

The Road to Financial Freedom

Avoid The Overspending Cycle

If you want to live with less stress, and less debt, it would be wise to learn how to spend less than what you earn.

Calculate Your Income And Expenditures

You might begin by calculating your monthly earnings. This may be difficult for those with fluctuating incomes or multiple income streams. However, it is crucial that you consider and keep in mind your approximate total income each month.

Your next step could be to write down all of your necessary monthly expenditures. Once you have completed this list, calculate the total and compare that against your monthly earnings.

Be Honest With Yourself

When you weigh your expenses against your income it might be easier to get a clearer picture of where money is going.

Consider every regular expense you have and analyze anything that pops up daily or frequently. Do you see any routines in your spending? Do you regularly spend on "required" services/products that you could do without? Consider what truly is needed to benefit your life and financial health.

Think of it this way - eliminating just \$10 each week from your regular expenditures could save you over \$500 per year!



Pretend To Earn Less Than You Do

Remember that you will never get ahead if you overspend your budget.

In addition, you might be able to eliminate much of your financial anxiety if you learn to spend less than you earn.

Right now you want to set aside as much money as possible to deposit into your debt settlement account. If your budget allows, you may also want to transfer a small amount into a personal savings account as well.

Following the completion of your program it may be a good idea to continue making your "settlement account" deposit into your personal savings for greater financial freedom.

The Importance Of Budgeting

Everyone has their own style when it comes to working a budget.

The important thing is that you have a budget and you stick with it.

Try revisiting your budget consistently to make sure it is working and you haven't strayed from the basics.

If you have already cut back on unnecessary routine expenses and still find you are having trouble spending less than you earn, you may need to consider eliminating things like cable, phones and internet until you pay off your debt. Otherwise, you might need to consider ways to earn extra income.



Change How You Think About Money

Try to look at your debt repayment plan as a process that is preparing you to live on less than what you earn.

For example, you are currently setting aside an amount of money each month that goes directly toward your debt repayment.

You should also be living frugally within the parameters of the income you need for the remainder of your necessary expenses.

Consider what you plan to do after your program is complete and your debts are paid off. What would happen if you continued your frugal living habits and took the same amount of money you set aside for debt resolution and deposited it into a savings account? How much would you have at the end of the year? You would be living on less than what you earned!

Finding "Hidden" Income. Consider individual adjustments you could make that might lead you to a balanced budget and better peace of mind.

For example, have you thought about moving into a less expensive home or apartment? Or, maybe you've considered carpooling or using public transportation most or all of the time until you pay off your debt.

Remember that the holidays are quickly approaching and might provide you the opportunity to earn extra cash during a limited amount of time.



Credit Cards And Income: Advice To Consider

If you are one of the many Americans feeling the effects of today's economy, you may be tempted to use a credit card to fall back on if a job loss or wage cut effects your financial well-being.

However, it is important to remember that although each individual handles credit cards and debt differently, relying on credit cards to make ends meet usually leads to even more financial

problems in the future.

Try Not To Rely On Credit

There are a few things to consider regarding the use of credit cards and income. If you become unemployed, keep in mind there is no guarantee as to when you will find a job. In addition, when you are hired again, your salary may not be comparable to what you earned in a prior position.

Despite regulations of the recent Credit CARD Act, even a small increase in the usage of your credit cards could cause the issuer to decrease your credit limit or increase your interest rate on part of your balance.

Even if you don't anticipate loss of employment or wages, it is wise to examine your financial habits before anything unexpected occurs. If you are currently working through a debt negotiation program, consider whether or not your financial habits regarding credit cards contributed to your current situation.

It is possible that missing payments while you are unemployed could appear as part of your credit history and may influence hiring decisions. According to the Fair Credit Reporting Act, potential employers can examine your credit report as part of the hiring process and current

Credit Corner

employers may also review your credit report if you are a candidate for a

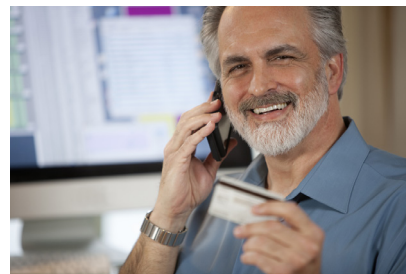
promotion. However, employers should obtain an applicant's permission to do so, and actual credit scores should not be released as part of the process.

You may decide to obtain a credit card after you complete your program.

If you anticipate a possible layoff or decrease in wages at some point in the future, you should try to keep your monthly balance manageable according to your income and avoid charging more than you can pay off in full each month. Remember to use your card sparingly in case an unexpected financial setback occurs.

