

# SoundAdvice

Advising Investors for 30+ years

October 2019 Issue

September 30, 2019

## The Quest for Safe Harbor

Our *Sound Advice* Diffusion Index of Lagging Indicators (page 11) is still giving us a Caution Signal. It is telling us that the economy is still strong enough to put upward pressure on interest rates. Our *Sound Advice* Risk Indicator (page 10) remains above 2.0, revealing that it is a very high-risk time for stocks. Accordingly, our investing approach continues to be defensive.

We are not alone in our concern over the risk in the stock market. This is evidenced by the fact that traditionally defensive stocks, such as utilities and consumer staples, have become expensive as money has piled into them looking for safe harbor. It has become extremely difficult to find defensive but good values.

In our quest for defensive and safe investments that also present a good value, we are introducing two preferred stocks into the portfolio. Preferred stocks have first claim to the company's cash flow for their dividends. Only after the preferred dividend is satisfied, can the remaining cash flow be used to pay the dividend on the company's common stock. This makes preferred stocks inherently safe and defensive in comparison to common stocks.

We are adding to the *Sound Advice* portfolio the preferred stocks of our two recommended REITs in the hospitality industry. We continue to recommend both of the common stocks, **RLJ Lodging Trust (RLJ)** and **Hersha Hospitality (HT)**.

A major drag on the hospitality industry has been the proliferation of Airbnb and similar competition. However, this is changing in major metro areas. New York City is the most recent to pass a measure prohibiting transient rentals of fewer than 30 days at a time without the host being present. San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Washington DC, Philadelphia and Miami have also passed similar measures.

**RLJ Lodging Trust (RLJ)** is in our portfolio because it is worth considerably more than its current price. An established method of evaluating real estate is to measure the cash yield before any debt service. In real estate parlance, this is called a capitalization (cap) rate.



Gray Cardiff, Editor

The *Sound Advice* model portfolio is in a defensive posture and hedged to reduce risk. It is up 5.3 percent so far this year.

Investment returns in prior years have been calculated independently by the Hulbert Financial Group and concur with ours. They are as follows:

From 2000-2018  
9.5% Annually versus  
2.8% from the S&P 500

Like a bond yield, a lower cap rate means a higher asset price.

Both RLJ and Hersha have reported several hotel transactions in recent years for an average cap rate of 6.5 percent. In the spirit of being conservative, we use a cap rate of 7.0 percent for valuation purposes. On this basis, RLJ is worth \$33.86 per share which is substantially higher than the current price.

RLJ has a large and diversified portfolio, with 151 hotel properties with 28,800 rooms located in 25 states and the District of Columbia. The majority are located in business districts within major metropolitan areas where business travelers represent the majority of the demand. We believe the net operating income (and thus the value of the stock) is primed to improve as the company executes its mission to sell its non-core assets since the August 2017 merger with FelCor, and to renovate and upgrade significant properties.

After paying debt service and the preferred dividend, funds from operations (FFO) is \$2.29 per share which is plenty to cover the common stock dividend of \$1.32 which provides a yield above 7.7 percent. As we have pointed out in past issues, while FFO is considered the best measure for dividend coverage, it can be misleading if the company has significant capital expenditures (capex), which are normally not included in FFO. The renovations of the Felcor properties have required substantial capex which, if subtracted from the FFO leaves \$1.21 in net cash flow, which is slightly less than the dividend. We don't see RLJ lowering the dividend because the net cash flow is still close to the declared dividend, and cash flow is

bound to increase from major renovations. In addition to, or instead of RLJ common stock, there is also a preferred stock.

**The \$1.95 Series A Cumulative Convertible Preferred Shares**

RLJ has a strange but interesting Preferred stock, the Preferred A. Its ticker symbol varies depending on the device you are using or the brokerage service. It is often quoted as RLJ.PA, but on the iPhone it is RLJ'A, and Fidelity uses RLJ/PA. In any case, this is the only RLJ preferred stock, and it came from RLJ's acquisition of Felcor Properties.

Normally, preferred stocks have a call provision whereby the company can buy them back at a certain price (par value) at a certain date (call date). However, this preferred does not have this provision. Out of the hundreds of preferred stocks trading on the exchanges, there are only a few without call provisions, and this is one of them. The fact that it is not callable means this stock has unusual upside potential.

The only way the company could redeem this preferred stock is if RLJ common rose to \$115.82 per share. In that event, the company could exchange 0.286 common shares for each share of preferred. That would require an enormous rise in RLJ from its current price which would take a long time under the most bullish scenarios. The value of this preferred would rise to \$32.50, a substantial increase from the current price. We are not expecting such a meteoric rise in the foreseeable future. Instead, the upside potential comes from a drop in the

yield on this preferred, which is highly likely.

This preferred stock pays \$1.95 annually per share (which must be paid before the common stock dividend) providing a yield of 7.2 percent. If the yield drops to, say 5 percent, which would still be a good value, the price of this preferred would rise substantially because there is no call provision. At a 5 percent yield, the price of this stock would be \$39 per share, a 45 percent increase. Meanwhile, the yield is excellent. It is also quite secure. The preferred dividend was only \$12.6 million for the first half of 2019 out of \$193 million in operating revenues. A lot would have to go wrong in the company's large portfolio for the preferred dividend to be in jeopardy. Moreover, this is a cumulative preferred, which means that any missed preferred dividends must be paid in full first, before common stock dividends could be paid.

**Tactics**

Like most preferred stocks, the number of outstanding shares is relatively small, with close to 13 million shares outstanding, which means the daily trading volume is also relatively small. We recommend using limit orders that specify your purchase price (instead of market orders which can be executed at any price). Because the volume is light, there is usually a large spread between the "bid" and "ask" price. Placing your price close to the midpoint usually works, or you can place your limit lower and wait for a price dip. We also recommend being patient with your purchase. It could take a while to fill.

