## 25 Holiday Money Wasters



It can't hurt to spend a little extra during the holidays because, "Tis the Season." Right? Wrong…it can and does hurt. No matter how caught up in the spirit of Christmas you may get, being wise and careful is the name of the game to keep your finances in good standing when January rolls around. Avoid these 25 holiday money wasters.

- Shopping without a budget. Before you make any purchases, figure out how much you can afford to spend, stick to your budget and track your spending. Don't make purchases you haven't budgeted for.
- Not sharing the cost of entertaining. While it is tempting to just cover all of the costs yourself, share your entertaining costs by assigning such things as food and game supplies with guests.
- 3. Putting purchases on a credit card. Most of us tend to overspend when using a credit card. We are also less likely to do as much price comparison when we think we will just get it now and be done, then pay for it later. We rationalize that the few extra dollars aren't that big of a deal breaker.
- 4. Using out-of-network ATMs when shopping. Those fees can add up, so plan carefully.
- 5. Shopping at the last minute. This can be a tricky one. Sometimes in a rush, we buy too much and spend too much. With that said, sometimes there are still some "perfect" items at a great price later in the game. The trouble is, things are generally picked over, and the frustration may not be worth the savings.
- 6. Buying "little" gifts for too many people. In fact, consider an alternative to gift exchanges. Determine a set amount that you donate to a charity, then tell all those would- be-recipients of your gift what you have done.
- 7. Buying party supplies at grocery stores. Try discount

stores and dollar stores for the majority of your party supply needs.

- 8. Not comparing prices. There are a number of great ways to check prices on things, so use them – they are free. Some websites/apps include: www.fatwallet.com (they even have a Black Friday app); www.pricehistories.com; www.consumerworld.org; Google Shopper app, www.pricegrabber.com.
- 9. Buying new decorations every year. Cut back on the decorations this year, and use last year's decorations as much as possible. Get creative and put some time and effort into making decorations.
- 10. Getting new holiday clothes. We don't need new holiday attire for a family photo, gathering or night out. Learn how to dress up the basics...like a black dress that can be used many times with just a simple switch of less expensive accessories.
- 11. Not taking advantage of free activities.
- 12. Buying too many specialty foods or drinks. Carefully plan menus for simple and economical meals for the majority of your holiday dining. Also, carefully plan your special occasion meals watching for sales.
- 13. Not shopping a year in advance, when things are considerably reduced at the end of each season.
- 14. Not using coupons. This time of year there are some really good deals and promotions...so if there are discounts on items on your list, don't pass them up. Try www.retailmenot.com for online discount codes at checkout.
- 15. Buying overpriced wrapping paper just to make your gifts look extra special.
- 16. Splurging on meals away from home, or tipping too much when you do go out.
- 17. Paying for warranties on appliances and electronics. Odds are that you won't need the extra coverage because most major appliances don't break down during the extended-warranty period. Or you might already be

covered. The four major credit card networks — Visa, MasterCard, Discover and American Express — provide up to a year of extended warranty protection for some cardholders, according to credit card comparison site www.cardhub.com.

- 18. Not clearly planning your charitable contributions. We all want to help out those in need during the holidays, but we usually either go overboard, don't plan a set amount or get carried away with everyone who approaches your help. This can add up quickly.
- 19. Paying full price for gift cards. It is possible to find gift cards at a discount. Try these sites: www.giftcardgranny.com or www.cardkangaroo.com for up to 50 percent savings sometimes.
- 20. Buying "bad" gifts. Be thoughtful well in advance regarding gifts you plan on giving.
- 21. Going overboard for your kids. It is an easy thing to do, out of desire to make the season magical and a desire to grant their every wish, but be careful. Stay the course on your predetermined amount of money available for gifts, and live within the reality of your budget.
- 22. Running too many errands through poor planning.
- 23. **Paying too much for shipping**. Try www.freeshipping.org for shipping coupons and the date for free shipping for online purchases this holiday season.
- 24. Spending too much on greeting cards. There are many places to access e-cards. Or better yet, design your own letter/card in a simple program, and send it electronically. You will save on postage and the card.
- 25. Buying for yourself. While you may be worth it, no matter how good the deal, pass it up. On average we spend about \$130 on ourselves during the holidays, according to the National Retail Federation. So be careful...that is a lot of money. Imagine what an impact that extra money will make on your gift list. Only a couple more weeks of abstaining from unnecessary

personal purchases and you can get back into the swing of spending on yourself at the first of the year, if you have the money.

