

## If I'm Working so Hard, Why Am I Always Broke?

Several months ago I read a story *One Family's Sudden Fall from Comfort to Despair*. One day Patrick Robbins was earning \$110,000 a year and the next day he was laid off with no severance pay for a company he'd worked at for 22 years. Within a week his family was on Medicaid and had applied for food stamps. In Patrick's own words – *from middle class to poor immediately*. He had no emergency fund and his unemployment only covered the mortgage. He and his wife gathered their children (ages 6, 10, 11 and 13) together to explain the situation. It's the first time he ever cried in front of his children. Patrick eventually got a new job in another city and the family moved. I was moved by Patrick's wife comment "If someone breaks a leg, you can sympathize, but you don't know how it feels until it happens to you." The Robbins' story is not uncommon today. If it hasn't happened to you it's probably happened to someone you know.

There's a new country music song -- Moo La Moo that says "There's too much month at the end of the money". Does that ring true to you? It obviously resonated with more than 3000 women who attended my breakout session at last week's Central California Women's Conference in Fresno, CA.

People are driven by fear and they're realizing it's time to get their finances in order. According to Maria Nemeth, author of *The Energy of Money* "The key to an easy life is to learn to use fear and discomfort as teachers".

Where do you begin? We're a nation of unconscious spenders and most of us have no idea where we're spending our hard earned money. The first step is to track your spending for at least two weeks. Write down everything you buy, whether you use cash, check, debit card or credit card. Use a blank checkbook register or small notebook. At the end of the time review your expenditures to see where your money's been going. Most people find something they're spending more money on than they thought. Often, it's eating out and I can believe it because the restaurants always seemed to be packed full of customers.

Here are a few ways to trim you spending.

Cut the cost of eating out.

- Eat out one time less a month.
- Share meals with someone. Restaurant portions are often way too much food for one person. Most restaurants are happy to split the meal and put it on two plates at no charge.
- Order appetizer for your meal. It's less expensive and usually a better sized portion.
- Go out for breakfast or lunch instead of dinner. It's less expensive.
- Skip the drinks -- both non-alcoholic and alcoholic.
- Get a doggy bag. You can enjoy the rest of your meal for lunch the next day.
- Check out [www.restaurant.com](http://www.restaurant.com) to purchase coupons for local restaurants. The site provides you with the opportunity to purchase a coupon for much less than the value. For example, I found a local restaurant offering a \$10.00 coupon for \$4.00 (less than half-price).

Purchase the 2010 Entertainment Book for 10% off (\$31.50) and free shipping. They also offer an online membership for \$30.00 a year which allows you access to coupons throughout the United States. You'll find discounts and coupons for restaurants, shopping, travel and much more.

Rent movies from NetFlix, Blockbuster, or RedBox. You can join Netflix for as little as \$8.99 per month and watch movies at your leisure (never a late fee). RedBox offers DVDs for \$1.00 per night. Or better yet, get your movies from your local library for FREE!

Negotiate your purchases. Several months ago I bought a toaster at Macy's using another stores' 20% off coupon. How? I asked the clerk if they would accept the coupon from another store and the answer was yes. Retailers are hungry for your business, so don't be afraid to ask. If you don't ask – you can't get a YES or NO answer.

Agree to limit gift giving for this year's holiday season. I don't know most of you don't want to hear it but Christmas is less than three months away. Talk with your immediate and extended family about picking names to exchange gifts, limiting the price of the gift or consider doing white elephant gift exchange. Do something different this year, but whatever you decide make it fun!

These are just a few ideas and suggestions. In next month's newsletter I'll continue the steps on how you can make your money last without the worry of "There's too much month at the end of the money".