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Ghosts of Your Financial Past, Present and Future: Turning Reflection into Action

The year is drawing to a close, and as the scent of pastel and ponche-de-crème fills the air, it's a time for reflection. Just as Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge was forced to confront his life by three spectral visitors, so too must many Trinbagonians face the Ghosts of their Financial Past, Present, and Future. This is not a tale of supernatural terror, but of self-examination, and a crucial step toward achieving that gift of financial security that should be on everyone's wish list.

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The Ghost of Financial Past: Lessons from the Last 12 Months

The Ghost of Financial Past is a hazy figure, often shrouded in the lingering smoke of post-Carnival bills or the shadow of a high-interest loan. It forces us to look back at the beginning of the year, at the resolutions and goals you had hoped to keep.

For many, the annual financial plan included ambitions like “clear the credit card debt”, “start an emergency fund”, or “save for a downpayment”. The honest assessment of our year sometimes reveals a familiar pattern of missed targets alongside notable accomplishments.

- **Accomplishment:** Perhaps you finally started that small business, or secured a much-needed promotion, slightly increasing your disposable income. Maybe you resisted the temptation of a new car and kept running “old faithful.” These are triumphs of discipline.
- **Missed Target:** On the flip side, the Ghost might howl about an emergency fund that never quite reached its target, or the credit card balance that, despite best intentions, crept back up after an unexpected expense. The crucial lesson here is the difference between a ‘want’ and a ‘need,’ a line often blurred by societal pressures and the YOLO (you only live once) culture of recent times. You learn that without a budget, a map for your money, your financial journey defaults to impulse, not intention.

The key takeaway from the Financial Past is simple: your current financial reality is the direct sum of your previous decisions. You cannot change the past, but must acknowledge the poor spending habits and missed savings opportunities so that the lessons, rather than the debt, are carried forward. ▲



The Ghost of Financial Present: Confronting Today's Reality

The Ghost of Financial Present can sometimes be overwhelming. It shows you the immediate reality of your finances: the rising grocery bills, the constant juggling of utility payments, and the ever-present pressure of having to penny pinch coming to the end of the month.

For the average person today, financial health is often defined by a few key indicators:

- **The Debt Load:** How much of your monthly income is consumed by servicing debt; mortgage, car loan, and especially high-interest credit card debt? A high debt-to-income ratio is the financial equivalent of trying to drive up the Lady Young Road with the handbrake on.
- **The Emergency Fund:** Does it exist, and is it adequate? Many Trinbagonians save money, with a 2023 survey showing that 75% of adults reportedly set aside money. However, a significant portion of this is saved informally (at home), not in interest-earning or easily accessible accounts, meaning it's often eroded by inflation or susceptible to temptation. A formal, accessible emergency fund of 3 to 6 months' expenses remains a critical, often unmet, goal.
- **The Financial Mindset:** The Present reveals your underlying beliefs about money. Do you see your salary as something to be immediately spent, or as a tool to build future wealth? The Ghost reminds you that the discipline of consistent saving and prudent spending is where the real power lies. You must know exactly where your money is going, not just where it went. ▲



The Ghost of Financial Future: Paving the Way to Prosperity

The final and most profound visitor is the Ghost of Financial Future, a silent figure holding up visions of potential prosperity or, conversely, a bleak, unprepared retirement. The future is not set in stone; it is merely a projection of the trajectory you are on today.

- **This Ghost asks:** What does your retirement look like? Is your child's education fund secured? Will you be debt-free by a certain age? These long-term goals, a comfortable retirement, property ownership, or financial independence, require a shift from mere saving to strategic investing. This is where mutual funds can offer a powerful, accessible solution for the average Trinbagonian. ▲



Mutual Funds: Your Vehicle to the Future

Mutual funds are collective investment schemes that pool money from many investors to purchase a diversified portfolio of stocks, bonds, and other securities. At RBC, we offer a range of Roytrin Mutual Funds tailored to different goals and risk appetites.

- **Diversification:** Mutual funds instantly diversify your portfolio. Instead of putting all your savings into a single asset (like one local stock), your money is spread across many, reducing the risk if one investment performs poorly. This is a vital layer of financial protection.
- **Professional Management:** The funds are managed by financial experts. For the average individual who doesn't have the time or expertise to research local and international markets, this professional oversight is invaluable.
- **Accessibility and Regular Investing:** Roytrin Mutual Funds allow investors to start with relatively small initial amounts and make subscriptions to your Roytrin Mutual Fund account at any branch of RBC Royal Bank or even via the Online Banking and Mobile Banking platforms. There is also the option to set up recurring subscriptions, making investing as automatic as paying a bill, helping you stick to the golden rule of "paying yourself first."
- **Types of Funds for Different Goals:**
 - **Money Market Funds (Low Risk):** Excellent for short-term goals and that critical emergency fund, often aim to offer greater returns than traditional savings accounts while preserving capital.
 - **Income Funds (Moderate Risk):** Suitable for medium-term goals (e.g. a car downpayment) by investing in local, regional and international bonds for steady income.
 - **Income and Growth Funds (Higher Risk):** The best option for long-term goals like retirement or tertiary education. While more volatile in the short term, these funds have the greatest potential for capital appreciation over decades, helping your money outpace inflation.

By integrating a plan to consistently invest in appropriate mutual funds, the average person can transform the vision of the Financial Future from a haunting possibility to an achievable reality. The consistent, disciplined contribution, the financial equivalent of a New Year's Resolution kept year-round, is the key to unlocking that better future. Your future self will thank you! ▲



Change Your Story

The visits are over, and the truth is laid bare: financial transformation is an internal journey. The journey starts not by waiting for a large windfall, but by making a small, deliberate choice today. Start by converting your forgotten goals into a structured budget, committing a percentage of every paycheck to investing whether it be a mutual fund or another investment structure, and turning your financial story from a tragedy of missed opportunities into a tale of conscious, disciplined prosperity.

The future is not fixed; the power to change it rests in your hand, right now.

Invest today! Or contact one of our trusted investment advisors to start your journey.

Wishing you and your loved ones a Bright and Prosperous New Year!

 **Roytrin Mutual Funds**  **Contact us: 800-1RBC**

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