



CRISER | GOUGH | PARRISH

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Criser, Gough, & Parrish

The Advisor

“Working together for you.”

Feed the Pig™

Feed the Pig™, a national public service announcement campaign launched to inspire “career builders,” those aged 25-34, to re-ignite the savings habit and make smarter financial decisions, takes a new angle on the old piggy-bank concept and urges young Americans to make small changes to build long-term financial security.

For free financial information and tools, go to the new web site, www.FeedthePig.org.

This age group was chosen as the target audience because their financial behaviors tend toward debt accumulation. More working time before retirement means their financial decisions have a great impact (positive and negative) on their long-term financial security. This group is simply not saving enough to fund their retirement needs.

(The CPA Letter, 11/06 and 2/07)

A study commissioned by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) revealed that young Americans face an uncertain financial future unless they change how they manage their money.

Criser, Gough and Parrish Can Help

Teaching young people how to manage money is a big concern in Kansas as well as the entire country. The tools and systems you give your children and grandchildren could literally save their financial lives.

We at Criser, Gough & Parrish want to help and we will continue providing advice in this newsletter, by phone, or in person. We want to be a clearing house of valuable tools and information to help you and your loved ones with financial concerns.

Identity theft is becoming a grave concern. The ideas of keeping an eye on your credit reports, being careful with email and actually canceling some of those unused credit cards are just some of the answers. We think it is important enough to devote much of the next two newsletters to it. Please be careful out there.

We at Criser, Gough & Parrish want to help guide you through this difficult and complex financial landscape. Please call us and recommend your family and friends to us. We really want to help.

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Identity Theft, Part 1: What Is It? How Do You Protect Yourself?

What Is Identity Theft?

Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information such as your name, Social Security Number or other identifying information, without your permission, to commit fraud or other crimes.

Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen can spend months or years, and their hard-earned money, cleaning up the mess thieves have made of their good name and credit record. In the meantime, victims may lose job opportunities, be refused loans, education, housing or cars, or even get arrested for crimes they didn't commit.

Common Ways ID Theft Happens:

1. **Dumpster Diving.** They rummage through trash looking for bills or other paper with your personal information on it.
2. **Skimming.** They steal credit/debit card numbers by using a special storage device when processing your card.
3. **Phishing.** They pretend to be financial institutions or companies and send spam to get you to reveal your personal information. With the sensitive information obtained from a successful phishing scam, these thieves can take out loans or obtain credit cards and even driver's licenses in your name.
4. **Changing Your Address.** They divert your billing statements to another location by completing a "change of address" form.
5. **"Old-Fashioned" Stealing.** They steal wallets and purses; mail, including bank and credit card statements; pre-approved credit offers; and new checks or tax information. They steal personnel records from their employers, or bribe employees who have access.

How Do You Protect Yourself?

Deter Identity Thieves by Safeguarding Your Information:

Shred financial documents and paperwork with personal information before you discard them. This includes financial solicitations, credit card offers, etc.

Protect your Social Security Number (SSN):

- Don't carry your Social Security card in your wallet or write your Social Security Number on a check.
- Don't give a business your SSN just because they ask. Give it out only if absolutely necessary or ask to use another identifier.

Don't give out personal information (including checking and credit card numbers and passwords) on the phone, through the mail or email, or over the Internet, even your bank, unless you have initiated the contact or you are sure you know the person or organization you are dealing with.

- If you believe the contact may be legitimate, contact the financial institution yourself. You can find phone numbers and web sites on the monthly statements you receive from your financial institution, or you can look the company up in a phone book or on the Internet.
- The key is that you should be the one to initiate contact, using contact information that you have verified yourself.
- Notify your bank of suspicious phone inquiries, such as those asking for account information to "verify a statement" or "award a prize."

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Never click on links sent in unsolicited emails; instead, type in a web address you know. Use firewalls, anti-spyware, and anti-virus software to protect your home computer; keep them up-to-date. For more information, visit OnGuardOnline.gov.

- Emails and Internet pages created by phishers may look exactly like the real thing. They may even have a fake padlock icon that ordinarily is used to denote a safe site. If you did not initiate the communication, you **should not** provide any information.

Don't use an obvious password like your birth date, your mother's maiden name, or the last four digits of your SSN.

Keep your personal information in a secure place at home, especially if you have roommates, employ outside help, or are having work done in your house.

Deposit your mail into a secure, official Postal Service collection box.

Be alert to signs that require immediate attention:

1. **Regular bills** fail to reach you. Call the company to find out why. Someone may have filed a false change-of-address notice to divert your mail and steal your identity.
 - If your bills include questionable items, investigate immediately. This is often the first sign of identity theft fraud.
2. **Lost or stolen checks.** Review new deliveries of checks to make sure none have been stolen in transit. Report immediately.

3. **Unexpected** credit cards or account statements.
4. **Denials** of credit for no apparent reason.
5. **Calls or letters** about purchases you did not make.

Inspect:

1. **Your credit report.** Credit reports contain information about you, including what accounts you have and your bill paying history.
 - The law requires the major nationwide consumer reporting companies—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—to give you a free copy of your credit report each year if you ask for it.
 - Visit www.AnnualCreditReport.com or call 1-877-322-8228, a service created by these three companies, to order your free credit reports each year. You can also write: Annual Credit Report Request Service, PO Box 105281, Atlanta GA 30348-5281.
2. **Your financial statements.** Review financial accounts and billing statements regularly, looking for charges you did not make.

Part 2 will appear in the next issue of *The Advisor*: What if you are a victim of identity theft? How could identity theft impact your tax records?

Pursuant to federal regulations imposed on practitioners who render tax advice ("Circular 230"), we are required to advise you that any tax advice contained herein is not intended or written to be used for the purpose of avoiding tax penalties that may be imposed by the IRS.

Watch "Tax Talk Today"

Tax Talk Today is a free, monthly program sponsored by the IRS and broadcast through the web about current tax issues and policies.

The one-hour show airs at 2 p.m. (EDT) on the second Tuesday of each month (except for April and August when the show takes a break) and can be viewed three ways:

- Live Internet broadcast
- Archived Internet broadcast (available online 24 hours after the live broadcast)
- Purchase a VHS copy of the broadcast

To learn more, just go to the Tax Talk Today web site at <http://www.taxtalktoday.tv/> to register and attend or go to <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=161456,00.html>

(SSA/IRS Reporter, Winter 2006)

Private Collection Agencies

According to the *Tax Talk Today* panel, the use of private collection agencies has begun, with IRS letters going out to taxpayers. For any case assigned to a private collection agency, taxpayers maintain the same rights afforded them under IRS collection activities.

A taxpayer who would prefer to deal directly with the IRS rather than the private collection agency can ask that the case be returned to the IRS. To do so, they must inform the private collection agency of this desire in writing.

(The CPA Letter, 11/06)

A person doesn't know how much he has to be thankful for until he has to pay taxes on it.

— Ann Landers, quoting an anonymous source

Thinking is one thing no one has ever been able to tax.

— Charles F. Kettering

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Return Service Requested

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