

**RETIREMENT  
PLANS THAT  
“CLEARLY”  
WORK FOR YOU.**



Prizant Group



**GET DOWN TO BRASS TACKS:  
Focus only on the basic facts.**



"You get down to the nitty gritty, you get down to brass tacks, and we'll meet again tomorrow."

We hardly ever speak about brass tacks, so why did they achieve such prominence? Who and in what industries gets down to them? Some hypotheses are rather ingenious, but below I'll mention only two of them. The others are "a click away," as they now say. Unless an idiom happens to be a so-called familiar quotation, its origin is usually unknown. (The origin of familiar quotations is another problem.) Somebody whips the cat, takes care of the whole nine yards, is dressed up to the nines, or, conversely, kicks the bucket. Trying to guess how those phrases came about is a worthy occupation, but, unfortunately, it seldom results in significant discoveries. Suffice it to say that every idiom, like every word, was once coined by an individual. The cleverest and the most memorable words and phrases stayed, and now they are common property, while the inventors' names are forgotten. My contribution today will be modest. In 1931, there was a lively discussion of the brass tacks idiom in *Notes and Queries*, and, since not everybody has looked through the entire set of that delightful old periodical (at present it has quite a different format), I'll recount the most salient moments of the exchange with minimal commentary.

In recent history, the phrase spread to England from overseas. However, it took quite some time even for Americans to learn it. In his novel *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), Theodore Dreiser still used it in quotes ("It was like his brother to come down to 'brass tacks'. If Lester were only as cautious as he was straightforward and direct, what a man he would be!" Chapter 43).

All the contributors to the discussion were speakers of British English. One insisted that the correct form of the idiom is let us get down to tin-tacks and believed that it was "like many other war-time phrases." He obviously thought that he was dealing with military slang traceable to World War I (the Great War). The next discussant (a captain) agreed: "The army humour lies in calling common tin tacks 'brass', intimating they were of a special kind." The exchange began to gain its own momentum: a

wrong premise acquired pseudo-solid confirmation. This should teach all of us to be careful in dealing with language history. However, the man was rebuffed. His opponent quoted a 1904 example, which can now be found in the OED (from Horace Lorimer's book *Old Gorgon Graham*). So the military cookie crumbled almost at once. Yet the brave captain did not surrender, and what he said may be of some interest. The phrase get down to brass tin tacks, he explained, "was undeniably in everyday use in the British army between 1914 and 1920." And he insisted that only with tin and brass in modifying tacks does the idiom make sense. "Brass, or bronze, tacks, used in boat-building, do not rust, and are far superior to so-called 'tin' tacks for durability. Common 'tin' tacks appear to have not even a nodding acquaintance with tin, and are apparently made of galvanized iron."

This statement was followed by a useful addition. After the suggestion that "[a] brass tin-tack would be possible, however paradoxical the name, and an enduring kind; though doubtless army users liked the phrase for its apparent absurdity" (beware of those who use the adverb doubtless), the writer noted that in the United States he had only heard the simple get down to brass tacks and also "a kindred saying" hungry enough to eat brass tacks. I wonder: Did those who opened Brass Tacks Sandwiches in Oregon and invented the name of the establishment allude only to the voracious appetite of their customers, or did they know the idiom about being hungry enough to eat brass tacks? Most likely, it is a coincidence. I have not been able to find examples of the phrase about hunger and brass tacks and have no information about its possible currency in today's American English (my expertise is limited to being able to eat a horse). Members of the American Dialect Society will doubtless have better luck. In any case, if at some time brass tacks existed as a model of something truly solid, our popular idiom loses part of its mystery, and there is no need to refer to the occupations in which people dealt with those implements. This is my only and most important conclusion.

