



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MONEY

FINANCIAL TIPS FOR TODAY'S CONSUMER

CONSUMER CREDIT COUNSELING SERVICE OF MONTANA & WYOMING

Mark Your Calendar!

Don't miss our CCCS Fun Day on August 9! It is a celebration of 40 years in business. There will be free hot dogs, chips, pop, coloring activities, a jolly jumper, and free credit reports. Come join us at 2022 Central Avenue, Great Falls from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Click your way to lower food bills

You've read about the coupon queens: avid couponers who feed a family of teenage boys on something like \$10 a week. These folks are truly the black belts of couponing. They scrutinize the Sunday newspaper circulars and zip from store to store to leap on the best deals -- which they can identify because they maintain detailed "price books" tracking the historical sale prices of hundreds of items.

Stalk the sales . . . from your couch

You can always check the grocery store ads you can find in your local paper, typically on Wednesday or Sunday, or both. The best deals are usually although not always featured on the front page of the circular. Plan your weekly meals around those, and stock up on nonperishable and stuff for your freezer. Or use the Penny Pincher Gazette www.ppgazette.com/ or other online coupon services to get an overview of all the advertised sales you can enter your zip code and get the coupons for your area. Don't forget to shop with a grocery list and set out a budget before entering the grocery store.

Your story could help others and earn you a \$20 gas card.

Call Lauri at 406.454.5727 to find out how.

Star Studded Door Hanger

What you'll need:

2 miniature paper plates • Star-shaped foam stamp • Red acrylic paint
Red and blue glitter glue • Gold alphabet stickers • Patriotic star garland
White craft glue • White yarn • Scissors

How to make it:

Cut a piece of yarn to 14" in length.

Cut patriotic garland into six 16" pieces.

Glue two paper plates together so that they are both facing toward each other.

While glue on plates is still wet, place yarn into the top between the two plates, insert about an inch of each end between the plates. Do the same with the garland lengths, securing them between the bottom of the paper plates. Let dry completely.

Paint star-shaped foam stamp with a thin layer of red paint. Press carefully but firmly into the center of the plate (don't smash the plate) and lift straight up to remove.

Use a paintbrush to fill in any spots on the star that may not have transferred from the stamp.

Squeeze some red glitter glue onto the center of the red star and spread out using a small paintbrush, covering entire star.

Use white glitter glue to draw a border around the star.

Use blue glitter glue to draw a border around the plate edge. Let dry completely.

Apply alphabet stickers to the top of the plate, spelling out "WELCOME".

Wrap the garland around your fingers in a corkscrew fashion to create curls. Stretch them out and manipulate with your hands to get them how you want them. Hang on your door!

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8:00 a.m. - 5:30
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*Questions or comments?
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SURVIVING JOB LOSS

It's never a good time to lose your job. However, the current economic environment has resulted in business closures, downsizing and layoffs for many Americans. The unemployment rate hovers near 5 percent with recent graduates preparing to flood the market. The National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) offers the following tips for surviving a layoff, should one occur:

- Allow yourself to be upset or even afraid. These are natural reactions. However, should they become intense, be willing to seek professional help. Talking things through and hearing another person's perspective can bring relief and restore your positive outlook.
- Resist the urge to tell your boss what you truly think of him or her. Remember, you may need him or her as a reference for a future job.
- Take advantage of any assistance your workplace offers. Many companies provide placement assistance, job retraining and severance packages. Make sure you are aware of all benefits offered.
- Apply for any applicable government benefits. Your HR representative at work will be a good resource.
- Resist the urge to solve your problems by spending recklessly. It may feel good for the moment, but the high of spending won't equal the low of dealing with additional debt when there is no income.
- Don't be tempted to live off of your credit cards. Someone with a good line of credit could actually support the family at the current standard of living by using credit, but there's no guarantee a new position will materialize any time soon. One rule of thumb job counselors use is to expect one month of job search for each \$10,000 of annual income you hope to replace. In other words, if you seek a \$50,000 salary, it may take you five months to land that job.
- Take a personal inventory. Consider all assets, income and expenses. Hopefully, you will not have to liquidate any assets to survive, but it is good to know what you have to fall back on.
- Drastic times call for drastic measures. Nothing is off-limits. If necessary, consider selling the second car, or any recreational vehicles, real estate holdings, rental properties or jewelry.
- After reviewing income versus debt obligations, if there is not enough money to make ends meet, calculate how much is needed to meet the basic household living expenses.
Your goal is to pay everyone, but if you must make a choice, keep your home-life stable by paying your rent or mortgage, utilities, childcare, insurance premiums, health care, food and keeping gas in the car.
- Have a family meeting that includes the children. You don't want people pulling in different directions, and a joint effort yields a greater result. Make cutbacks wherever possible, knowing that this austere lifestyle will only be temporary. Resolve to stop all non-essential spending immediately.
- Tracking your spending is always a good idea, but when money is tight, it's essential. Write down every cent you spend. At the end of 30 days, review where the money went and make conscious decisions on where to cut back. You'll be amazed by how much you can save and not even feel the pinch.
- Contact your creditors to arrange lower payments. Most major credit card issuers have in-house help programs. Explain your situation and what you're doing to resolve it. The creditor may be able to temporarily lower your monthly payment and reduce interest.
- Call your mortgage lender or servicer and inform them of your situation. Be prepared to provide them with documentation of the setback, and have a resolution plan in mind. Since the average consumer doesn't know all of the loan modifications available, it is smart to first sit down with a certified housing counselor and map out a plan. This way, you'll know that you've selected the option that is best suited to your situation.

"No one is immune to a layoff. Stalwarts of the American economy have laid off workers by the thousands. Financial setbacks are never easy, but with help, most can survive unscathed," said Gail Cunningham, spokesperson for the NFCC. "Reaching out to a trained and certified credit counselor can be one of the smartest steps a person can take during times of financial distress."

You don't have to solve your financial problems alone. Your certified counselor can help you call 1.877.ASK.CCCS.