Expenditure Tracking: A Wise Idea

It is a good idea in any situation to create a budget, writing down all of your current expenditures. Keep wants and needs in mind and try to eliminate everything that is not necessary. Consider putting that extra cash into your reserve account so you can get out of debt faster. In the future, use extra cash to pay down your debt in full as quickly as possible.



Spare Change

Giving Out Your Zip Code Could Put You At Risk For Unwanted Junk Mail

Have you been the victim of an onslaught of unwanted catalogs and junk mail?

Consider if you've given out your zip code lately at the checkout when making a purchase by debit or credit card.

Although most identity theft-savvy consumers are aware that giving out a Social Security Number is a definite no-no, giving out zip code information may seem harmless.

However, according to a report in the New York Times, some merchants use zip codes for marketing purposes. When a zip code is combined with an individual's name, it may make it easier to find out other information



about that consumer from commercial databases, such as a full mailing address. The more information a store collects about a consumer, the more information they have to sell to data brokers and other marketers. Although the practice isn't identity theft, an individual's privacy is compromised nonetheless.

If you are asked for your zip code by a cashier and you aren't comfortable giving it, you aren't obligated to do so. You may simply say "no thanks" and the transaction can proceed.

In addition, if you are asked for your zip code when making a credit or debit card purchase at the gas pump, it may be used to prevent fraud and identity theft. You can always opt to pay by cash.

Also be aware when shopping online this holiday season. Simply making a purchase could put you on the list for catalogues and junk mailings by not only the company you are purchasing from, but also partner companies that sell items similar to the one you are buying.

If you wish to purchase online, try to look for any "opt-out" disclaimers during checkout. Or, you could call the company to order your item. Be sure to tell the customer support specialist you do not want to receive catalogues or promotional mailings.

UCAN Offers Help For Collection Calls At Work

Although a collector is allowed to call you in an attempt to collect a debt, they are not permitted to call you at work if they are aware these phone calls could jeopardize your job. United Consumer Advocacy Network (UCAN) can offer you valuable information on how to reduce these calls.

If you receive a collection call at work, calmly ask the collector not to call you at your place of employment. Stress to the collector that your supervisor does not permit any personal calls during working hours and failure to abide by this rule could result in your employment being terminated. Making this simple request will usually stop further calls at work from that collector. If the calls continue, contact UCAN for assistance. UCAN has been very successful in stopping collection calls at work for our clients.

Some collectors will also try to employ tactics such as faxing a letter to your place of employment or speaking to your coworkers about your situation. Collectors must be very careful in these instances. For example, if a co-worker takes a phone message while you are away from your desk, a collector is not allowed to state the reason as to why they are calling. Under no circumstances should your debt be advertised to others. If you feel that a collector has violated your rights by discussing your information with another person, contact UCAN immediately so they can possibly investigate the matter and determine what action they can take on your behalf.

Document calls to your workplace on your call log. Also, save any correspondence that they may send to your place of employment. If you have already asked a collector to stop calling you at work and they continue to do so, contact UCAN at 1-877-462-8226. We are available Monday through Thursday 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. EST and Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST. Our FAX number is 1-877-895-7577.



Deceptive Ads: A Wolf In Sheep's Clothing?

Advertising can motivate businesses to become more competitive, inform consumers regarding their choices in the marketplace and encourage the creation of new inventions. However, keep in mind many advertisements have an additional goal: To persuade consumers to spend money.

Effective Wordings

**BUY
GET
FREE**

When you see an ad in print, on television or online, consider the wording. For example, think carefully about claims that an item is "wholesale", "less", "free" or "at no cost to you". The FTC suggests that consumers read any small print an advertisement may contain.

Also, consumers are advised by the FTC to be cautious about sharing any personal information, such as a credit card or a banking account number, if purchasing an item from an obscure or unfamiliar company.

Sense Appeal

Advertisements sometimes use popular actors, music or even an inviting atmosphere to encourage sales. For example, have you ever been in a retail store only to hear a catchy tune that brought back good memories? Did you end up purchasing something that wasn't practical or did you stick to your list of necessities?

You may have also noticed that some advertisements for larger ticket items or life-affecting services often feature strong images and ideas.

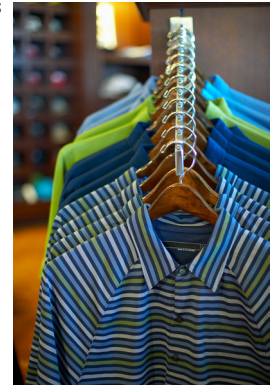


Becoming aware of advertisements like these could help you separate wants from needs if you are considering a purchase.

