

A monthly newsletter published by Interface EAP

Seven Money Management Tips

Have a resolution to better manage your finances this year? Here are some tips to help!

Track your spending. It's easy, if somewhat arduous, to jot notes on a smartphone or tablet every time you put gas in the car or stop for a coffee. But if you do, you will be amazed at how quickly money can slip through your hands. Some banks offer tracking and budgeting services through sites their websites or apps. Once you really see where the cash — and credit card transactions — are going, it will be easier for you to identify and cut wasteful spending.

Balance cash in, cash out. Now that you're seeing where the money is going, chart it against your other expenses. We are talking about everything from housing, food and clothing to movie-going, dining out and getting manicures and pedicures. It's pretty simple to calculate whether you're spending more than you're bringing in. Now you can see just how, where and why you're doing it. Acknowledging the problem is the first step to solving it.

Be realistic. If you absolutely don't see yourself brewing your own coffee every day — despite the estimated \$2,400 in annual savings — limit the java stop to once a day, rather than twice, or to a less-expensive coffee shop. Do the same with savings and paying off debt. Socking away \$50 a week is psychologically easier than \$200 a month, though the result is the same. Paying off a \$2,500 credit-card bill can be done in \$500 increments.

Automate it all. Raise your hand if you promised yourself that you'd transfer money from one account to a savings account and, oops, just forgot. Or planned on paying that bill by the due date but that too slipped your mind. Automate those duties so you

don't end up making excuses when you don't get to it yourself.

Aim to be fee-less. Interest fees, late fees, ATM withdrawal fees, checking-account fees. Banking fees can be avoided or reduced by choosing the right financial institution and products, and automating bill payments. And if you are bad at balancing your accounts and/or don't have a cushion account to cover you, consider overdraft protection on your accounts.

Find ways to stay motivated. Making a plan to cut spending and save money is easier said than done, so it's important to make yourself accountable. Start by telling your family and friends what your goals are and ask them to help you keep it up. You can even announce it to the masses on social media for crowd-sourcing encouragement. There's nothing like a thumbs up or smiley face to keep you going.

Negotiate other bills. Schedule yourself an hour or so to check the rates you are paying on all your bills. Make some calls to rework monthly tabs like cable, phone, internet, credit-card interest rates, auto and home insurance costs. That time can pay off handsomely all year long. Chances are there are untapped discounts or new offers available. And if they can't slash some of your costs, you might get more bells and whistles, which makes the dollars spent a better value. Check out competitor's promotions too and ask your provider to match the prices.

As an extra bonus, if you can cut the interest rates on your credit-card bills, you can get out of debt that much quicker. That's assuming, of course, you aren't running the bills up as you pay them off.



Keeping Track of Time



Living a busy life can make it hard to stay on track and fit in everything you need to do. Developing good time management skills can be beneficial for focus, stress reduction, and crossing more off your to-do list.

Try these tips to help you get your schedule better under control:

- ◆ **Keep a planner with you** to organize and prioritize all your activities including work, sleep, eating, social activities, and commute time.
- ◆ **Take 15 minutes** at the start of each day to list all the things you need to get done, and then check them off as you do them throughout the day. You will get a better sense of what you have done and will see that you are completing more than you think.
- ◆ **Expect the unexpected** and leave room in your schedule for those last minute activities or an unexpected meeting. Try not to fill your schedule so full that you can't make adjustments when you need to.
- ◆ **Allow yourself a couple 10 minute breaks** during the day to just **BREATHE**. Taking that time to relax can help you refocus and work more efficiently.
- ◆ **Learn to say no** to activities and requests that are less of a priority for you. You can open up your schedule and give yourself more time to get things done that are important to you.
- ◆ **Give yourself some ME time**. It is important to have time when you do something you enjoy. It energizes you and helps you be more productive. Make time in your schedule for your favorite activities and hobbies.