**Hersha Hospitality (HT)** is worth \$22.23 per share, which is substantially greater than the current price of the

**Hospitality REITs Comparison Table**

Company	Symbol	Recent Stock Price	Dividend Yield	Stock Market Cap Rate	Portfolio Value @ 7% Cap Rate (\$Millions)	Stock Value	Discount (-) Premium (+)
RLJ Lodging	RLJ	16.99	7.8%	11.4%	7,636	33.86	-49.8%
Hersha	HT	14.88	7.5%	8.1%	2,418	22.23	-33.1%
Service Properties	SVC	24.14	8.5%	11.1%	12,647	52.66	-54.2%
Host Hotels & Resorts	HST	17.29	4.6%	10.1%	23	26.66	-35.1%
Apple Hospitality	APLE	16.58	7.2%	8.5%	6,372	21.73	-23.7%

The table above shows the "Stock Market Cap Rate" (what the stock price is paying for the underlying real estate portfolio) for several comparable hospitality stocks. The "Stock Value" column shows the current value of the stock assuming the underlying portfolios are valued using a cap rate of 7.0 percent, which is close to the average cap rate on recent hotel transactions. The last column shows the discount or premium at which the stock is trading based on a 7.0 percent cap rate valuation of each company's real estate portfolio.

**Service Properties** (formerly Hospitality Properties - HPT) is trading at a large discount. However, this company is externally managed by RMR which charges high fees and suppresses value. As long as RMR continues to externally manage HPT, we do not expect to see significant growth. **Host Hotels and Properties (HST)** is very small, with only 749 thousand shares outstanding, which may lead to excessive volatility. Growth may be limited by its small capitalization.

stock, based on the most recent trailing four quarters and using a 7.0 percent cap rate to evaluate the real estate portfolio.

The dividend is currently \$1.12 annually, which is an astonishingly high yield of above 7 percent. Over the last four quarters, Hersha's funds from operations (FFO), after paying the dividends on its preferred stocks, was \$1.72 per share, which is plenty of coverage for the common stock dividend. However, Hersha has had very high capex due to the destruction brought by Hurricane Irma in 2017. The company reported \$65.7 million of capex in 2018, out of which \$38.8 million was categorized as hurricane damage, leaving \$26.9 million as a balance, or \$6.7 million per quarter.

For the first half of 2019, capex was \$21.2 million. It is not clear how much of this was extraordinary expenses to repair hurricane damage or to renovate other properties. If we subtract all of it from FFO, along with the final two quarters of 2018, the annual net cash flow is 92 cents per share, which is less than the dividend.

We don't see HT lowering the dividend because not all recent 2019 capex is "ordinary and necessary" to maintain the company's properties. Additionally, cash flow is bound to increase from increasing net income from major renovations to hotels in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York, along with the ramp up at Cadillac and Parrot Key after the 2017 Florida hurricanes. Even if the dividend were adjusted down to 92 cents per share, the yield would still be more than 6 percent. However, this is much less of a concern for HT's preferred shareholders.

### Hersha's Preferred Stocks

Hersha has three preferred stocks, series C, D, and E. Unlike the RLJ preferred, Hersha's preferred stocks have call provisions that enable the company to buy them back at \$25 per share. The call date on the preferred C has already passed, which means it could be called at any time, so we are not recommending the Preferred C. The preferred D and E both pay \$1.63 annually per share (which must be paid before the dividend on the common stock). The preferred D is callable on 5/31/2021, and the preferred E is callable six months later on 11/07/2021. These call dates can be exercised later at the company's option, and both of the call prices are at \$25 per share. At \$25 per share, the yield is 6.5 percent on both. Other than the call date, the

primary difference is that there are only 4 million shares of the preferred E outstanding, which makes it less liquid than the preferred D shares with 7.7 million shares outstanding. Trading can be thin on both, so we recommend the same tactics to invest as for the RLJ preferred.

During the first half of 2019, Hersha paid \$12 million in dividends on the preferred shares out of \$46.9 million of operating revenue. This is a larger percentage than RLJ paid, but a lot would have to go wrong with Hersha's portfolio before the preferred dividend would be threatened. As in the case of RLJ's preferred stock, all of Hersha's preferred stocks are cumulative -- any missed preferred dividends must be paid in full first, before common stock dividends could be resumed.

Both the D and E preferred trade at close to the same price. If you want to lock in the yield for an additional 6 months, you would choose the preferred E provided you can buy it at \$25 or lower. To pay more than that for either the D or E would reduce your overall return because they can be called at \$25 after the call date. Because of the relative ease of trading, better liquidity, and importance of paying \$25 or less, we will follow the preferred D in our portfolio. Ticker symbols also vary from HT.PD, HT'D for an iPhone, and Fidelity uses HT/PD. (Change the D to an E for the preferred E.) Both preferred stocks are currently trading slightly above \$25, but that has only been recently. They have typically traded below \$25 for most of the year. We recommend \$25 using a limit order at or below \$25 and waiting to let the market come to you.

## The Portfolio

With the markets rising again to peak levels, we believe it is a dangerous time because the stock and bond markets are priced for perfection, assuming nothing can go wrong. The trailing 12-month (TTM) P/E is still close to 19. The average since the bull market began in 2009 has been 17.61. In addition, the TTM P/E is substantially higher than at the peak of the previous bull market when it was 17.09 at the end of the third quarter of 2007. Accordingly, the market is extended and vulnerable by TTM P/E historical standards.

We are also looking into a period of slower growth for earnings ahead, which is not what a high P/E on stocks typically anticipates. Slower growth means lower P/Es on stocks which translates into lower stock prices even if earnings don't change.

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We continue to recommend that you keep a substantial amount of cash on the sidelines. We cannot tell you how much, because we are not familiar with your particular financial situation, but it should be substantial to you.

Our portfolio recommendations are made regarding the money you have allocated to the stock market, and in accordance with our current cautionary mode. We believe our selections are exceptionally strong values; trading at a significant discount to the rest of the market, which should give them buoyancy in both good and bad market conditions over the longer term. To add downside protection, we continue to recommend hedging your portfolio.

