

Buffett earned most of his fortune after 65. He started at 11

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Maxim: *Start investing at the earliest possible moment.* — John C. Bogle

The most valuable thing a young investor owns is not a salary or a stock tip. It is the years ahead, and they can only be spent once.

Of all the inputs to wealth, time is the one you cannot buy back later.

Warren Buffett bought his first stock at the age of 11, [CNBC noted](#) in 2024, drawing on Morgan Housel's book *The Psychology of Money*. Housel had looked closely at Buffett's fortune when the book came out in 2020. Of a net worth of \$84.5 billion at the time, \$84.2 billion had arrived after Buffett's 50th birthday, and \$81.5 billion after his 65th.

Read those numbers slowly. The most celebrated investor of his era had, by his mid-sixties, built only a small slice of what he would end up with. Buffett is extraordinarily skilled, but Housel's point was that skill alone does not explain the size of the result. "If Buffett retired at age 65, you would have never heard of him," he told CNBC.

What made the difference was the length of the runway: a boy who started before he was a teenager and was still compounding in his nineties. Few people can copy his skill. Anyone can copy the other half of the formula, which is to give money as many years as possible to work. That half begins on the day you start, and not one day earlier.

The lesson Bogle kept repeating

John Bogle, who founded Vanguard and launched the first index fund for ordinary investors, put it plainly: "We must start to invest at the earliest possible moment." Vanguard's UK arm placed it first among his five lessons in a [September 2026 note](#), using the old image of a snowball that picks up more snow the longer it rolls.

The image is familiar; the size of the effect is not. In an illustration published on 19 October 2026, [Tata Mutual Fund](#) compared two investors who each put ₹10,000 a month into an equity fund until 60, at an assumed 12% a year. One started at 25, the other at 30. The early starter put in ₹42 lakh and ended with about ₹6.5 crore. The late starter put in ₹36 lakh and ended with about ₹3.5 crore.

Notice the gap. Five extra years of saving added only ₹6 lakh to what went in, yet nearly doubled what came out. The last few years of compounding are the largest, and they belong only to people who started early. To catch up, the fund house reckoned, the 30-year-old would need to invest about ₹18,400 a month instead of ₹10,000.

The 12% is an assumption, not a promise; real returns arrive unevenly, and some decades are far worse than others. But the shape of the result does not depend on the exact rate. At any positive return, the money invested first works longest.

India's young are arriving early

The good news is that more Indians are starting younger. The National Stock Exchange's *Market Ki Pulse* report, [cited by The Tribune](#) in August 2026, found the median age of its registered investors had fallen from 38 in March 2020 to 33 by June 2026. Investors under 30 now make up 37.9% of the base, up from 23.5%.

The less good news is what some of them start with. A [Sebi study](#) released in September 2024 found that 93% of individual traders in equity futures and options lost money between FY22 and FY24, with combined losses above ₹1.8 lakh crore. Traders under 30 rose from 31% to 43% of the total in a single year, [Moneylife](#) reported from the same study.

Starting early is only an advantage if what you start is investing. A young trader who loses capital in the first five years does not just lose the money; the lost years cannot be recovered either. Buffett's own record rests on owning businesses for long stretches, not on trading in and out of them.

Why waiting feels sensible, and isn't

The reasons to delay are always reasonable. The salary is small. The markets look expensive. A wedding, a car or a course seems more urgent. Each of these is real, and none of them requires starting with a large sum. The early starter in the Tata illustration was investing an amount many first jobs can support.

Waiting for a better moment also carries a hidden assumption: that a few months or years of delay are cheap. In the first years they look cheap, because the balance is small either way. The cost only appears at the far end, when the missing years would have been compounding on the biggest balance. By then it cannot be paid back.

None of this means taking reckless risks to make up time. It means beginning with what you can afford, in something you will not need to sell, and raising the amount as income grows. Bogle's other lessons point the same way: keep costs low, own the broad market, and stay calm when prices fall.

If you do one thing: Start a monthly investment this month, in a low-cost diversified fund, at an amount you can keep paying even in a bad year. Set it to rise each time your salary does. The amount matters less than the start date.

Buffett did not become rich only because he started at 11. He became rich because he was very good, started at 11 and never stopped. Most young Indians starting work today cannot choose to be Buffett. They can choose their start date, and the only question is whether they use the first, most valuable years or spend them waiting for a better moment. The snowball does not care how small it is at the top of the hill. It cares how long the hill is.

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