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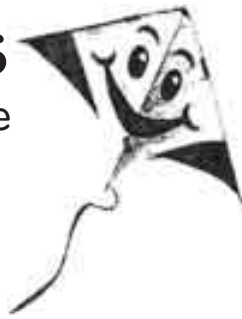
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MONEY TIP: Painless Ways to Trim Your Budget and to Build Your Savings Account

By Carey Denman

As difficult as it may be with the buzz of bad news that seems to hover everywhere you go, the best thing you can do to quell your economic fears is to focus on what you can control right now. Getting a handle on your overall financial picture can better prepare you to make effective decisions. Once you've done this, you need to get down to the business of cutting your expenses.

You may wonder, "How can I cut back now when my budget is already tight?" You might also think that a call to cut costs is just plain insensitive when you're trying to enjoy some modest slice of pleasure in distressing times. Stick with me here. I'm no killjoy, and I don't think deprivation is the key to gaining financial stability. What I do think is that cutting costs is something that everyone can do, regardless of your current financial situation. You can begin cutting costs in the most painless of ways by eliminating goods or services that you don't use or that don't bring value to your life.

At first, you might think that this doesn't apply to you: Why would you be paying for anything that you don't use? Chances are you just don't realize that you are. If you've been tracking your expenses, or if you can commit to doing so, you'll begin to see where your money goes. With this information, you can decide if you're happy with where your money is going—and consider what value you're getting in return.

Let's say that you pay \$100 a month for your cable package, which amounts to \$1200 a year or about \$3.30 every single day. Based on the time you spend watching television each month, do you feel as though you get your money's worth all of the time? If not, is it possible to change your cable package? Can you cut the movie channels or just opt for fewer channels altogether? You probably find yourself flipping to the same channels all the time anyway—get rid of any that you possibly can. You could also consider eliminating cable and using the money you save to build up your emergency fund.

In fact, make it a point to take any of the money you save with these suggestions and tuck it away. This includes any money you might save by reconsidering your cell phone options. Are you currently paying for any options that you don't use? Can

you modify your cell phone plan to avoid paying overages? Could you consider moving to a pre-paid plan? Or can you eliminate your land line or a second cell phone in your family that only gets occasional use?

Do you have stacks of magazines waiting to be read? If you're already "behind" two issues and have a new one arriving any day, you may want to consider cancelling your subscription. If reading the magazine were important to you, you wouldn't ever have to worry about not getting to them. Go to the public library to read those magazines that interest you most.

You might intend to hit the gym three days a week, but you need to be honest with yourself about the value of your membership. Unfortunately, your good intentions can become expensive intentions if you keep holding out hope that you'll find time to work out. This goes for any kind of "membership" you might have, including those to companies that require you to spend a certain amount each month to remain part of the club. This runs the gamut from books, to cleaning supplies

and health supplements to movies and music CDs. The problem with many of these memberships is that they can be difficult to discontinue, but if you're paying merely out of habit or because you simply haven't taken the time to cancel, you need to cancel your membership as soon as possible.

Making changes such as these can put you in the frame of mind to make further adjustments in your budget, allowing you to focus on building your savings account in the event you lose your job. If you've already suffered a job loss, however, you need to focus your energy on some essential steps that I'll address next week.

This information is provided through your local Consumer Credit Counseling Service, located at 375 South 4th Street, Coos Bay, OR 97420, by permission of the American Center for Credit Education. For additional Consumer information or help in resolving financial issues contact Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Coos-Curry at (541) 267-7040 or (800) 248-7040 or visit our website at www.cccscoos.org.

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