From the subsequent discussion in *Notes and Queries* we learn that, according to *Hardware Trade Journal* (has it been excerpted for the OED?), the most common expression is tin tacks, which is a "corruption" of tinned tacks. "There are also 'Blued Tacks' and copper tacks, but no brass tacks. A search through invoices back to 1878 and through very old catalogues fails to disclose a single brass tack." Does this mean that in the United States brass tacks rather than tin tacks were especially common? What is known about the use of American brass tacks in the eighteen-sixties and before? Perhaps those who searched for the origin of the idiom did not pay enough attention to the object that has brought it

into prominence. I never stop repeating that a student of words should pay equal attention to things.

In 1927 Frank H. Vizetelly, Managing Editor of Funk and Wagnall's New Standard Dictionary, wrote to a correspondent of Notes and Queries that the origin of the idiom had not been discovered and cited two explanations. One is familiar from the current discussion on the Internet, namely that in the upholstery trade brass tacks hold a protective leather band in place on a chair; driving them is one of the last finishing touches. According to the other one, "brass tacks, being the last decoration that is put round a coffin, when a man gets down to brass tacks, he faces conditions as they are." Brass nails do have an association with coffins, and the variant of the idiom to get down to brass nails exists, but, as has been observed, getting down to brass tacks is synonymous with getting down to bedrock or coming to the point, rather than putting the finishing touches. The last participant in the discussion wrote: "Before guessing at the origin, it would seem advisable to make certain what the phrase really does mean: and whether it has, or has had, more than one meaning." This is what I call getting down to brass tacks. [Brass](#)



**\$100K ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE** According to IBIS World, a record 35% of all US households will have incomes of \$100,000 or more in 2023, which is up 53% over the last 30 years. Adjusted for inflation, though, \$100,000 today is the equivalent of \$47,340 thirty years ago, \$60,965 twenty years ago and \$77,000 ten years ago.

(SOURCE: BESPOKE)

I find it interesting that the Minimum Federal Hourly Wage [Wage](#) is still **\$7.25** and hasn't been increased since 2009. In reality, market driven forces required the majority of businesses to exceed that rate to attract workers. Nonetheless, there are still parts of the country that get away with offering the federal minimum wage. [State Wages](#). Apparently, autos, appliances, furnishings, TVs, computers/tablets, cell phones, building materials, energy are cheaper in the Southern states. Who would have thought? (BTW, **NONE** of the above is

**TRUE).** I readily admit that cost of land, labor, and food varies based on geographical location. Nonetheless, my informed (some may say ill-informed) opinion is that keeping wages low makes for higher profits and greater poverty. You would think that more disposable income would be **GREAT** for the private enterprise system and also the coffers of the governmental agencies. Alas, that is far from reality. Per CNBC, [Paycheck to Paycheck](#) 78% of Americans are living "Paycheck to Paycheck" which certainly explains the plethora of Payday Loan establishments. As a retirement plan advisor, who has conducted thousands of education meetings, you don't have to tell me the economic instability that the average American worker faces. When you suggest a savings rate of 10% to your group and all you get back is a "**Blank Stare,**" you are pretty much assured that quiet laughter is taking place. Asking for 10% deferral rate, with 2% merit raises being the 2023 norm and an annual inflation of 6%, (6% inflation rate [2023 Inflation Rate](#) will get you a chuckle or two. And you wonder why this nation of **PILL POPPERS, POT SMOKERS, AND RUMMIES** (Noun. 1. rummy - a chronic drinker. drunk, drunkard, inebriate, sot, wino. alcoholic, boozer, dipsomaniac, lush, souse, soaker - a person who drinks alcohol to excess habitually.



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It seems fairly obvious, that if the majority of workers are living "paycheck to paycheck," that the enduring motto "**You Need To Save For Retirement**" continues to fall on deaf ears through no fault of the worker bees. The warnings about longevity, rates of inflation or the inadequacy of one's projected monthly Social Security check, or the upcoming shortfall of the Social Security Trust Fund have done little to "**move the needle**" on the average retirement savings rate. [Savings Rate](#). Hopefully, the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 "Automatic Enrollment" rule for new plans starting after 12.31.24 will help somewhat. Though I am a big believer in automatic enrollment/increases; it is way too easy to "Opt Out" which somewhat negates the positive effects.

