You Missed the Best Day to Buy

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December 27, 2008

There was once a woman who prayed every day for 20 years that she'd win the lottery. Every single day. Finally, in despair, she said, "God, I've been a true and faithful servant and have lived an exemplary life. Why won't you grant me this one thing?"

"Look," said God, "at least meet me half way -- *and buy a lottery ticket*."

Buy the ticket
Similarly, in order to take advantage of the greatest long-term wealth-building machine available to us individual investors, you *have* to be in the market. And if the current craziness is keeping you away because you fear a huge drop, you're ignoring the advice of some of history's top investors.

In the latest edition of his book *Stocks for the Long Run*, Jeremy Siegel charted returns for a hypothetical unlucky investor who happened to invest at the absolute top of six major 20th-century market peaks. After 30 years, this investor actually accumulated four times more wealth in stocks than he would have in bonds, and five times more than in T-bills. For a 20-year period, he doubled the return for bonds.

There's more where that came from
Consider John Templeton, founder of Templeton Growth Fund and widely regarded as one of the best investors of his generation. His advice about getting into the market is simple: "The best time to invest is when you have money. This is because history suggests it is not *timing* which matters, it is time."

Our own David and Tom Gardner, who've beaten the market by a tremendous amount in *Motley Fool Stock Advisor*, also eschew timing the market. "The best time to invest was yesterday," says Tom. "The next best time is today."

So even though the tongue-in-cheek title of this article implies you've missed your *best* chance, you can see that you really haven't. If you've got money you won't need for five years or more, just get in the game as soon as you can.

Still need convincing? I looked back a decade, specifically searching for companies that had been up 25% or more in one year. Surely, many investors back then were worried that stocks were too rich and ready for a great fall.

Well, a gnarly bear market did start up a couple of years later, and yes, these stocks fell. And yet despite their large prior one-year gains, and despite *two* big bear markets (including the current one), their returns have been solid for those who held for the long term -- especially when compared to a market that has *lost* 29% in the meantime

Company	Dec. 23, 1997, to Dec. 23, 1998	Dec. 23, 1998, to Dec. 23, 2008
Apple (Nasdaq: AAPL)	208%	761%
Oracle (Nasdaq: ORCL)	97%	152%
McDonald's (NYSE: MCD)	66%	60%
United Technologies (NYSE: UTX)	56%	91%
Johnson Controls (NYSE: JCI)	29%	75%

Tiffany (NYSE: TIF)	36%	92%
Adobe (Nasdaq: ADBE)	31%	257%
S&P 500	**31%**	**(29%)**

There are no guarantees
Many companies from that time have not returned to their all-time highs of 2000, but history shows that if you can find superior businesses with good management, hold for the long haul, and add new money regularly, you will rarely be disappointed.

That's the advice David and Tom give to their *Stock Advisor* members, and they help them with not only new recommendations each month but also the top five stocks to buy right now. They've been at it a long time, through bear and bull, and their average recommendation is beating the market by 29 percentage points.

Right now a special no-obligation free trial will give you access to all these stocks and more. Here's more information.

This article was first published Jan. 25, 2008. It has been updated.

Rex Moore is an analyst for Stock Advisor *and thinks now is a good time to buy stocks. He owns no shares of the companies mentioned. Apple is a* Stock Advisor *pick. This information is brought to you by the Fool's disclosure policy.*

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