

The end of the year is a great time to take charge of your finances, no matter what the markets are doing. Our year-end financial checklist gives you smart ways to make sure you're on track. Don't miss out on tax advantages this year— now is the time to act to reduce your 2009 tax bill - check off as many items as you can before December 31, 2009.

- **MANAGE YOUR INVESTMENTS FOR POTENTIAL TAX SAVINGS**  
It's smart to think ahead—especially if your investments have fallen behind. If you decide to sell losing assets before year-end, you can use those capital losses to offset taxable capital gains.
  
- **REVIEW YOUR PORTFOLIO**  
Major market swings can cause your investment allocations to shift. By rebalancing, you can restore your target allocation, manage investment risk, and keep your portfolio in good health.
  
- **MAXIMIZE YOUR RETIREMENT PLAN CONTRIBUTIONS**  
If you haven't reached this year's contribution limit for your retirement plan, kick the funding up a notch for the rest of the year and plan to maintain that contribution in 2010. The sooner you maximize your contributions, the more time your investments have to benefit from potential long-term growth.
  
- **MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PHILANTHROPY**  
Planning to make a contribution to a charitable organization? Donate before December 31 so you can write it off on 2009 taxes. You can save gift and estate taxes by making gifts sheltered by the annual gift tax exclusion before the end of the year. You can give \$13,000 in 2009 to an unlimited number of individuals, but you cannot carry over unused exclusions from one year to the next.
  
- **GET SMART WITH COLLEGE SAVINGS PLANS**  
You can take advantage of potential tax benefits if you open or contribute to your kids' or grandkids' college savings plan, such as a 529 plan, before the year ends.
  
- **SPEND YOUR FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT**  
If you've covered the basics but still have some remaining funds, check your plan's list of eligible expenses for last-minute ideas. Make sure you use the money that's left in your account by the end of the year, or you'll lose it ("use it, or lose it"). It's also enrollment time for 2010 FSAs, so consider whether you've spent all your funds in the past and make any necessary adjustments.