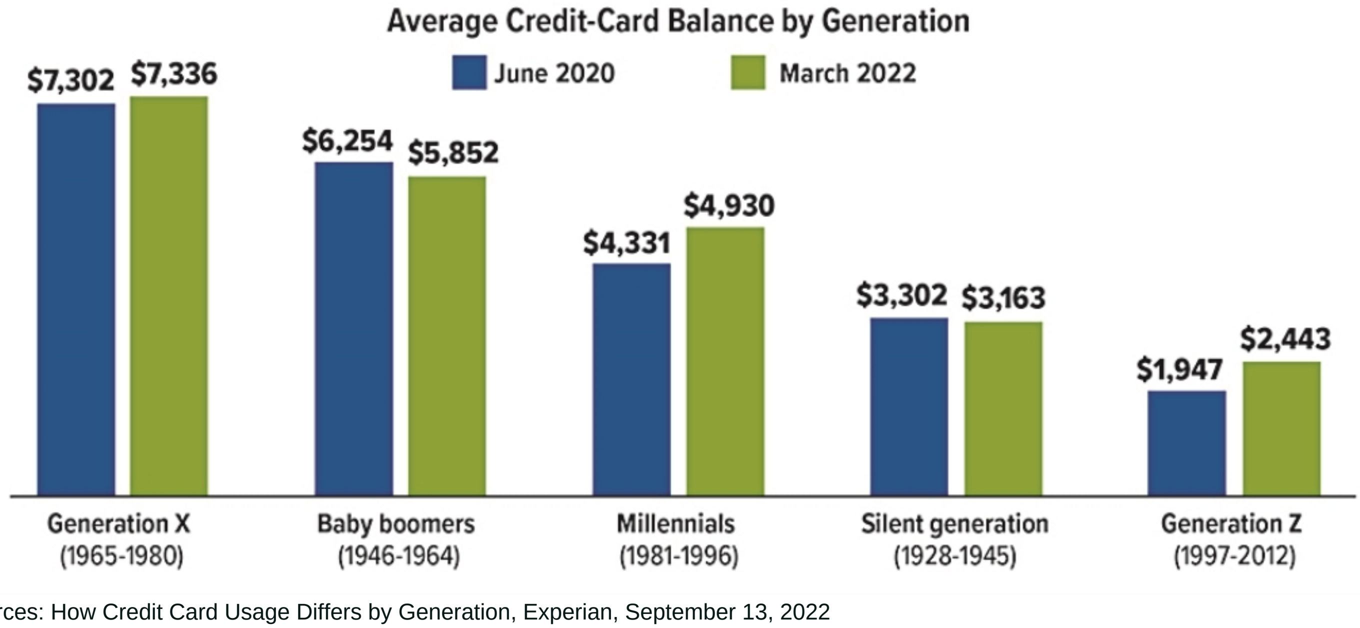
Community Wealth Advisors

Younger Generations See Fastest Growth in Credit-Card Balances

During the past two years, credit-card balances of younger generations have grown at a faster rate than for older generations. From June 2020 to March 2022, the average credit-card balance for Generation Z grew from $1,947 to $2,443 — more than a 25% increase. The average credit-card balance for millennials grew from $4,331 to $4,930 during that same period — close to a 14% increase.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, older generations spent the past two years paying down their credit-card debt, leading to a decline in their balances. The average credit-card balance of baby boomers dropped more than 6%, while the silent generation's average balance dropped more than 4%.



Sources: How Credit Card Usage Differs by Generation, Experian, September 13, 2022

Should You Consider Tax-Loss Harvesting?

Stock market losses can be rough on your portfolio's bottom line, but they may also offer the potential to reduce your tax liability and possibly buy shares at a discount. Whether this strategy — called tax-loss harvesting — is appropriate for you depends on a variety of factors, including your current portfolio performance, your long-term goals, and your current and future taxable income.

Gains and Losses

When an investment loses money, it's often best to look beyond current performance and hold it for the long term. Sometimes, though, you may want to sell a losing investment, which could help balance gains from selling an investment that has appreciated or reduce your taxable income even if you do not have gains.

Capital gains and losses are classified as long term if the investment was held for more than one year, and short term if it was held for one year or less. Long-term gains are taxed at a rate of 0%, 15%, or 20% depending on your income. Short-term gains are taxed at your ordinary income tax rate, which may be much higher than your capital gains rate.