**ProShares UltraShort S&P 500 (SDS)** essentially short-sells the market and will benefit from down-drafts in the S&P 500. It is designed to produce two times the daily fluctuations of the S&P 500 index. A decline of say, 1.0 percent in the S&P 500 will cause SDS to increase by 2.0 percent. Conversely, an increase in the S&P 500 will cause SDS to decline in the same fashion. We have been tracking SDS and confirmed that it is performing as it should, with daily premiums and discounts within 0.5 percent. It is also very liquid.

**Energy & Natural Resource Selections**

**Adams Natural Resources (PEO)** is a candidate for steady income because it has an objective and recent history of making quarterly distributions that add up to at least 6 percent annually. These distributions are usually a mix of dividends and long-term capital gains. This fund has been in operation since 1929 and has 80+ years of distribution history.

This is a closed-end fund, which means it trades like a stock and can be bought and sold during market hours.

The price of PEO is not tied directly to the NAV of the underlying portfolio, so it can trade at a discount or a premium. This is an advantage now because PEO is currently trading at a substantial discount to its NAV. In addition, PEO also has a lower expense ratio of 0.78 percent, versus the industry average of 1.14 percent.

**Chevron (CVX)** will see substantial growth in production from its holdings in the Permian Basin. The company will also see growing production from its massive Australian projects. Chevron has also made major improvements in its costs which is making CVX much more profitable and resilient to any declines in the price of oil. As we point out regularly, Chevron is an integrated oil company, which means it has operations in production as well as refining. This gives CVX diversification because the company’s oil and gas production (upstream) benefits from rising oil and gas prices while the refining operations (downstream) tend to benefit from lower oil prices. This diversification adds financial stability during times of volatile oil prices. CVX has an attractive and sacrosanct dividend that provides an attractive yield. This means we can continue to expect annual increases in the dividend which is already providing an attractive yield.

**Fidelity Select Natural Gas Fund (FSNGX)** is an open-end fund which means it trades at the NAV of its portfolio set at the close of the market each day. It is a diversified way to participate in the growth of the natural gas industry through strong companies.

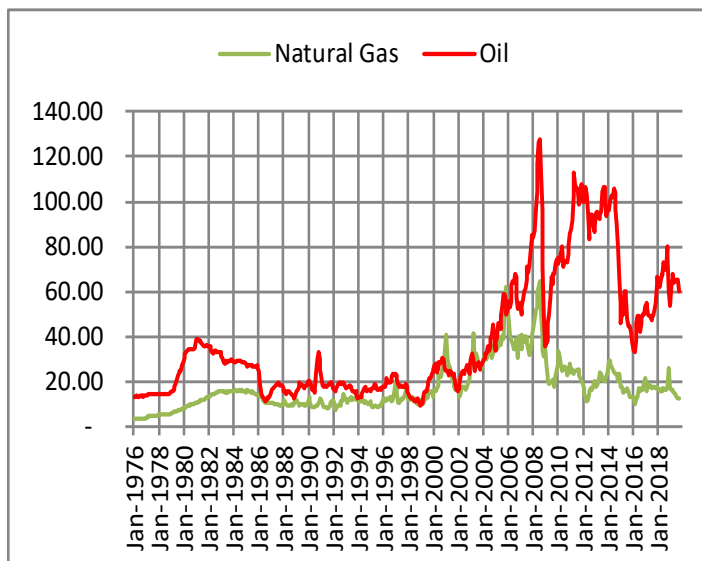
Natural gas provides the same energy as oil for pennies on the dollar, and natural gas is more environmentally friendly. One barrel of oil provides approximately 5.8 million British Thermal Units (BTUs) of energy. However, with the current market price for natural gas at \$2.40 for one million BTUs, 5.8 million BTUs will cost \$13.92. Thus, with a barrel of Brent crude oil costing \$62, the same amount of energy is available for 22 cents on the dollar if it is in the form of natural gas rather than oil.

The updated chart shows the historic relationship between the costs of these two forms of energy. The red line shows the price of a barrel of oil since the mid-1970s. The green line shows the price of natural gas multiplied by 5.8 to approximate the same amount of energy contained in a barrel of oil. The fact that natural gas provides energy for pennies on the dollar translates into an expanding natural gas industry.

**Valero Energy (VLO)** cut production temporarily in September in its Port Arthur refineries on the Texas Gulf Coast because flooding caused by the storm Imelda prevented trucks from entering the area. Production resumed after the storm subsided.

Valero will begin benefiting in January from the

**The Cost of Energy Equivalents of Oil and Natural Gas**



new international marine standard, requiring all vessels sailing in international waters to use the more environmentally friendly low-sulfur diesel fuel, which needs extensive refining and is more profitable for refiners. This new requirement is expected to boost annual demand for low-sulfur diesel fuel by four-fold beginning next year. Valero's earnings are expected to jump from close to \$5.00 per share in 2019 to over \$9.00 next year.

Valero has the flexibility to refine substantial quantities of both US light sweet as well as heavy sour crude, which bodes well for the longer term. Valero also has access to the US pipeline network for delivery to its gulf coast locations. This flexibility allows the company to capture the highest margins among its competitors because it can take advantage of the temporary local gluts of crude, whether it's low or high-quality crude, or light sweet or heavy sour, and receive the best discounts for its feedstocks.

### Real Estate Selections

Commercial real estate prices remain historically high as low interest rates have pushed down real estate capitalization (cap) rates to historically low levels (like bond yields). The *Sound Advice* portfolio only includes real estate stocks offering an extraordinary value now. We discussed our two recommended REITs in the hospitality industry earlier, along with the introduction of their preferred stocks.

**Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor Fund (TVRVX)** is a global real estate fund which means it is not confined to US real estate with low cap rates. Management looks for growth more than current income by focusing on real estate operating companies which, unlike REITs, can reinvest profits back into the business. Management also searches for opportunities in different aspects of a real estate company's capital structure by investing in senior debt in addition to equity. Also, unlike the typical REIT, management will go to cash when asset prices are generally high. Cash is preserved for scooping up opportunities.

