan for up to 18 months, through COBRA. Other options include joining a spouse or family member's employer-sponsored plan, shopping on the federal marketplace or applying for Medicaid.

Health savings accounts are also valuable. Available to those with high-deductible health plans, HSAs can be used to pay for medical expenses. They have numerous tax advantages and the balance in your account can be carried over from year to year. Consider making the $3,650 maximum annual contribution to your HSA if you're under 55 (or $4,650 if you're over 55).

44. Have a plan for medical debt

We are unfortunately still in a pandemic. It's more important than ever to have health coverage, especially as COVID-19 hospital bills are wiping out Americans' savings accounts. In 2020, collection agencies held $140 billion in medical debt. Health insurance isn't a guaranteed solution, either — health plans don't cover everything, and many of them require the policyholder to dig deep into their pockets before coverage kicks in.

The best step you can take to avoid COVID-19 hospital bills is to get vaccinated, if you haven't already, since the vaccines make hospitalizations far less likely and less severe. If you're unable to get a vaccine, wind up in the very small percentage of breakthrough cases that require hospitalization, or have another medical event that leads to a massive bill, there are actionable steps you can take to avoid, minimize, or cope with your medical debt.

There is a 180-day waiting period before medical debt can be reported to the credit bureaus. If it is reported, it will stay on your credit for up to seven years. That said, you should start working on a plan of attack now. That may include checking your bill for mistakes, negotiating it down or working out a payment plan. It will take time to sort through your bills and make the necessary calls to insurers or medical providers. Medical billing is complicated and difficult to navigate on your own. You may want to hire some professional help — it will cost you, but it could end up saving you a lot of cash in the long run. Look for patient advocates or medical billing advocates in your area to help you reduce your bill.

45. Buy private life insurance

Life insurance is one of the best ways to financially protect your family if the unexpected happens. But most families don't have enough protection in place. Not only does life insurance financially protect your partner if tragedy occurs, it can also financially protect your children. It's important for both spouses to get life insurance to completely cover their assets.

While a majority of American adults have life insurance, almost one-third have only group coverage through their employer. While this is a great workplace benefit, this type of life insurance is typically not enough in terms of payout. If you switch jobs to an employer without life insurance, or you lose your job (which can happen in a recession), you lose coverage. Private life insurance only gets more expensive with age, so the best time to apply is now.

46. & private disability insurance

Did you know one in four workers will become disabled before they retire? Losing your income for months — in addition to possible medical bills — is more than most Americans can handle without going into debt.

Long-term disability insurance provides comprehensive, affordable income protection. When you're unable to perform your normal job duties because of an injury, illness, or other condition — whether or not it's permanent — disability insurance replaces a certain percentage of your gross monthly income. It won't completely replace your pay, but it provides enough so you can afford necessities without drastically changing your lifestyle.

While your job may offer disability insurance, it typically doesn't cover enough and you may need to supplement it with a private disability policy. And, like other benefits, it's tied to your employment — so if you lose your job, you lose the policy. If you have a short-term policy through your employer, pairing it with a private long-term disability policy will offer the most comprehensive financial protection.

47. Make an estate plan

There's no better time to think about having a comprehensive financial plan in place for the unexpected. An estate plan can arrange for what happens to your belongings after you die. Many people feel that an estate plan is only for rich people, but that isn't the case. If you own anything of value or if you have dependents who need to be cared for if you were to pass unexpectedly, you should have a plan. If you haven't planned for who receives these assets and belongings by writing a will and naming a beneficiary, then the courts may ultimately decide what happens. It's important to keep these documents up to date.

Your estate plan gives instructions on your end-of-life medical decisions. If you already have an estate plan, ensure everything is up to date, and if you don't, it might be an appropriate time to start. Some documents you need include: a last will and testament, living will, trust, bank accounts, and power of attorney forms.

48. Create a will

A last will and testament is one of the most simple yet effective parts of an estate plan. Use it to pass along your assets (even if you don't have anything of high value), name a guardian for your minor children and choose an executor who will carry its terms. You don't need a lawyer to make a will, though they can help make sure it's ironclad. For more complex needs, open a trust, which will hold assets on your behalf and put restrictions on how your assets can be used by the beneficiaries. Designate someone to receive the money in your bank and investment accounts, including life insurance policies. Lastly, a power of attorney form authorizes someone to make financial decisions on your behalf if you are unable to.

While you're at it, check in with your parents about how the recession has affected their financial situation. They may also need to create an estate plan.

49. Work with a professional

Financial advisors are professionals who help families manage their money. Many advisors are certified financial planners, meaning they took a rigorous course to become financial experts. Financial advisors typically cost more — the average comprehensive plan costs around $2,400. The key benefit of CFPs is their ability to take a personal, holistic approach to your finances.

A good planner will help you set realistic long-term goals and guide you through complex topics like choosing the right retirement portfolio or saving for your child's education. Financial professionals can help identify missing pieces of your financial puzzle, including fees or medical bills you haven't paid, or a specific money goal you've been putting off. Having a professional help you through tough money decisions can help you avoid making rash decisions.

50. Do nothing

This sounds counterintuitive, we know. But if you have a solid financial foundation in place, the best course of action is to be patient and stay the course, especially if your finances are in a good place.

If you've done one (or all 50!) of these money moves, you're already in a better place financially then you were before, and can be more prepared to weather the next storm.

About Policygenius

Policygenius transforms the insurance journey for today's consumer, providing a one-stop platform where customers can compare options from top insurance carriers, get unbiased expert advice, buy policies, and manage their insurance portfolio, in one seamless, integrated experience. Our proprietary technology platform integrates with the leading life, disability, and home and auto insurance carriers and delivers an exceptional digital experience for both consumers and insurance carriers. Since 2014, our content, digital tools, and experts have served as a resource for millions of people on their insurance journey, and we have sold more than $120 billion in coverage.

About the author

Hanna Horvath is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ and managing editor for growth at Policygenius. She helps produce the Policygenius Money newsletter.

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