For tax purposes, capital losses are applied first to like capital gains and then to the other type of gains; for example, long-term losses are applied first to long-term gains and then to short-term gains. Up to $3,000 of any remaining losses can then be applied to your ordinary income for the current year ($1,500 if you are married filing separately). Finally, any remaining losses can be carried over to be applied to capital gains or ordinary income in future years. For most taxpayers, the biggest benefit comes when applying losses to short-term gains or ordinary income.

Selling, Buying, and Washing

Some investors sell losing investments with the idea of harvesting the tax loss and then buying the same investment while its price remains low. In order to discourage this, the IRS has a *wash-sale* rule, which prohibits buying "substantially identical stock or securities" within 30 days prior to or after a sale. This also applies to securities purchased by your spouse or a company you own.

It is impossible to time the market, but under the right circumstances, harvesting a tax loss and then buying the same security at least 30 days later (i.e., after the wash-sale period) could potentially result in a lower tax liability when you sell that security later at a gain.

2023 Income and Capital Gains Tax Rates

Taxable income		
Income tax rate	**Single filers**	**Joint filers**
10%	Up to $11,000	Up to $22,000
12%	$11,001 to $44,725	$22,001 to $89,450
22%	$44,726 to $95,375	$89,451 to $190,750
24%	$95,376 to $182,100	$190,751 to $364,200
32%	$182,101 to $231,250	$364,201 to $462,500
35%	$231,251 to $578,125	$462,501 to $693,750
37%	Over $578,125	Over $693,750

Taxable income		
Long-term capital gains tax rate	**Single filers**	**Joint filers**
0%	Up to $44,625	Up to $89,250
15%	$44,626 to $492,300	$89,251 to $553,850
20%	Over $492,300	Over $553,850

This is most likely if you repurchase the security at a similar or lower price, and you are in a higher tax bracket at the time you take the loss than at the time you take the gain — for example, if you take the loss while working and sell when you are retired.

Any year in which your taxable income falls within the 0% capital gains rate is an opportune time to take gains, and any losses in that year would be applied to short-term gains or ordinary income. Keep in mind that capital gains and losses apply only when investments are sold in a taxable account.

Tax-loss harvesting is a complex strategy, and it would be wise to consult your financial professional before taking action. Although there is no guarantee that working with a financial professional will improve investment results, a professional can evaluate your objectives and available resources and help you consider appropriate long-term financial strategies.

All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful.

Debt Optimization Strategies

To help improve your financial situation, you might consider reducing your debt. Before starting any debt payoff strategy (or combination of strategies), be sure you understand the terms of your debts, including interest rates, payment requirements, and any prepayment or other penalties.

Start with Understanding Minimum Payments

You are generally required to make minimum payments on your debt, based on factors set by the lender. Failure to make the minimum payments can result in penalties, higher interest rates, and default. If you make only the minimum payments, it may take a long time to pay off the debt, and you will have to pay more interest over the life of the loan. This is especially true of credit-card debt.

Your credit-card statement will indicate your current monthly minimum payment. To find the factors used in calculating the minimum payment amount each month, you can review terms in your credit-card contract, which can change over time.

The minimum payment for credit cards is usually equal to the greater of a minimum percentage multiplied by the card's balance (plus interest on the balance, in some cases) or a base minimum amount (such as $15). For example, assume you have a credit card with a current balance of $2,000, an interest rate of 18%, a minimum percentage of 2% plus interest, and a base minimum amount of $15. The initial minimum payment required would be $70 [greater of ($2,000 x 2%) + ($2,000 x (18% ÷ 12)) or $15]. If you made only the minimum payments (as recalculated each month), it would take 114 months (almost 10 years) to pay off the debt, and you would pay total interest of $1,314. For consumer loans, the minimum payment is generally the same as the regular monthly payment.

Make Additional Payments

Making payments in addition to your regular or minimum payments can reduce the time it takes to pay off your debt and the total interest paid. Additional payments could be made periodically, such as monthly, quarterly, or annually.

Using the previous example ($70 initial minimum payment), if you made monthly payments of $100 on the credit card debt, it would take only 24 months to pay off the debt, and total interest would be just $396.