This fund is loaded with good values substantially below their net asset values (NAV) with strong growth prospects. Management has a similar approach to ours because it is very price conscious, especially in relation to net asset value. Just as we do at *Sound Advice*, they eat their own cooking – they invest a substantial amount of their personal assets into their funds.

### Medically-Related Selections

Both of our selections make medical devices and products which are well-suited for an aging population.

They are defensive in nature because they are not largely dependent on economic conditions. They also avoid the current uncertainties over drug pricing and patent expirations facing pharmaceutical companies.

**Boston Scientific (BSX)** has been a global medical technology leader for three decades by providing a range of high-performance solutions aimed at addressing medical needs and reducing healthcare costs. The company's stream of new inventions acquisitions add to promising growth prospects.

**Stryker (SYK)** provides a diverse array of innovative medical technologies, including reconstructive, medical and surgical, as well as neuro-technological and spine products. Its orthopaedic devices for artificial knees and hips lead the industry. SYK has a very high return on equity which is propelled by its strong balance sheet and its ability to make strategic acquisitions.

### The Best in Biotech ETFs

Biotech companies offer the most explosive profits in the healthcare industry. Over the last 15 years, biotechnology has become a major industry and the source of the world's top breakthrough drugs. However, stocks of individual biotech companies are often volatile and can have unforeseen risks, which makes diversification essential. This diversification can be accomplished by investing in a diversified biotech electronically traded fund (ETF) investing exclusively in a portfolio of biotech companies. We are recommending two top performers.

**ARK Genomic Revolution Multi-Sector (ARKG)** is an actively managed biotech ETF investing in companies that are expected to benefit from extending and enhancing the quality of human life by incorporating technological and scientific developments and advancements stemming from mapping the human genome. Breakthroughs and advancements have cut the cost substantially of mapping the human genome which is opening up new opportunities and making this sector the cutting edge of new innovations.

**Virtus LifeSci Biotech Products (BBP)** is a passively managed biotech ETF that weighs the portfolio selections essentially equally, as opposed to weighing selections according to market capitalization. This is an important aspect because biotech ETFs weighing their portfolio selections essentially equally have been the best performers by far because they have larger investments in smaller biotechnology companies which are acquisition targets for large pharmaceutical companies looking for ways to revitalize their drug portfolios by scooping up smaller companies.

BBP tracks the performance of the LifeSci

Biotechnology Products Index, which tracks the performance of biotechnology companies, and covers companies that design drugs ranging from entrepreneurial start-ups to global giants that have completed multiple human clinical trials and have received FDA approval to sell and market at least one drug.

## Financials

It does not make sense that short-term bonds yield essentially the same as long-term bonds. Investors are getting nothing for many years of additional risk. A flat yield curve is unusual and not a historical norm. The yield curve will not remain flat indefinitely. As it steepens, banks will prosper. That eventual return to historical norms is why these stocks present an extraordinary value.

**JP Morgan Chase (JPM)** is a good value, especially in comparison to the rest of the market. At the relatively modest P/E ratio of, say 14, JPM would be \$139 which is substantially above the current stock price. JPM just increased its quarterly dividend to 90 cents per share from 80 cents.

**Wells Fargo (WFC)** is also a good value. At a P/E ratio of 14, WFC would be \$67.20, substantially above the current stock price. Growth has been flat, largely because of the Federal Reserve's limit on its asset growth as punishment for its shady business practices in recent years. The limit expires at the end of this year which should unleash better growth. Meanwhile, the bank has been buying back enormous amounts of WFC stock, including approximately \$18 billion last year.

## Small Caps

Numerous studies show that small caps perform better over the long run than the market as a whole. Small Caps are pure plays on the early stages of new industries and inventions. They have more dynamic and entrepreneurial management, and they are much more likely to be the target of an acquisition or merger, which is usually quite profitable.

**Third Avenue Small-Cap Value Investor Fund (TVSVX)** invests in companies with small capitalizations using the same value-oriented approach as it does with its real estate value fund (TVRVX). Management scours the investment universe for companies that combine the three main features: creditworthiness, a meaningful discount to a conservatively estimated net asset value, and the ability to consistently grow NAV, with an initial targeted holding period of three to five years. A patient

and price conscious acquisition is a critical first step in both protecting capital and in realizing an attractive investment return.

## Special Situations

The rest of our portfolio falls into other market sectors, with companies that are presenting extraordinary values within their respective industries. Here they are in alphabetical order.

**Apple (AAPL)** is drawing up plans to open its first store in India, starting with Mumbai. This is because a key regulation in India has been changed, previously requiring that a foreign retailer source at least 30 percent of products in India, a requirement that Apple could not meet. Now the only requirement is that \$200 million be invested inside the country, a requirement that Apple can meet. Before the opening of retail stores, Apple is planning to begin selling on-line within a couple of months. Of course, this regulation change opens up a large market and a growth avenue for AAPL, especially for its entry-level iPhones.

AAPL represents a good value, especially in view of the \$210 billion in cash in the company's coffers. This amounts to \$48 per share. Subtracting this cash from \$215 per share means we are actually paying \$169 per share for the company. This puts the TTM P/E below 15, substantially less than the rest of the market.

**Carnival Cruise Lines (CCL)** will benefit from the liquidation of the Thomas Cook Group as budget-minded European travelers look for stable operators to book their cruise vacations. Aside from this near-term benefit, CCL has strong growth prospects because of the company's dominance in the industry, efficiencies of scale, and favorable demographic trends driving a lasting increase in demand.

With a P/E close to 10, CCL is very cheap, especially when compared to the rest of the market. Such a low P/E anticipates very little or no growth. During the last 5 years, the median P/E has averaged close to 19.

**Intel (INTC)** is bound to see new growth from the introduction of its "10 nanometer" chips beginning with the fourth quarter. By increasing the density and design of the chips, the 10 nanometer chips are faster and consume less battery power on a laptop. The design change has also facilitated the next step to 7 nanometer chips which are even faster and more efficient.

