Avoiding the urge to splurge

Would you consider taking out a loan at up to 24 percent to buy things that you will never use or see again? That’s exactly what you do when you use a credit card for Christmas gifts if you cannot pay for the items within 30 days. Credit is an expensive way to buy things.

Unplanned or over extravagant Christmas spending can push a family into serious financial trouble, especially in January when all those bills start to roll in. Here are a few ideas to help you control your Christmas spending this year instead of having it control you.

It isn’t necessary to play Scrooge at Christmas, but do set a limit for your spending that you think is realistic and will fit your budget. Then stick to it. Discuss it as a family and try to get everyone’s agreement on how much will be spent. Sticking to a budget makes Christmas enjoyable and January much more bearable.

Try setting limits on individual gifts. You may choose to do one large gift or several small ones, but don’t overspend on individuals. **Bring on the envelopes; chuck the credit cards.** Leave your credit cards and debit cards at home. Allocate an amount of money for each gift, and put that money in separate envelopes marked with the recipients’ names. When the money is gone, quit spending.

Shop early to take advantage of sales as they come up. It helps avoid the last minute pressures that result in impulse buying.

Look at out-of-the-ordinary places for unusual gifts. We have lots of bazaars that happen each year that are great places to buy. The grocery stores, feed stores, antiques stores and auto parts stores are great places to look for gifts.

Do spend some time reviewing the latest sales flyers from your favorite retailers and the competition. Check the fine print on the circulars. Some stores offer price-matching guarantees. If you find it cheaper within a week or two, they will refund the difference.
Give of your time. You can cook people dinner, do chores around their house, babysit their children while they go out to a romantic dinner or write letters explaining how people are important to you. Be creative and think outside the box. Spend time thinking about the individual needs of your loved ones so you can do something really special for each of them.

Shoveling driveways for neighbors without telling them is a great show of charity. Help your church put up and take down Christmas decorations … trust me, there is no such thing as the “decoration fairy” and it doesn’t “just happen.” An older friend or neighbor would love you to play decoration fairy for a day as a gift.

Making gifts is another great way to give of your time. Making a homemade gift tells people that they are important and you are willing to spend time to make them happy. If you can cook, give baked goods. If you can woodwork, make toys or simple décor pieces. This requires more of your time but less money. When you spend time creating unique gifts for people, they appreciate it.

Here’s one more idea on presents. I had an elderly friend that couldn’t figure out how she could manage to find the money to buy presents for her extensive family. She hit on the idea of gifting her family treasures. She called them “Annie’s Treasures” and gave each child and grandchild a dish, book or some type of memento for Christmas. She wrote out the story of each item and attached it to the gift. Now if you had the chance to get a pair of socks for Christmas or the book that grandma read to you when you were growing up, which would you rather have? What a wonderful way to mark the holiday, yet give something that had a lasting family memory.

The holidays are upon us, but keep your focus on the importance of family and friends, not gifts.

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