This article was written by Teresa Hunsaker, USU Extension family and consumer sciences educator, Weber County

## Ask an Expert// 5 Steps to Financial Freedom

Financial freedom is something that most people want, but only a few learn how to master. While it does take some up-front planning, in the end the payoff is substantial. Here are five things that can be done to ensure more financial freedom.

## Ask an Expert // 7 Ways to Identify Money Wasters



Have you ever been caught in the trap of wasting money? Find out how you can escape!

#### A Penny Saved is a Penny Earned

In a recent article, financial guru Dave Ramsey identified the Top 10 things Americans wasted money on in 2015. His list includes: student loans, Ziosk tablets at restaurants, gym memberships, daily coffee trips, car payments, car leasing, car wash upgrades, name-brand household paper products, timeshares and shipping charges.

While this is his personal perspective, assessing our own personal money wasters over the year is a worthwhile activity. Here's how to do it.

\*Get out receipts or go online to your bank account (or bank statements if you have them) and start adding up expenses in specific categories such as clothing, food, entertainment, gas, etc.

\*Total each category for the entire year. This will take some time if you have not been tracking through the year, but it is critical if you want to change the way you handle money.

\*This last part is the most useful, and that is to ask yourself some key questions to identify money wasters:

1) Did we need to spend this much?

2) What traps did we fall into?

3) Did we get into loans that, with some planning, we could have saved for to avoid the interest costs? Could we have put more money down or found a better interest rate? (Or avoided a loan altogether?) 4) Did we enter into contracts for products or services that we didn't realistically think through? (The long-term implications can get us in trouble.)

5) Do we currently have little habits that add up to a considerable dollar amount when multiplied by the frequency?

6) Are we guilty of the "I earned it, I deserve it" mentality?

7) Is the price of convenience being forgotten in our budget and dollar equations?

It can be helpful to assess where we are financially, based on current habits we may have gotten into, then determine if there are better ways our resources could be spent in the coming year. Ramsey's list provides us some great things to consider for our own budget as well as a path to step down some of our own expenses.

This article was written by Teresa Hunsaker, Utah State University Extension educator, teresa.hunsaker@usu.edu, 801-399-8200

## 5 Ways to Use a Bonus, Gift or Tax Refund



It's that time of year again. Many people will be getting tax returns (or already have) and are looking for the best ways to use that money as well as other "extra" money they have received.

Many of us hope for a windfall or a large gift or bonus. However, more than likely, most of us will be hoping for a tax refund this time of year. Here are five ways to consider using your tax refund (or gift or bonus).

- Add it to your Savings. Whether you are saving for a particular item or event such as a vacation, new baby or retirement, your savings account is a great place for any extra money you receive. Powerpay.org can help you set savings goals, help you with steps to reach them and also find resources to help you with overall financial goals.
- 2. Reduce Debt. If you have any debt, this is also an important category to pay attention to. Powerpay.org can be an especially useful tool to help you power your way out of debt. There is also an iOS app for PowerPay. These tools will help you determine which

debts should be paid first and outcomes if you pay different amounts on each debt.

- 3. Contribute to your Posterity's Future. Set up or contribute to a college fund, wedding plans or other event for your children or grandchildren. The Utah Educational Savings Plan can be a tool for college savings. Be sure you understand the details before participating.
- 4. Charitable Giving. If you decide to contribute to a charity, be sure to check a website such as Charity Navigator or Charity Watch before donating.
- 5. Create or Add to an Emergency Fund. If you don't have one, do what you can to get one started. This can be a useful tool to help keep you out of debt. Any amount can be helpful to start with and add to. A minimum to aim for should be \$1,000, and recommended is three to six months of your income.