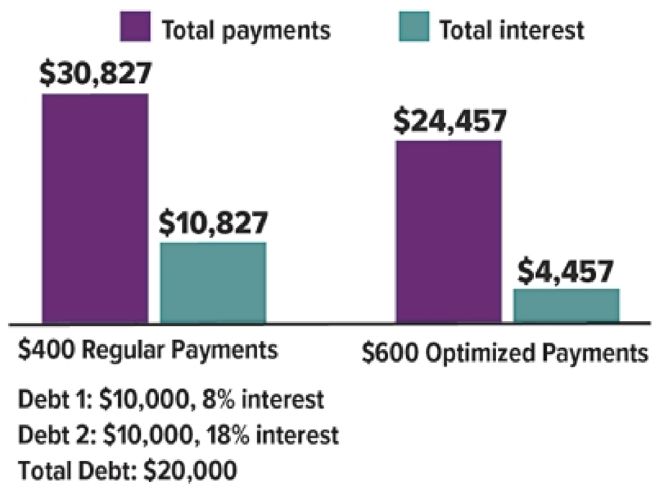
Here's another example. Assume you have a current mortgage balance of $300,000. The interest rate is 5%, the monthly payment is $2,372, and the remaining term is 15 years. If you make regular payments, you will pay total interest of $127,029. However, if you pay an additional $400 each month, it will take only 12 years and one month to pay off the mortgage, and you will pay total interest of just $99,675.

Pay Off Highest Interest-Rate Debt First

One way to potentially optimize payment of your debt is to first make the minimum payments required for each debt and then allocate any remaining dollars to debt with the highest interest rates.

For example, assume you have two debts, you owe $10,000 on each, and each has a monthly payment of $200. The interest rate for one debt is 8%; the interest rate for the other is 18%. If you make regular payments of $400, it will take 94 months until both debts are paid off, and you will pay total interest of $10,827. However, if you make monthly payments of $600, with the extra $200 paying off the debt with an 18% interest rate first, it will take only 41 months to pay off the debts, and total interest will be just $4,457.

Pay Off Highest Interest-Rate Debt First



Use a Debt-Consolidation Loan

If you have multiple debts with high interest rates, it may be possible to pay them off with a debt-consolidation loan. Typically, this will be a home-equity loan with a lower interest rate than the rates on the debts being consolidated. (Note that a federal income tax deduction is not currently allowed for interest on home-equity indebtedness unless it is used to substantially improve your home.) Keep in mind that a home equity-loan potentially puts your home at risk because it serves as collateral, and the lender could foreclose if you fail to repay. There also may be closing costs and other charges associated with the loan.

All examples are hypothetical and used for illustrative purposes only and do not represent any specific investments or products. Fixed interest rates and payment terms are shown, but actual interest rates and payment terms may change over time. Actual results will vary.

Random Acts of Financial Kindness

Acts of kindness, even small ones, can have lasting benefits. You may not always see the impact of your investment of time or money, but your acts of kindness will ripple through the lives of people you know...or don't know. Here are some ideas for practicing financial kindness.

Pay It Forward...or Backward

- Hand out gift cards in small denominations. Add in an extra one with a note asking that it be paid forward to someone else.
- Ask the manager of your local grocery store if you can buy pizza to thank employees for their hard work.
- Give a generous tip along with an encouraging note.
- Pay for the lunch of someone behind you in line.
- Buy extra groceries to donate to the food pantry the next time you shop.
- Recognize someone else's kind act with a note of thanks, public recognition, or a small gift.

Each year, celebrate Random Acts of Kindness Day on February 17 and World Kindness Day on November 13.

Share Your Time and Talents

- Hire an intern or volunteer to mentor someone.
- Share what you've learned about finances with someone who could benefit from your expertise.
- Write a job recommendation.
- Offer your professional services for free.

Help Others Prosper

- Contribute to a scholarship fund in your community to help a student finish school.
- Donate books on finance to your local school or library.
- Support a financial literacy program.
- Help someone save for the future.
- Set up monthly donations to a favorite charity in someone's honor.
- Start a fundraiser for a good cause.

Don't Forget to Be Kind to Yourself

- Attend a financial seminar or webinar to learn how you might improve your financial health.
- Accept help from others and allow them to experience the joy that comes from being kind.
- Save for a rainy day.