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Top of Mind
Roth IRA Mishaps

I've seen a few errors regarding Roth IRAs in the new year. Six key notes:

Higher Contribution Limit: Roth IRA limits are \$7,500 in 2026 which is \$500 more than 2025. Make sure to update any recurring contributions to stay on track to max out.

Fill the Prior Year: Most brokerages put recurring contributions automatically into the *new* calendar year, even if you still have room for the prior one.

Since 2025 Roth contributions are allowed until April 15, 2026, it's wise to fill the \$7k 2025 bucket first. Your auto-draft may need a manual override.

Earning More: If you're single and will make over \$153k this year your Roth IRA eligibility could be disallowed. For married folk, the phaseout starts at \$242k. If those figures seem close to your expected income, wait until 2027 to confirm eligibility.

Earning Less: Conversely, see if you're eligible for the Saver's Credit – it gives lower income workers a tax credit for contributing to retirement accounts like a Roth or Traditional IRA.

Backdoor Roth: For those blatantly over the income limit who still want to get dollars growing tax free, there is a backdoor option; however, it is not a DIY project. The pro-rata rule often causes issues.

Inheriting a Roth: If you inherit a Roth IRA from a non-spouse, you generally have 10 years to empty it. If you don't need the money right away, letting it grow tax-free (until year 10) can be a savvy decision.



The Long Awaited BILT Card,
Points on Mortgage Payments

I think BILT is the most revolutionary credit card/rewards company of our era.

They first made a name for themselves by allowing people to pay rent through their ecosystem without fees to earn points and now they've expanded into mortgages.

There is **so much** to say about BILT – like their incredibly innovative gamification tactics, neighborhood strategy, the truck loads of money they lost Wells Fargo, and now their dramatic 2.0 unveiling.

The CEO literally sent a mass email with a new proposal after people erupted online. For the record, I think the “response” email was the plan since the beginning which is absolutely brilliant marketing in my view.

Honestly, I could write a juicy Netflix series...

Here's the deal. BILT will now allow users to earn points on rent AND mortgage payments for free, but the number of points earned will depend on how much you spend.

To quote the CEO, “It is probably not a surprise to any of you, but if members only purchase four bananas and earn free rent points, it doesn't allow us to sustain such a rich value proposition for everyone.”

Here's the simplest example I can give:

Say your mortgage/rent is \$2k a month. To get 2k BILT points you will need to spend at least \$1,500 on the card in addition to your mortgage/rent payment. If you want to get in the weeds, read this article.

BILT now offers three cards – a free option, \$95/year, and \$495/year. As expected, the higher annual fees come with bigger benefits and spending multipliers.

Cassidy and I chose the free option because it's not our primary card and we don't have a big mortgage payment. (We used it for our HOA fees in the past.)

For those who use BILT as their primary card, I like the annual fee options if they have a big rent/mortgage payment. I did make a spreadsheet for those interested.

It's worth mentioning that BILT points are objectively valuable. They can be redeemed in their travel portal for a decent rate and/or transferred to solid partners.

The first mover in this space, the Mesa Homeowner card, recently shut down. We'll see if BILT can survive. I hope so because it's a fascinating company.

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They Must Be Smart
The Language Bell Curve

Real financial experts can make complex ideas simple; complexity often signals the opposite. Don't be fooled by fancy language.

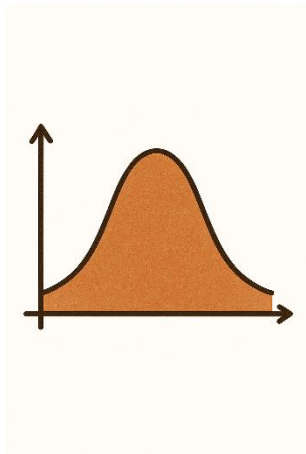
Don't File Too Early
Being Patient with Taxes

It seems that people are antsy to file their taxes in hopes of a refund. Make *sure* all your documents arrive before asking the IRS for your money back.