Intel has the size, diversity, and industry dominance, to make a relatively safe investment in a high-growth, and often high-risk business. Intel can leverage new

technology into its existing large platform without introducing unacceptable risks. A history of established cash flow and an attractive dividend, along with the currently low P/E ratio below 12, diminishes the risk profile of this stock.

**International Business Machines (IBM)** says that the company will earn at least \$13.90 in earnings per share for all of 2019. This guidance puts the current P/E under 10, which anticipates little or no growth. However, a strong driver of growth is the company's so-called "Strategic Imperatives" which offers cognitive solutions through its artificial intelligence platform, it calls "Watson", which can "think" like a human.

Added growth from the Red Hat acquisition is bound to be significant. It launches IBM into the enormous and growing hybrid data center market in a big way because Red Hat's "OpenShift" platform facilitates modernizing legacy cloud services so that they can work on both private cloud platforms as well as public platforms including IBM Cloud, Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud, and even Alibaba. This so-called "hybrid multi-cloud" approach is in line with industry trends and should bring new growth to IBM.

Any new growth will be a beneficial surprise and gives IBM stock large potential upside. Even at a modest P/E of 12, the stock would be over \$167 per share. The \$6.00 per share dividend provides an attractive yield and puts a floor under the stock and reduces risk.

**NCR Corp (NCR)** makes automatic tellers (ATMs), retail point-of-sale (POS) workstations, self-service kiosks, and other self-service checkout systems. 485 million people use NCR products every day, and there is room for substantial growth in the US and around the world.

NCR owns nearly three-quarters of the burgeoning self-checkout market. Using their smartphones, or a handheld scanner provided by the store, customers scan items from the shelves as they add them to their cart. At checkout, they input either device into the register, and it spits out the tally.

**ETFs for Rising Bond Yields**

Even without an increase in interest rates or inflation in the foreseeable future, long-term Treasury bond yields are absurdly low, both from a historical perspective and from just plain common sense. Thirty-year treasury bonds have close to the same yield as short-term treasury bonds.

Our recommended ETFs are essentially short-selling bonds and will prosper from rising bond yields. They differ in the amount of leverage used. You can choose among them depending on your investment objectives and risk tolerance.

The **Direxion Daily 20 Plus Year Bear 3 Shares (TMV)** uses 3:1 leverage.

The **Proshares UltraShort Lehman 20 Plus Year Treasury (TBT)** uses 2:1 leverage.

The **Proshares Short 20 Plus Year Treasury (TBF)** uses no leverage.

The price action of these ETFs is based on the changes in long-term Treasury bond indexes, only in the opposite direction, and then multiplied by the leverage each ETF uses. For example, a decline of say, 1.0 percent in their respective benchmark bond indexes will cause TMV to increase by 3.0 percent, TBT by 2.0 percent, and TBF by 1.0 percent.

Yields on bonds can only remain low as long as inflation is low. Inflation is widely reported by changes in the consumer price index (CPI) on both goods and services which is becoming outdated. The services sector has become far greater throughout the world and now represents a majority of the world's GDP. In the US, the services sector represents **80 percent** of GDP, and in this sector, inflation has been running higher than widely perceived. One of the Commerce Department's economic indicators is the *Change in the CPI for Services*, which has been steadily logging in annual increases of 2.4 to 2.8 percent. The latest reading for August was a 2.8 percent annual increase.

Today's absurdly low yields of 2.1 percent on long-term treasury bonds are not sustainable because they offer nothing in real terms (after adjusting for inflation). This has not been the case historically, as can be seen from the following table.

Years	30 Yr Note (Avg. Yield)	CPI Annual Increase	Real Rate
1980-84	12.0	7.6	4.4
1985-89	8.4	3.6	4.8
1990-94	7.7	3.7	4.0
1995-99	6.3	2.4	3.9
2000-04	5.7	2.6	3.1
2005-09	4.5	2.6	1.9
2010-14	3.6	2.0	1.6
2015-18	2.9	1.9	0.9
Average			3.1
		Current Inflation Rate	2.0
		Theoretical Target Yield	5.1
		Average Since 2000	1.9
		Current Inflation Rate	2.0
		Theoretical Target Yield	3.9

We can see from history since 1980, that investors have demanded a real return of 3.1% on long-term treasury bonds. With today's inflation rate above 2 percent, 30-year treasury bonds should be yielding more than 5 percent, not 2.1 percent. If we only look at recent history, since 2000, a low inflationary period, investors have demanded a real return of 1.9 percent. This would put the yield on long-term treasury bond yields close to 4 percent. Accordingly, even in a low inflationary environment, the yields on long-term treasuries are way too low and belong much higher. The stock market won't like a rise in bond yields because low bond yields have been propelling the stock market to today's heights.

The following table shows the impact on the prices of our selected ETFs at the end of next year at various long-term treasury bond yields. The first row shows today's ETF prices with long-term Treasury bonds yielding 2.1 percent. Note that the price of these ETFs would rise dramatically with yields at 4 percent, and even more so at 5 percent.

