

Budget Basics

Women and Money

Congratulations on taking this important step to a brighter financial future. Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada, Inc. has been helping Canadians across the country solve their credit and debt problems for years.

Our Educational Team has created over twenty publications to help you improve your personal finances. By logging onto www.consolidatedcredit.ca you can access all of our publications free of charge. We have tools to help you become debt free, use your money wisely, plan for the future, and build wealth. The topics Consolidated Credit of Canada addresses range from identity theft to building a better credit rating; from how to buy a home to paying for college. On our website you will also find interactive tools that allow you to calculate your debt and see how much it is costing you.

We are dedicated to personal financial literacy and providing a debt-free life for Canadians. If you are overburdened by high interest rate credit card debt, then I invite you to speak with one of our certified counselors free of charge by calling 1-800-656-3920 for free professional advice.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Schwartz

Executive Director

Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada, Inc.

When it comes to women and money, the news can be gloomy. We live longer, we earn less, and are less secure in retirement. But the news isn't *all* bad, because women can also be terrific budgeters, investors, savers and entrepreneurs.

Take women business owners as an example. According to a study conducted by professor Karen Hughes of the University of Alberta cited by Women Entrepreneurs of Canada (www.wec.ca):

- Women owned businesses are contributing over \$18-billion to the Canadian economy.
- There are now over 800,000 women owned businesses in Canada.
- 85% of women entrepreneurs are satisfied with their jobs in comparison to 68% of paid employees.
- Women are opening 4 out of 5 new businesses and have tripled the rate at which they have opened those businesses over the last 20 years.

Sure, the deck may be stacked against us a bit. But with some planning, hard work and a willingness to learn, women can be financially successful and independent. Here's where to start:

Be A Smart Spender

Women:

- Influence 90% of home-buying decisions*
- Spend 80% of Canada's money*

*source Financial Post

If you want to be financially successful, the first thing you have to tackle is the family budget. Millionaire women are good budgeters and they are frugal. (And frugal, by the way, means wise with money, not necessarily a spendthrift.)

You need to know where your money is going. If you haven't done so already, start tracking your spending and create a budget. If you have a family, get them involved in creating it. Visit the Learning Center at ConsolidatedCredit.ca for a couple of helpful booklets on budgeting.

Once you've created your budget and started tracking your expenses, you'll want to find ways to make you get the most for your money. Consolidated also offers helpful brochures on spending, whether it's saving money on groceries or the heating bill. The less you spend, the more you have to save and invest. So don't be afraid to clip coupons or get your kids to turn the lights out when they leave a room. Every bit can help!

Earn Your Worth

If you are going to work for someone else, it's important to research pay rates for the type of work you do (start at salary.com), to negotiate your starting salary, and to develop the skills you need to ask for and get a raise. If you don't, you not only shortchange yourself in yourself in your current job, but also in terms of your lifetime earnings. In fact, statistics show that women who consistently negotiate their salary increases have been found to earn at least *\$1 million more* during their careers than women who don't.

If you're a mom looking to balance career and family, check out Home Based Working Moms Canada (www.hbwmcanda.com). If you're looking for a great work environment with benefits or the opportunity for advancement, The Great Places to Work institute also publishes an annual list of the 50 Best Companies to Work For (www.greatplacetowork.com/best/list-ca.htm). Finally, if your company offers tuition reimbursement, take advantage of it and take classes to increase your salary and marketability.

Perhaps you just can't seem to find a job that gives you the flexibility or opportunity you want. Then starting your own business may be your ticket to financial independence. It isn't always easy, but you can often test the waters by starting a small business part-time or from home, and grow at your own pace. A terrific resource for small business advice is the Canadian government, which provides free business planning and consulting advice. Visit www.canadabusiness.ca for more information. Be very careful, though, about work at home opportunities that promise lots of money for little work – especially if they also require a large upfront investment.

Get Your Credit In Shape

According to Industry Canada, women:

- Form a greater proportion of people in bankruptcy than ever before at 41%.
- This has almost doubled in the last 20 years.

The single greatest predictor of whether a woman will end up in financial ruin is if she has children, according to bankruptcy researcher Elizabeth Warren, writing in *The Two Income Trap*. Plenty of parents know how expensive children can be, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't have children. However, the added financial responsibilities of parenthood mean that you do have children you should budget more carefully and be extra vigilant about avoiding debt and setting aside money for emergencies.

It's also important to maintain your own credit history, and try to keep it strong. Too often women want to help out their loved ones (including spouses) by cosigning, lending them money, or taking over the bills.

No one wants to think their marriage won't make it. But the truth is, debt and money troubles are cited as one of the major reasons for divorce. So don't cosign loans for a partner or spouse with a bad credit history, or you could end up with bills that last longer than the marriage. Even if you stay together, it helps to have one spouse with a strong credit history and a low debt ratio in case of emergencies.

Check your credit history at least annually and if it's less than perfect, start the process of rebuilding it. It's never too late! Visit ConsolidatedCredit.ca for free brochures about credit reports and scores, as well as divorce and credit.

If your family is digging itself into a debt hole, don't be shy about asking for help. Even if your spouse isn't willing to acknowledge the problem yet, it's important to get advice before things become so bad that you have no choice but to file for bankruptcy. For a free, confidential consultation on your debt situation, call Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada Inc. at 1-800-656-3920 or visit www.ConsolidatedCredit.ca.

Plan For Tomorrow

According to Statistics Canada:

- Well-over 40% of senior women living alone live below the pre-tax Low Income Cut Off (LICO).
- Live longer, with an average life expectancy of over 80 years compared to 77.2 for men in 2002.
- Senior women live in poverty due to low pension incomes.
- 65% of people collecting public pensions are women
- Many women have little Canada Pension Plan (CPP/QPP) or private occupational pension income because these plans are based on lifetime earnings.
- In 2001, women earned approximately 71% of what men earned.

If you don't take care of yourself who will? The good news is that a longer life means you have more time to save. Start small if you must – just start. Realize, too, that it's never too late to start saving for retirement, urges Ruth Hayden, author of *Start Where You Are*. Even if you're at or nearing traditional retirement age (55-65), you may still have 25 – 30 years of time for your investments to grow.

Women can be excellent investors if they take the time to learn. If you haven't had the time or opportunity to study the stock market yet, join or start an investment club with other women. Many women-only clubs have excellent track records. It's inexpensive to get started, and you'll develop skills that will help you make better decisions about your retirement funds. Visit the Investors Association of Canada at www.iac.ca for information on investment clubs.

Take Care of Your Loved Ones

According to authors Douglas Gray and John Budd, two thirds of Canadians die without a will. What would happen to your family, your property, or your children if you died? Don't leave it to chance. If you can't afford an attorney, find out how to go about drafting your own will and planning your estate with Gray and Budd's book "The Canadian Guide to Will and Estate Planning".

It's also important to have adequate insurance. Take life insurance, for example. If you work outside your home, your family would need to replace your income if you die. They may also have to hire someone to handle the household duties you take care of. If you don't work outside the home and have children, your family would still likely have to hire someone to do what you do (and chances are you're very underpaid!) Life insurance may be much more inexpensive than you realize.

Educate Yourself

For more inspiration and advice, visit your local library or bookstore for some of these helpful books:

From Money Shy to Money Sure by Olivia Mellan