Collective Wisdom
Articles, Tweets, & More

Taxi Drivers vs Bus Drivers, Why the Yield Curve is Steepening, Health Passes Before Wealth, Absolutely Absurd Wedding Budgets, and More...

They Must Be Smart



“We can’t understand him because he uses big words and talks about complex concepts. He must be smart though.”

I’ve heard some iteration of that quote countless times since I started working in the finance world and it’s bothersome.

Einstein famously said that if you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough. I think that’s true, but I like the language bell curve visual better.

There are exceptions to this illustration; complex language can be most direct.

That said, more often than not I think we have an illusion of knowledge.

The Y-Axis is the number and complexity of words needed to explain a topic.

The X-Axis is your knowledge level.

As your topical knowledge grows, you should be able to explain it with both fewer words and fewer complex words.

The language bell curve depicts this progression well because when your knowledge level is low, you don’t have much to say.

As you learn more about a topic and move toward the center of the bell curve, your knowledge level is higher, but you need lots of big and complex words to explain the topic because you’re not yet an expert. This is where most people sit.

The furthest right on the bell curve represents someone who is a master. They understand all the big words and elaborate sentences but can say the same thing with simpler language.

Don’t be fooled by fancy words.

Don’t File Too Early

It seems that people are antsy to file their taxes in hopes of a refund, especially this year given the recent tax law changes.

Be patient. Why? It’s an “interest-free loan” to the government, right? Yes, but you do not want to be forced to amend.

How could that happen? Quite easily. I speak from personal experience.

Companies must send W-2s by January 31, but brokerage firms typically issue complete 1099s in mid-February and can follow up with amended or consolidated versions into March.

A 1099 reports income like interest, dividends, and gains - and sometimes you get surprised with unexpected forms from asset sales you forgot about. It’s common.

And it’s not just 1099s. K-1s from partnerships, real estate funds, and private investments often arrive in March or even early April. If you file too early, those late-arriving documents can force you right back into amendment territory.

Article Arcade

Taxi Drivers vs. Bus Drivers

[Range Widely](#)

This is another article about using technology as a crutch, but I found the first study incredibly interesting. At least read the taxi drivers vs bus study. What are we outsourcing that we should be doing ourselves? And what price might we pay for taking the easy route?

Average Spending by Age

[A Wealth of Common Sense](#)

Ben compiled some interesting tables from BLS data and JP Morgan’s Guide to Retirement. Annual spending is not a linear function, nor is your satisfaction correlated 1:1 with higher consumption. It turns out, many retirees run out of health before wealth.

Seeking the Kingdom

[Gospel in Life](#)

I really enjoyed the podcast above by Dr. Keller, a respected apologist and NYC pastor. The second half was memorable. He talked about believing in God vs believing God, related to anxiety.

The Curve Is Steepening

[Apollo](#)

Why is the yield curve steepening? Long duration bonds will gain as interest rates fall, right? Wrong...so far. Torsten Slok put together a great chart book that helps explain why the yield curve is steepening.

Home Price Predictions

[BiggerPockets](#)

BiggerPockets revealed their Pulse Survey for 2026 which shares where people think home prices, mortgages, and home-related trends are headed across the country. I question the robustness of these forecasts, but the visuals are cool.

Help With Travel Points

[PointHound](#)

A reminder to bookmark the site above if you haven’t already. I frequently use PointHound to help me determine where to transfer/redeem my points when booking a flight. The tool also helps you learn the airline alliances, which is key.

Talk of the Month

Me: I recently heard the most absurd wedding budget. Take a guess.

Friend: Ahh, \$300k?

Me: Double that and then add some extra flowers. \$650k...

Friend: That is absurd. That said, we had a wedding at our hotel last month that cost \$8 million...

Me: ...how?

Friend: They effectively rented the whole resort for the weekend.

Me: Who were these people? (As if he’d tell me)

Friend: Just some old couple with a ton of money for a wedding.

They say comparison is the thief of joy. I’m not sure spending that much money on a wedding is considered “joy” by any definition, but it really puts things into perspective.

When you’re feeling big and mighty in your own little bubble, remember there’s always somebody that could give you a fat dose of humility.