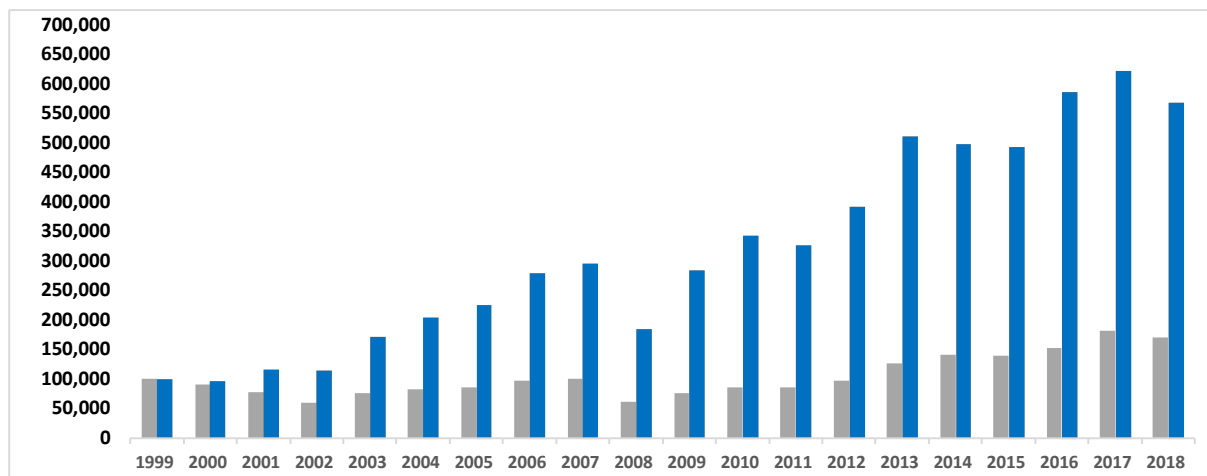
Bond Yields	ETF Prices		
	TBF	TBT	TMV
2.10	18.77	24.36	10.39
3.50	22.88	35.04	17.22
4.00	24.70	40.59	21.31
4.50	26.61	46.88	26.27
5.00	28.62	53.97	32.23

**The Erosion Factor**

As we point out regularly, these ETFs suffer from erosion because they decline slightly faster than they increase with an equivalent change in bond yields, particularly with higher leverage. To gauge this factor, we can assume that Treasury bond yields simply tread water, rising and falling by an unusually large amount, say, 0.03 percentage points (3 basis points) every day, and thus go nowhere. By the end of 2019, TMV would decline to \$10.14 (2.4 percent), TBT to \$24.01 (1.4 percent), and TBF to \$18.65 (0.6 percent). While not insignificant, this erosion factor is nominal in comparison to the price swings caused by a change in bond yields.

**Sound Advice vs the S&P 500**

This chart shows the growth of \$100,000 invested in the S&P 500 (in gray), which would have grown to \$170,645, versus \$100,000 invested in the *Sound Advice* recommendations (in blue), which would have grown to \$561,174.



Energy/Natural Resources	Symbol	Price / NAV	Yield	Action	Limit
Adams Natural Resource Fund	PEO	\$15.83	6.00%	BUY	\$16.62
Chevron	CVX	\$118.60	3.78%	BUY	\$124.53
Fidelity Select Nat Gas Fund *	FSNGX	\$17.37	0.00%	BUY	\$18.20
Valero	VLO	\$85.24	4.22%	BUY	\$89.50
Real Estate					
Hersha Hospitality Trust	HT	\$14.88	7.53%	BUY	\$15.62
<b>Hersha Hospitality Trust - Preferred D</b>	<b>HT.PD</b>	<b>\$24.74</b>	<b>6.59%</b>	<b>BUY</b>	<b>\$25.00</b>
RLJ Hospitality Trust	RLJ	\$16.99	7.77%	BUY	\$17.84
<b>RLJ Lodging Trust - Preferred A</b>	<b>RLJ.PA</b>	<b>\$26.99</b>	<b>7.22%</b>	<b>BUY</b>	<b>\$28.00</b>
Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor *	TVRVX	\$27.80	1.47%	BUY	\$28.00
Medically Related					
Boston Scientific	BSX	\$40.69	0.00%	BUY	\$42.72
Genomic Revolution Multi-Sector	ARKG	\$29.52	0.00%	BUY	\$31.00
Stryker Corp	SYK	\$216.30	0.96%	BUY	\$227.00
Virtus LifeSci Biotech Products	BBP	\$35.86	0.00%	BUY	\$37.66
Financials					
JP Morgan Chase	JPM	\$117.69	3.06%	BUY	\$123.57
Wells Fargo	WFC	\$50.44	3.41%	BUY	\$52.96
Small Caps					
Third Avenue Small-Cap Value Investor Fund *	TVSVX	\$18.30	0.38%	BUY	\$19.00
Special Situations					
Apple	AAPL	\$224.06	1.30%	BUY	\$235.26
Carnival Cruise Lines	CCL	\$43.71	4.58%	BUY	\$45.90
Intel	INTC	\$51.56	2.33%	BUY	\$54.13
International Business Machines	IBM	\$145.42	4.13%	BUY	\$152.69
NCR Corp	NCR	\$31.56	0.00%	BUY	\$33.14
ETFs for Rising Interest Rates					
ETF - Direxion Daily 20+ Yr Bear 3X	TMV	\$10.39	0.00%	BUY	\$10.91
ETF - ProShares Short 20+ Year Trsry	TBF	\$18.77	0.00%	BUY	\$19.71
ETF - ProShares UltraShort 20+ Year Trsry	TBT	\$24.36	0.00%	BUY	\$25.58
Hedges					
S&P 500 ProShares Ultra Short ETF	SDS	\$29.50	0.00%	BUY	\$30.98