Eye-Catching Visuals

According to MSN Health & Fitness, consumers should be aware that store displays containing sale items

or special offers may be placed up front, at the end of aisles and at eye level. When grocery shopping, try to make sure you have plenty of time to price compare the items on your list. Try to consider non-processed, healthy products.



If crowds make you feel rushed or more prone to picking up items just to get out of the store, you may want to do your shopping during off-peak hours if possible. It is also a wise idea to stick to your list of necessities.

Be A Savvy Consumer

Before deciding on any purchase The Federal Trade Commission suggests that consumers research a company or an item as much as



possible. You may want to consider asking someone you know and trust if they have used a particular item or product.

However, be wary of internet reviews as you do not know the truth of those reviews, or the circumstances that surrounded the business transaction.

In addition, try not to pick up products or food brands just because you have a coupon or because it's a 'good deal.' If you don't absolutely need something or won't use it you are wasting your money. When retail shopping, think carefully before signing up for a store credit card or store email alerts which might encourage you to spend more on items you don't need.

For more information on consumer protection against deceptive advertising go to FTC.gov or call 1-877-382-4357.



Prepare Now To Save On Winter Heating Costs

Now is the perfect time to consider how you will save on your heating and utility costs throughout the winter.

Check For Leaks. You could use a candle to find out where the heat is leaking from your home. Try to watch for the flame to flicker as you run the candle along the walls and the sides of the windows and doors in your home. If you find that you have a draft letting cold air

in and warm air out try using weather stripping, caulking or insulation to help fix this problem.

Small Space Heating.

Consider using a space heater in the room

you are currently using. This might make you feel more comfortable without having to heat the rest of the rooms in the house and wasting energy.

Insulation. According to TheFrugalLife.com you should insulate accessible heating ducts in unheated areas including the attic. You may consider hiring a qualified professional to help you seal and repair all ducts. You might want to consider insulating your hot water heater and hot water pipes as well.

Keep Vents Free Of Obstruction.

Check to make sure furniture and other items aren't obstructing the heat coming from the heating vents. Try not to forget floor vents if you have them. Make sure you are getting the full benefit of the heat you are paying for.

Plastic heat directors are available at low cost and can direct the flow of heat out into the room if you need this solution. If you have heat registers, putting aluminum foil behind them could reflect heat into the room, saving about \$5 per year for each radiator you have.



If you have any unused rooms in your home you may want to shut the vents in them and close the doors. According to the Department of Energy you could save between \$35 and \$60 a year per room by doing this.

Bundle Up! Wear warmer clothing around the house. Try to stock up on comfortable blankets so you can cuddle up and relax. Open the blinds during the day - the sun will come in and help warm up your house. At night you should close your drapes so the heat stays inside.

Need Help? Contact your utility company if you are having trouble paying your gas bill as you might be eligible for energy assistance. Ask to see if you are allowed to choose natural gas suppliers. Other suppliers could lower your gas bill significantly.



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Company Announcements



Concerned About Your Credit Score? Completing a debt settlement program can be a rewarding experience. However, once you have graduated from your program, you may be concerned about your credit rating. Century Negotiations has partnered with Century Credit Services whose vision is to provide a low cost, yet highly effective, credit restoration program to clients who have inconsistent or inaccurate information reporting on his or her credit report. CCS staff members would like to speak with you! CCS offers a free consultation and will help you in reviewing your current credit report. If your report includes any incorrect items, it may be determined that you are a good candidate for credit restoration. **CCS has a pay per deletion policy and many clients see improvements after the first month.** Call **877-809-6610** today!



Online Settlement Offers: Have you ever missed calls from us because you weren't home or couldn't get away from your desk? Have you ever lost an important e-mail from your settlement company? You can now approve your settlements online! All you need to do is go to www.CenturyNI.com and click 'Client Login' (or click 'First Time Users') to get your CNI ID and password. If there is a settlement awaiting your approval you can review the details and approve it immediately! Your approvals are sent back 'real-time' to our representatives, so we can act on your behalf as soon as we hear from you. If you've received a call, an e-mail or text message about your program but haven't had the time to get back to us, approving and managing your offers online is an easy way for you stay uninterrupted while we make your settlement program a success!



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CORPORATE OFFICES

1061 Main Street • Banco Park, Suite 19 • North Huntingdon, PA 15642
Phone: (800) 256-7273 • FAX: (724) 861-1039