

Money: Do you have a plan for it?

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It makes the world revolve, coveting it spawns ill will, fools lose it and it's the stuff of countless lyrics and plot lines in literature and our lives.

Money.

It won't buy happiness, comedian Spike Milligan astutely said, but it does bring you a more pleasant form of misery.

Since mankind first developed commodity currency, the monetary system has evolved exponentially to include trading, bartering, precious metals and stones, credit, coins and paper.

Today, society is becoming cashless, with transactions being conducted electronically and remotely through the precarious ether.

Still, if it's cash in your pocket, in the bank or invested in various financial vehicles, it can run, rule and ruin lives.

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As the majority of Canadians try to recover, recoup and regroup from the recession, we can use as much financial advice as possible. With Equifax Canada telling us credit card debt grew and bankruptcy filings rose 32 per cent last year, it's still tough out there.

Accordingly, as the economy convalesces with fragility, we launch Money Wise, a series examining the realm of finance featuring York Region experts, families and individuals. Over the next few weeks, our team of reporters will explore the pleasures and perils of money. Money Wise features will be printed on these pages, blogged and videotaped on our website, yorkregion.com

It's a good and timely idea, M & Co. Chartered Accountants Professional Corporation managing director Atul Mehra said.

"York Region is a vibrant, dynamic and resilient community," the Markham accountant said. "The recession allows us to clear out inefficiencies and restructure. It's part of the process built into the economy."

Families and individuals, regardless of income, can benefit from a financial makeover.

Reducing debt should be everyone's priority, he said.

"People need to take ownership of their financial position," he said. "Look at your personal net worth. What do you own? What's the value? Who do you owe money to?"

Everyone should review interest rates and refinance debts, including credit cards and mortgages, he said.

Surviving and thriving in this delicate fiscal environment requires consensus and planning, Seneca College School of accounting and financial services professor David Hoffman said.

The biggest mistake families and corporations make is not concurring on a financial plan, Mr. Hoffman said.

"A budget, be it personal or professional, is a blueprint and it has to be discussed, workable and agreed upon," he said.

If you're carrying credit card debt, the professor's advice is to cut and consolidate and enlist the expertise of a financial planner.

"If you can't afford it, don't buy it," he said. "Cut the cards up. Look to eliminate your lowest debt first. Look at a line of credit with the lowest interest rate and roll high debt into that."

Now is an ideal time to revisit your financial obligations with your banker, he said.

"Banks are all part of the Let's Make A Deal game show," he said. "You can negotiate and change rates."

If you have the means to invest, Mr. Hoffman's best advice is to ask yourself if it's a decision you can sleep with at night.

"It all depends on your aversion to risk," he said. "Taking a cautious approach for the next 12 to 18 months is OK."

The Money Wise series will be researched and authored by York Region Media Group's award-winning regional writing team. Reporters Chris Traber, David Fleischer and Joe Fantauzzi will endeavour to enlighten and engage.

You'll learn how to how to make your kids financially savvy

and how you can still enjoy extra-curricular activities, sports and hobbies on a budget. We'll try and make you a savvy shopper at the grocery store, malls, swaps, online and garage sales and teach you the fine and ancient art of haggling.

You'll learn how the do-it-yourself approach to car and home repairs, investing and cooking can save some cash and how raising your financial IQ and literacy can take the fear out of personal finance and saving.

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We'll examine baby boomers, who have worked hard and now that they're settling into retirement, are helping their adult children financially. This is a growing trend. Whether it's help with a home downpayment or saving, parental responsibilities are lasting longer and putting more of a strain on the grey-haired set.

If you've lost your job, we'll look how you should go



An ongoing series on ways to help you spend and save better.

WEEK 1: Money Wise overview

WEEK 2: Financially savvy kids

WEEK 3: Hobbies on a budget

WEEK 4: Bargain shopper within

WEEK 5: The DIY approach

WEEK 6: Raising your financial IQ

WEEK 7: New challenges for boomers

WEEK 8: Getting back to work

WEEK 9: Retirement of your dreams

WEEK 10: Estate planning that pays off

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about getting back into the workforce and make your savings stretch further. Unemployment soared last year. How has it impacted us? We'll get you answers.

You'll also get a primer on retirement and how to achieve the lifestyle you want by making sound decisions earlier in life.

We'll also deal with the inevitable: death. It can exact a huge emotional and financial toll. We'll appraise how estate planning can clarify all the details and prevent family infighting over assets. The second part of our series, called Living Rich, will pair residents with a personal finance expert.

THEY SAY...

'Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons.'

— Woody Allen

'Money is only loaned to a man. He comes into the world with nothing and he leaves with nothing.'

— William Durant,
Founder of General Motors
and Chevrolet

'Money couldn't buy friends, but you got a better class of enemy.'

— Spike Milligan

'No one can earn a million dollars honestly.'

— William Jennings Bryan



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