## 5 Quick Tips for Managing Money as a Couple



These 5 tips will help you manage money as a team!

#### The Cost That Money Can Have

Successful couples have learned to blend their money styles by being in harmony with the way they build a budget and spend money. So how do they do it?

Everyone has a money style. Many people love to save, others enjoy spending and unfortunately some just don't want to be bothered with thinking about money, and they are the avoiders.

Often spouses are opposite in their habits, which can work well; but unless they can discuss it and make a successful plan, it can lead to arguments and dissatisfaction in the relationship.

It may have been learned from parents or developed later in life, but **everyone values money differently** and has a preferred style for handling it. No style is right or wrong, but how it is handled is critically important.

Some regard money as a security and have a desire to save and

protect it. Some enjoy spending money because it makes them feel good, and still some don't want to even open an envelope that might have a bill inside.

## Unless you understand how your partner values money, it can cause frustration in a relationship.

When a couple fails to communicate about how each person values money and there is not a financial plan, arguments often arise. Many unhappy marriages and divorces are a direct result of financial issues.

A strong relationship will put the value of money into what makes family members happy and content. Money will be used for meeting goals and planning ahead for the future. When you can build a financial plan, you will have the freedom to work on areas of need for your family.

Consider these tips for building a financial plan:

1. Discuss how you value money and what is important (saving, spending or not discussing it). Visit Olivia Mellan's website if unfamiliar with money styles. Take the quiz at https://www.moneyharmony.com/moneyharmony-quiz.

2. Discuss your family goals for this year, the next five years and then for future needs and retirement.

3. Make a financial plan (a budget) where you can set aside money to save and money for charity. If things are tight, start where you can. Most financial planners will encourage you to set aside 10 percent for each of these; however, you can begin with less. Even a little can make a difference because it sets a precedence.

**4.** Set up a plan for your family needs and wants and review it monthly.

5. Be sure to set aside weekly activity nights for the two of you. Spending quality time together can help you discuss your

financial plans in a more direct and positive way.

Couples with strong relationships have developed money management skills that work for them. For example, they set aside time each month to go over finances, talk about how they value money and set goals.

Generally one of the individuals will be the money manager; however, both should discuss and look at the plans each month. Both partners must be happy with the spending arrangement.

Understanding the value each person places on money helps build respect in a relationship. Both partners should have input about where the money goes.

Relationships are fragile, and money is a major issue. It doesn't matter how much or how little you have, but how you work as a team to plan and be content with your financial decisions.

This article was written by Carolyn Washburn, Utah State University Extension family and consumer sciences professor

## Keep 2016 Looking Bright

Keep up with those 2016 goals!



#### New Year, New You

Have you made your resolutions for 2016? If not, here are some amazing ideas to get the ball rolling. If you have, check this list and make sure that your goals are on-track!

#### Make sure your goals are SMART:

If you plan to set goals, make sure they are SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and has a Time frame. Add as many intermediate action steps to your goal plan as possible. A written goal with these elements puts your brain to work faster than if you merely have the thoughts in your mind. A few minutes each day taking action on your goals can put you farther ahead in attaining them as opposed to spending hours periodically. There are many goal setting resources on the internet to help you with the goal setting, planning and completion process.

#### Make your goals VISUAL:

Create a vision board with pictures and words of your goals.

Put a frame around, which can be as simple as painter's tape, to give your brain parameters on which to focus. Spending a few minutes a day concentrating intently on the images and words, 2-3 minutes in the morning and at night can be very effective. As you attain your goals, put your completed goals in a binder with the date you accomplished them. This will give you momentum to complete your goals faster. Again, there are many resources on the internet on vision boards, but one I like is 3KeyElements.com.

#### Check your CREDIT REPORT:

Even more important than knowing your credit score, which is often provided for free by credit card companies, is knowing that your credit history is secure and accurate. Incorrect information and fraudulent activity can affect your credit standing greatly. Annualcreditreport.com is the official site to get your free annual credit report for the three credit reporting bureaus, Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian. If you stagger pulling your report throughout the year it will help keep a monitor on your credit. Consider getting your report in January, one at tax time and one in the fall.