**Notes to the table:** The right hand column is the highest recommended price limit for purchases.

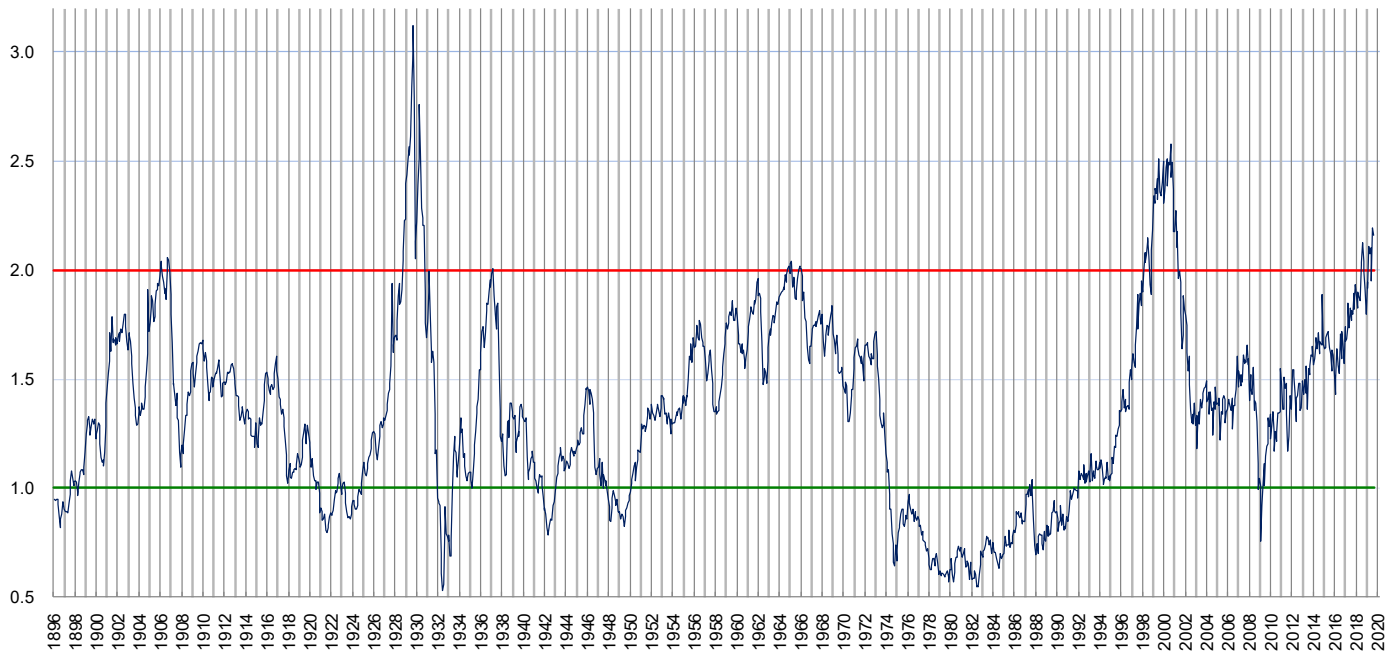
\* It is not possible to offer live pricing on our recommended mutual funds.

**General Comments:** Our statistics are based on the assumption that \$10,000 is invested in each position. When a new position is added, we assume the same \$10,000 amount is invested in the new recommendation. When we recommend adding to a particular position, as we have done over the years, we assume another \$10,000 is invested again in that position.

If you are picking and choosing, you can focus on the sector of the portfolio that matches your investment objectives. Alternatively, you may have a higher degree of comfort with certain industries, funds, or stocks because of past experience or your profession. In that case, you may want to invest more heavily in one sector, or in one or more individual recommendations.

As always, broad diversification will temper volatility, add to safety, and improve long-term performance.

## Capital Competition: Real Estate versus Stocks: The SoundAdvice Risk Indicator



There are few forces that are more important to a market's destiny than the amount of capital that is available to it. In a normal situation, capital will flow easily between markets as their underlying conditions change. But if a market becomes dangerously superheated, it will absorb a larger proportion of available investment capital than economic conditions and market demand can justify. This change will be reflected not only in the rising market's prices but also in the prices of competing markets, which will be lower than their underlying fundamentals would indicate they should be. Over the last 120+ years, we can see this titanic struggle between the stock market and its foremost competitor for investment dollars: real estate.

To reveal this phenomenon, we have set up an equation based on the ratio of the S&P 500 Stock Index to median price of new houses for each month over the last 100+ years. This equation exhibits an elegant financial minuet as each market has taken turns outperforming the other.

As we look at the historical data, we find that there is a range in which the price disparities are so strong that they are too great to be accounted for by the fundamental economic conditions underlying each market. Every time prices get into these danger zones it has meant that the prices in one market or the other have gone too high, and that they are in imminent danger of falling.

We label this new tool the **Sound Advice** "Risk Indicator," since it will allow us to locate the point at which prices are so high when compared to competing markets that they have come loose from their moorings and are on the verge of declining or under performing the other market.

What is too high? When stock prices are very high

relative to house prices, the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator will rise over the line marked 2.0, revealing a high-risk time for stocks. In contrast, when the indicator drops below the line marked 1.0, it means that it is a very low-risk time to buy stocks. Notice from the chart how the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator has oscillated back and forth, revealing the ongoing struggle between Stocks and houses for investment capital. We have labeled these long vacillations Supercycles.

But though an investment beginning with \$25,000 in 1895 could have made money being in either stocks or housing, had an investor followed the signals of the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator he or she would have made \$465 million, or 26.5 times more money than by simply holding stocks though the ups and downs.

A brief walk through history shows just how reliable this indicator is. The first recorded time the Risk Indicator rose above 2.0 was in February 1906, after the eight-year-old Dow-Jones average doubled since 1903. The market peaked in September of 1906. A massive sell-off in October would later be labeled the Panic of 1907. Stock prices trended downward for 14 more years until the end of 1921 while, searing inflation after World War I boosted house prices 48 percent. The combination of falling stock prices and rising real estate prices forced the Risk Indicator to fall below 1.0 in 1920, just in time for the Roaring 20's when stock prices tripled. Then, in October 1928, the Risk Indicator rose above 2.0 again. On Tuesday, September 3, 1929, the Dow

**The New York Times**

*"Cardiff's equation reveals an elegant financial minuet as each market takes turns outperforming the other."*

peaked at 318.17. The October crash marked the beginning of a decline that lasted until July 8, 1932. Houses had declined only by 15 percent compared with the 85 percent loss in stocks. The relative superior performance of houses caused our Risk Indicator to fall below 1.0 at the beginning of 1932.

As America's GNP began posting positive gains and with 46 percent growth in three short years, stock prices would triple. Then the Risk Indicator crossed 2.0 in March 1937. This time, the signal came only one month after the zenith in stock prices. As stock prices retreated 50 percent, house prices remained relatively steady, causing the Risk Indicator to fall below 1.0 again in June 1941, within 9 months from the bottom.