Attitude: Choose to Be More Positive



Attitude can be learned (and changed). It may seem to operate automatically, but behavioral health experts say it is actually a “filter” you have chosen to adopt as a way of looking at things. A deeply negative attitude may be a product of depression and will not readily go away without outside help. But those who are psychologically in good health can do a lot to change their outlook by consciously switching to a different filter.

Examine your thinking

Attitude has three processes: thinking, feeling and action. The first of these is critical, because it determines the course for the other two. You react not so much to events themselves as to your interpretation of them.

If you tell yourself, “I’ll never finish all my projects today,” that may be true. But it can also be true if you tell yourself, “I’ll stay focused, and work as hard as I can to get as much done as I can.” You interpret these differently, and the difference is huge! One puts you in a positive mindset, the other—not so much.

Additionally, catching yourself when you take things personally is another way to make a choice toward a positive outlook. This self-awareness can have the immediate benefit of lowering stressful emotions such as anger. But it can also help change the external factors—like the behavior of bosses and co-workers—for the better. If you learn to react with less anger, you provoke less anger and friction from others.

Learn from others

If you want to change your attitude from negative to positive, do a little research. See who around you has a more positive attitude and observe them ... basically, imitate them.

These positive models can include family as well as co-workers. Family models can have a particularly strong influence, for better or worse. We have a tendency to act in ways that are familiar for us, that is, they come from family. And each of us tends to fixate on one family member that we tend to be like. If the relative you emulate tends to be a negative person, look around elsewhere to find someone more positive. By the same token, it’s a good idea to avoid people who strike you as negative.

Meditation at Work

Learning to manage stress can be a great benefit to your health! Stress can definitely overwhelm us; whether it's because of hectic schedules, deadlines, important meetings, and the list goes on and on. Since a large portion of your time might be spent at work, learning how to meditate at the office can be a great way to keep you calm and healthy. Try out these meditation tips:



- ◆ Focus all of your attention on how you breathe. Concentrate on breathing through your nostrils, and taking controlled, deep, and slow breaths.
- ◆ When you have a moment alone, close your eyes and block out all surrounding sounds. Focus on yourself and nothing else.
- ◆ Take a 5 minute break from that report you have due, close your eyes, and think about a place or hobby that is relaxing to you. Using mental images about a relaxing time in your life can help soothe your mind and calm you down.

Meditation at work can help you improve your focus and attention, trigger creativity, increase your energy and production, and reduce your stress. You can incorporate meditation into your 10 minute breaks!



Is it Depression?

It can be difficult to tell the difference between depression and a normal case of "the blues." Everyone gets the blues at times because of troubling events—job difficulties, money problems, family issues, illness, etc. Stressful or tragic events, such as the death of a loved one, can cause many of the symptoms of depression, such as sadness, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance and fatigue.

Such normal reactions to stressful events typically improve over time. In severe cases, however, such episodes can lead to major depression.

Ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Do I feel unhappy, empty, sad or irritable most of the day, nearly every day?
- ◆ Have I experienced decreased interest or pleasure in most activities most of the day, nearly every day?
- ◆ Has my appetite or weight significantly changed recently?
- ◆ Has my energy level decreased; do simple tasks seem an effort?
- ◆ Do I feel hopeless or helpless?
- ◆ Do I have trouble concentrating on simple tasks that were not a problem before?
- ◆ Do I prefer to be alone rather than interact with other people?
- ◆ Do I no longer feel like "myself"?
- ◆ Do I wake up too early or have trouble falling asleep?
- ◆ Do I have thoughts of suicide or death?

Whether you are diagnosed with major depression or a milder form, you can benefit from treatment. If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, or if you want more information, free confidential assistance is available through your EAP.

Stress

Financial

Legal

Depression

For free and confidential assistance, call your
Employee Assistance Program and speak with a Care Coordinator:

(713) 781-3364
(800) 324-4327

Se Habla Español
(800) 324-2490

Marital Problems

Family Problems

Alcohol/Drug Problems

Other Referrals

www.4eap.com

Your employer has contracted with Interface EAP to provide you an Employee Assistance Program.