

Too Much Month, Too Little Money?

Can you relate to Marty Stuart's song "Too Much Month at the End of the Money?"

You promised yourself to get physically fit and it didn't work out as planned. Now the credit card bill for the gym fees comes in and reminds you of another New Year's resolution - to get financially fit.

Stop beating yourself up and change your approach. Disagreements about money management are the number one cause of relationship problems. Communication, exercise and financial fitness will reduce stress while improving your mood and your relationships.

All you need is a simple plan. Start off slowly. Walk a bit more than you did before and build from there. Figure out your major expenses and build from there.

The starting point is your home. Walk around the block. Figure out your total housing costs. That's the monthly payment for the mortgage, insurance and property taxes. The goal is to keep the cost below twenty-eight percent of your gross income.

The next step is to walk a little longer. Jot down any loan expenses. These are the student loans, the car payment and the credit card payments. Add up your housing costs and debt payments. If they are more than thirty-six percent of your gross income, you need to cut back. Okay, that did work up a sweat. Take a shower and try to relax. If the numbers are too high put the credit card in a block of ice and use it only for an emergency. Begin to pay down the cards with the highest interest rates.

The following week move quicker around the block and go a bit deeper into the finances. Now we have a real workout going and want something to eat and another hot shower. Groceries and utilities have to be paid and we can find an average cost by going through the checkbook. While you are at it, see if there are some other major ticket items. Having raised two children into adulthood I know they can eat cash for everything from clothes to overdue books. You have to figure that in as well.

If this is getting too depressing, just add some more exercise and release those endorphins. Your reward can be a latte. That latte falls in the mystery money category. This part of the program would frighten even Captain Kirk. For those of you who don't remember, William Shatner was Captain Kirk before he went to law school and ended up in Boston. Still confused? Google Kirk and Star Trek and then money and relationships.

Continuing on with the Star Trek theme we appeal to Mr. Spock's logic and ask him about the diminishing marginal utility of satisfaction. He tells us that one latte is great, the second one is good and the third starts to lose something. That example didn't work. Here is another. The in-laws come to visit. Day one is good, day two is headed downhill quickly, and on day three you schedule the long overdue root canal.

You want to learn where the money goes, especially the mystery money, so you get the most satisfaction from every dollar. When I found out how much money I went through for dining out my circumference decreased and I was able to tighten my belt. You too can make similar choices but you first have to know what happens to the mystery money.

You don't need to know where every dollar goes but if you have \$500 to \$1,000 that seems to vanish, you want to do some exploring. It can be enlightening. Some things you keep and others you discard. This simple exercise program will get you headed in the right direction. Remember you are doing this to improve your mood, your health and your relationships. We all learned how to walk one step at a time. If you fall, get back up and try again. What is important is the process of gaining control and communicating about money. You will be glad you did it.

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