[How Does SECURE 2.0 Act's Automatic Enrollment Work? Starting in 2025, the](#)

SECURE 2.0 Act will require companies with new 401(k) plans to automatically enroll their employees into those plans at a minimum contribution rate of 3%, but no more than 10%. This rate will increase by 1 percentage point each year up to 15%.



"Are you new money, old money  
or other people's money?"

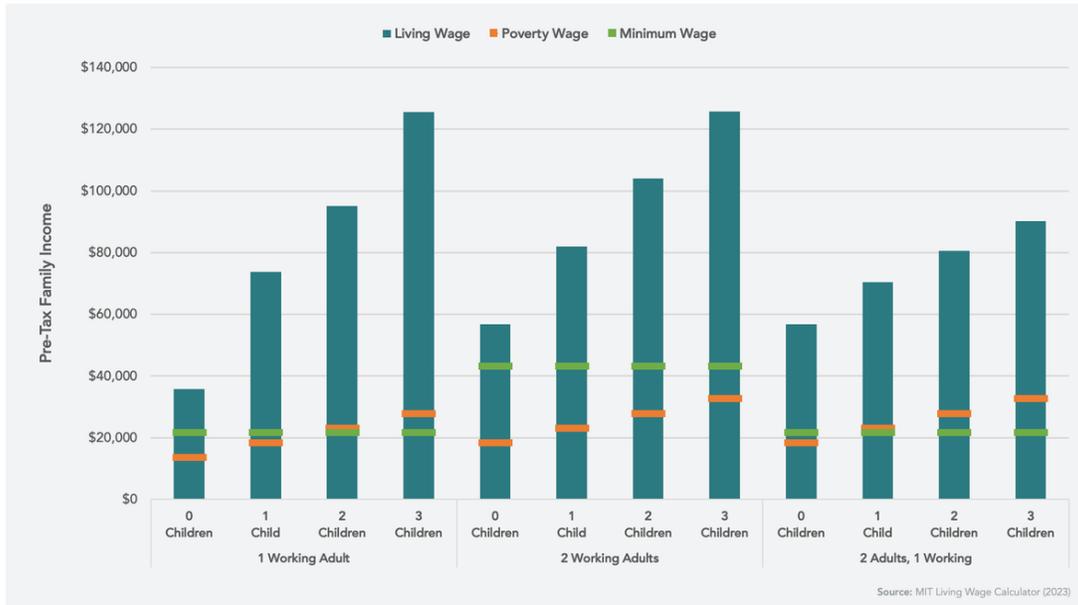
So now we get down to the "**Brass Tacks**" of saving for retirement. "**HOW MUCH DO I REALLY NEED TO SAVE TO LIVE COMFORTABLY IN RETIREMENT?**" Honestly, I have been at this game for 25 years and i don't pretend to have the answer. Lifestyle, Medical History, Continuing Income Sources, Tangible Assets (Liquid/Illiquid), Genetics, Residence, Debt, Financial Support for Relatives all go into determining a possible correct sum. [Retirement Calculator](#) Per CBS News, investors (whoever "they" may be) say **\$3 Million**. **\$3M** I hate (not really!) to inform those "investors," but in 25 years of retirement plan work, a participant balance exceeding \$1 million is a rare sight. Needless to say, I **DO NOT** use any of those "**7 Digit Numbers**" in any of my education presentations. My participants are already have enough economic stress and don't need me to push them over the precipice. We, at **The Prizant Group**, are here to encourage our participants to either use their retirement plan to defer taxes and/or save for retirement. We avoid "Lump Sum" figures as each participant will have different needs and wants as they exit from the working world (whenever that might be). Whether one will live a long life or not, is life's ultimate crapshoot. We will end this Missive with a most appropriate ballad from the legendary folk singer Woody Guthrie. [Do Re Mi](#)

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