As U.S. corporations expanded to meet growing demand, and the economy came to a rolling boil during the Eisenhower years, the stately rise would multiply stock prices by ten times until November 1964, when the Risk Indicator crossed over 2.0 again. The stock market would continue to climb into 1968, and then crash in 1975, wiping out the inflation-adjusted gains scored by investors since 1954. However, a switch to an investment in houses would avoid all that and double in price by the time the next signal came for stocks in May 1974, as the Risk Indicator fell below 1.0 again, as the Dow careened below 700.

It would not be until March 1998 when the Risk Indicator would cross 2.0 again, after stocks were up by more than tenfold. The Dot-Com bubble would push stocks higher into early 2000, but then began another 50 percent retracement. A switch to houses would produce a 44 percent gain through the end of 2008 while stock prices were lower by 17 percent. In February 2009, with the Dow careening down through the 700s once again, the Risk Indicator quietly dropped below 1.0 to 0.77 as the S&P tumbled under 700. Since then, the stock market has delivered stunning gains as the S&P 500 has quadrupled. For the sixth time in the last 123 years, the Risk Indicator rose above 2.0 again in July 2018.

**With the latest median house price at \$305,000 in July and with the S&P 500 at 2,977, the Sound Advice Risk Indicator reads 2.23, revealing the risk in stocks is high.**

As remarkable as the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator has been, it does not pinpoint the exact time. In the past 123 years, its signal has ranged from being only one month after the zenith to as much as four years early. While the Risk Indicator has been early, it has never been wrong. An expensive crash was inevitable. A 50 percent decline took a 100 percent recovery just to break even.

To help us narrow down the timing as well as gage the potential severity of an upcoming decline, we have our Diffusion Indexes.

## Business Cycles and Stocks: The SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes

### Track Record of the SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes

After each "Aggressive" signal, the S&P 500 climbed an average of 31 percent. During "Caution" signals, the S&P 500 either crashed, meandered, or climbed, recording an average increase of 3.5 percent.

Aggressive	S&P	Caution	S&P
Sep-74	68.1	Apr-76	101.9
Jul-76	104.2	Dec-76	104.7
Oct-78	100.6	Jun-79	101.7
Nov-79	100.0	Oct-83	167.7
Aug-84	164.5	Jun-85	188.9
Jul-86	240.2	Aug-87	329.4
Feb-88	258.1	Jun-88	270.7
Mar-89	280.0	Mar-93	449.7
Mar-95	493.2	Dec-98	1,141.0
Jun-00	1,429.4	Dec-00	1,320.3
Jun-03	974.5	May-05	1,191.5
Jun-06	1,276.7	Mar-08	1,325.4
Apr-09	848.2	Mar-12	1,370.3
Mar-15	2,080.0	May-15	2,111.9
Sep-17	2,492.8	Jan-18	2,823.8
Ave +/-	31%		3.9%

If the Supercycles identified by our Risk Indicator are the solemn, inexorable seasons that roll across the market's landscape, business cycles are the highly visible, sometimes serene but frequently blustery fronts and storms that we actually perceive as weather. The Risk Indicator has given us a reliable tool to determine the investment season in the stock market. This information is all-important; there will be no heat waves in January, no blizzards in July. But in our search for fair winds, we need to know more than the season. We also must be able to predict the shorter-term weather -- the bull and bear markets that fluctuate along the path of Supercycles.

The data we need is contained in the leading and lagging economic indicators published monthly by The Conference Board. We have hand picked the most sensitive of these economic indicators to produce our "Diffusion Indexes" which function with amazing accuracy as predictors of the birth of cyclical bull and bear markets in stocks.

To construct our **Sound Advice** Diffusion Indexes, we observe changes in each of our selected indicators over a six-month period, and take the percentage of those increasing.

When the **Sound Advice Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators** drops to zero, it is time to buy stocks aggressively, regardless of how negative the atmosphere may be. This is not just an empirical coincidence. It is also logical. In order for all of the leading economic indicators to be giving off a zero value compared to six months before, it is nearly certain that the soft economy is providing an atmosphere for stable or declining interest rates.

This Diffusion Index gave us a zero reading in April, 2009, close to the bottom, officially giving us an "Aggressive" signal. That signal came at a time when the Risk Indicator was below 1.0, which revealed that Supercycle 5 came to an end, and that Supercycle 6 was born.

The **Sound Advice Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators** gives "Caution" signals when all three of its individual lagging economic indicators rise above their respective levels of six months earlier, providing a 100 percent reading. This reading reveals that the US economy is strong enough to put upward pressures on interest rates.

#### Current Status

The Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators climbed to 100 percent for December, giving us a new Caution Signal in January, very close to the peak in the market. **The latest data for August caused a 100 percent reading, revealing that the US economy is strong enough to put upward pressures on interest rates.**

Our next signal will come from the Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators, when it drops to zero, which would take a surprising softening in the US economy. **The latest reading for this Diffusion Index is 33.3 percent.**

## Concurrence

There are times when signals from the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator and the Diffusion indexes are out of sync, when one is signaling caution and the other is not. This occurred in August 1987, when the Diffusion Index of Lagging Indicators switched into caution mode, just prior to the October 1987 Crash that took stocks sharply for a brief period. Non-concurrence also occurred in March of 2008, when the Diffusion Index of Lagging Indicators switched into caution mode, just prior to the 2008-09 bear market crash. Both of these crashes were brutal, but relatively short-lived. Once the Risk Indicator plunged below 1.0, a very profitable bull market followed.

Then there are times when both indicators concur, signaling the same thing at roughly the same time. This happens when the Risk Indicator is above 2.0, indicating the end of a supercycle, and the Diffusion Index of Lagging Indicators switches into caution mode, indicating the end of a business cycle. Of course, this concurrence indicates that a more vicious and potentially longer-lasting bear market, or series of bear markets, is bound to follow, eventually taking stock prices down substantially – usually by 50 percent -- until the Risk Indicator falls below 1.0 again. We have this concurrence today.

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