#### Make some positive HEALTH changes:

You can find useful tips and tools for healthy activity and food choices on ChooseMyPlate.gov. Consider shopping more on the perimeter of the grocery store where you can find healthier choices such as fruit and vegetable produce and dairy and meats. Choose lean dairy and meats. Choose more whole grain products. Making your changes gradually is more effective than trying to do too much and giving up.

#### Monitor your ACTIVITY level:

Get a good device to track your activity level. If you are tracking steps, 7,500 - 10,000 is considered active, with 10,000 being the better goal of the range. Start where you are

and add steps gradually till you reach your goal. Smart phones often have activity tracking options and there are many apps to help with tracking your activity and food intake. Be sure to check with a doctor before beginning an exercise program.

#### Strengthen your family RELATIONSHIPS:

Eating dinner together is a great way to increase family togetherness. The benefits of eating together are better communication, better nutrition and better well-being. Eating dinner around the table has greater benefits than watching TV while eating.

#### Make a PLAN:

If you have a business or plan to start a business, make sure you have a plan and the know how to run a successful business. Be sure you have thought everything through before starting a business. Many small businesses end within the first two years after having put a lot of time and resources into it. There are many business planning tools available through SBA.gov and SBDC.gov. Watch for the Garfield County Business Conference in March, which is open to everyone to attend.

## Use the USU Extension Office as a RESOURCE:

Check your local County Utah State University Extension Offices for classes, resources and information on these and other topics. Or check the state USU Extension website extension.usu.edu for additional information, fact sheets and articles.

This article was written by SuzAnne Jorgensen, Extension Agent, Garfield County

## 10 Ways to Avoid Holiday Debt

Christmas is just around the corner, but there is still time to plan for gift exchanges that won't cause credit card debt to skyrocket. Consider implementing one, two or several of the following tips.



\* Reduce the number of purchased gifts. This is especially effective for children. Rather than buying gifts for family and friends, help children create service gift cards good for babysitting, watching a pet for a weekend, 1 dozen homemade cookies, etc.

\* Pick up odd jobs for a few weeks. Find people who will pay to have their leaves raked, garden tilled or rain gutters cleaned. If you are handy with tools, there may be other jobs that can be done like chopping wood, building a shed, etc.

\* Beware of shopping the TV networks. Professionals on commercials are trained to entice buyers. They are interested in getting you to buy; they aren't interested in whether or not you need their product.

\* Shop local. Perhaps some items on your Christmas list could be purchased for less in a larger city. However, watching sales close to home can save time and fuel costs. Consider that many who shop out of town will also spend money to eat out and are tempted to buy more when there is a larger selection available.

\* Set a spending limit and stick to it. Traditions of buying expensive clothes, large tools, appliances, etc., can quickly run up the credit card tab. Also, do kids (and adults) really need the very latest tech gadget or toy?

\* Spend on a gift that is an investment in your future. As a couple, consider giving each other the gift of an extra payment on your home mortgage. This could jump-start the desire to pay off your home sooner. Those who budget even \$50 more each month to pay down the principal on their mortgage can take two or more years off the total due by decreasing the interest.

\* Put on a "practical" hat when making your Christmas list. Socks, gloves, kitchen shears, towels, a welcome mat or a book are examples of practical gifts. Does the family you are giving to really need one more decoration for the home? Perhaps, if it has personal sentiments attached, but be thoughtful if you choose to go this direction.

\* Consider size, shape and weight if you are mailing. Costs of shipping have gone up, even since last year. If you are sending gifts, perhaps a gift card is the best choice. It's possible that the shipping costs may be more than the value of the gift. Some companies have electronic gift cards that can be emailed directly to the recipient.

\* Start setting aside cash now. How many paychecks do you have coming between now and the holidays? For some it may be only two. Others could have as many as six. Could you set aside 5 percent from each paycheck? That could give you extra money to work with.

\* Black Friday and Cyber Monday – are they worth the hype? Consider that the whole purpose behind these events is to jump-start consumer spending for the holidays. There may be one or two exceptional deals, but most people will be better off to simply stick to the original shopping list.

The above ideas don't come close to covering the slew of suggestions available to help reduce buyers' remorse and January credit card statement shock. Hopefully, however, they will assist in getting the creative juices flowing in deciding how to spend less this Christmas. For other suggestions to slash expenses throughout the year, visithttp://extension.usu.edu and click on "Publications." Then type "Slashing Expenses" in the search bar.

By: Kathy Riggs, Utah State University Extension professor, kathleen.riggs@usu.edu, 435-586-8132

## Baby Steps to Budgeting



Budgeting can be easy if you take it one step at a time!

### Little by Little

Are you feeling overwhelmed by your financial situation? Well you're definitely not alone! According to the American Psychological Association, money, work and the economy remain the most common sources of stress in Americans.

To help you get back on track and feel confident about your finances, financial expert Amanda Christensen offers three baby steps to budgeting. No matter where you are or what state you're in, the key to budgeting is taking one step at a time.

Click here or click below to watch the clip from Studio 5!



## Establishing Positive Credit: It's Easier Than You Think!



Talking about credit can be intimidating. To young adults and recent graduates of high school and college, credit can be a particularly scary subject. But don't worry, establishing positive credit is easy with these 8 tips!

#### **Give Credit some Credit**

It is spring, the school year is winding down and many are looking forward to graduation. Newly graduated high school and college students may be looking to secure rental housing or to make a major purchase such as buying a car.

Big transactions like these often depend on having a suitable credit history, something that many graduates may not have established. But don't worry! Here are some tips for establishing a positive credit history:

1. Order your credit report to find out what kind of credit history you already have. You can access your free credit report from all three major credit reporting agencies at www.annualcreditreport.com. 2. Correct errors on your credit report. Make sure all of the information on the report is accurate. If you find errors on your credit report, contact the credit reporting agency that the report is from and file a dispute.

**3. Get a secured credit card.** If you are unable to obtain new credit because of poor credit history or lack of a credit history, you can obtain a secured credit card. When you open a secured credit card you will provide collateral in the form of a cash deposit equivalent to the line of credit that is being issued.

4. Make regular, on-time payments with your existing accounts including utilities and rent. Utility companies and landlords don't typically report information to credit bureaus, but delinquent accounts that are transferred to a collection agency will show up on your credit report as a negative item.

5. Establish a non-traditional credit history. Building a credit history takes time. In the meantime, try showing a non-traditional credit history with statements from companies that you have made regular payments to. These might include a cell phone company or a bank that you have made regular savings account deposits to.

6. Limit the number of credit card accounts that you have open. When department stores offer a discount for opening their card, truly consider how often you shop at that store and whether the card will benefit you. Having too many open accounts can negatively affect your credit history.

7. Keep your credit card balances down. Balances should be no more than 30 percent of the available line of credit. For example, a credit card with a credit line of \$1,000 should only maintain a balance of \$300 or less.

8. Choose a credit card and stick with it. The longer your history with a particular company, the better your credit report will be.

This article was written by Stacy Abbott.

Stacy Abbott is an Extension Assistant for Utah State University. She received a master's degree in family and consumer sciences education from Utah State University. Trained as a financial counselor and housing educator, she spent 6 years working at a HUD approved counseling agency. Stacy loves learning and enjoys teaching others practical life skills especially in the area of housing and personal finance.

# Save Today for Your Summer Getaway!



Some summer vacations can be pricey. However, it is definitely possible to get away without inviting the always-present friend, Debt.

#### Fun in the Sun

Spring is in full swing and summer is right around the corner! The warm weather soon to come will welcome swimming suits, lemonade and summer getaways. The summer months are a perfect time to travel; the kids are out of school, the sun stays out to play longer and the weather plays nice too.

The only con to traveling in the summer is the expense. However, with these three quick tips from Extension Assistant Professor Amanda Christensen, you can start saving right away for those perfect days spent in the sun with your family.

Have fun in the sun without your wallet feeling done!



#### References

https://extension.usu.edu/news\_sections/videos/3\_tips\_to\_save

This article was written by Leah Calder, a USU Extension Marketing Assistant.