

February 2020

Top 3 Ways to Make Your Money Work for You



Date/time to schedule: Wed., Feb. 5 at 11:05 a.m.

Preheader Text: Work smarter, not harder.

Facebook Share Text: Here's a step-by-step approach to reaching a place where you control your money, and put IT to work for YOU.

Body Copy:

One of the biggest differences between the wealthy and the less wealthy is that wealthy people **earn** interest and everyone else **pays** interest. It is important to realize that money is a tool that can help you to achieve your goals. For you to reach true financial independence, you need to have your money begin to work for you—not you for it.

In this article, Miriam Caldwell, writer for The Balance, offers three steps that can also help you break free of the bad financial habits. If you can follow them, you will begin to manage your money rather than your money managing you.

1. Budget

The most important way to change the way you handle your money is to budget. When you are budgeting, you are in control of what your money does. By assigning each dollar to a category, you are deciding where your money goes and what it does. This will help in reaching your financial goals.

In the efforts of building your wealth, your budget will give you control over your finances and allows you to make financial decisions at the start of each month. Once you master budgeting, you will be able to reach your financial goals more quickly and take a big step toward avoiding debt.

If you want to change your financial picture, your budget is your first step to doing that. You need to create your budget each month, track your expenses and make changes as needed, so you are always spending less than you earn. When you make the decisions on how you will spend your money at the beginning of the month, you can prioritize and begin to make progress on your goals.

2. Get Out of Debt

Do you know how much money you are paying in interest each month? How much of your monthly budget is being eaten-up by student loans, car payments, and credit card bills? If you could just take all of that money and put it into retirement, you would be amazed at how quickly you could save for retirement, and other enjoyable things in life. One of the best decisions is to get out of debt and stay out of debt!

If you have a lot of debt, it may seem like a problem that is too big to tackle. You could initially focus on clearing up smaller debts and then work on tackling the bigger ones with the extra money you have. As you pay off more debt and then apply that money to the next debt, your momentum builds, and you will be surprised at how quickly you can recover from debt.

3. Save and Invest Your Money

Once you have freed-up all that extra money from paying off your debt, aggressively saving is your next focus. The goal is for the money you have to be earning more than you do in a month. This naturally requires a lot of money, and in order for this to happen, you need to put a large amount away each month.

Once you've saved a six-month emergency fund, you will need to begin investing your money. Additionally saving money helps to prepare you for the ups and downs that will happen in life. Saving for an emergency fund may be the first step, but building wealth comes when you invest.

It helps to have a specific set of goals that you are saving for and investing in because that will help focus your spending and give you motivation. Please feel free to reach out to the credit union for suggestions and guidance to set and meet your goals!

[Read the full article.](#)

9 Valentine's Day Ideas on a Budget



Date/time to schedule: Sunday, Feb. 9th at 6:15 p.m.

Preheader Text: Big love, little budget.

Facebook Share Text: If you have lots of love, but a small budget, these ideas may be exactly what you're looking for...

Body Copy:

Valentine's Day can be a problem if you're on a tight budget. All the glittering store window displays, and glossy magazine articles send the message that to express your love, you need to shell out big bucks for lavish bouquets, fancy jewelry, or big boxes of gourmet chocolates.

There is no need to worry! Love isn't measured in dollars and expressing your love doesn't have to mean emptying your wallet. With a little creativity and a willingness to think outside the heart-shaped box, you can give traditional gifts like flowers and candy for much less money – or take part in some less traditional gestures that are just as romantic.

This Valentine's Day, follow some of these tips from Amy Livingston, freelance writer for MoneyCrashers.com.

Traditional Valentine Gifts

There are ways to give traditional Valentine gifts without spending a bundle. It just takes expanding your horizons a little, by looking at different types of gifts within the same general category.

Cards

According to legend, love notes were the very first Valentine gifts, dating back to the original Saint Valentine – an early Christian martyr who supposedly left a letter signed "Your Valentine" to his jailer's daughter before going to his death. In today's Valentines world, you can choose from a wide selection of pre-written cards, for around \$3 to \$5 apiece. Homemade cards are likely to be treasured longer than something you picked out at the store. Create your own personal and heartfelt message, qualifying as a romantic gesture, and costing only pennies.

Candy

Chocolates are the most common type of Valentine candy, but they can also be quite expensive. Fortunately, there are less expensive ways to send your sweetheart a message. For starters, chocolate isn't the only type of Valentine-themed candy. A quick search for "Valentine candy" online turns up a wide variety of non-chocolate treats, including cinnamon "red hots," and "conversation hearts" with love messages on them, all for \$4 to \$6 a bag.

Homemade Valentine treats have the added benefit of your own personal touch, which could make it a better choice than the more expensive boxes you find in stores. Another homemade Valentine idea is a plate of homemade goodies in your Valentine's favorite flavor, showing that you really put effort and thought into the gift.

Flowers

Flowers are also traditional tokens of love. It is known that roses stand for love, so it's not surprising that roses are the most popular flower for Valentine's Day. Unfortunately, roses are a summer-blooming flower, so you can't just go out and pick a bunch of them in February. Most roses purchased for Valentine's Day are shipped up from South America and sending them over this long distance while keeping them fresh adds to their cost. A dozen of ordered red roses can cost anywhere from \$20 to \$65, depending on the type of roses and the way they're packaged.

However, there are less expensive ways to "say it with flowers":

- Different Flowers such as carnations, tulips, chrysanthemums or daffodils
- A Single Rose... delivered with a message such as, "You're my one and only", is just as romantic and more affordable.
- Potted Plants that can live longer, continuing to grow & bloom are an affordable alternative to a dozen red roses.
- Paper Roses will last a lifetime. You can search online for tutorials on a variety of methods for creating beautiful paper blooms.

Jewelry

The exchange of jewelry, especially rings, as a pledge of love is a centuries-old tradition. Unlike many other Valentine gifts, gifts of jewelry are treasured at least partly because of their financial worth.

For some people, however, buying an expensive piece of jewelry isn't the best way to invest money a relationship. For instance, spending that same \$2,500 on a fabulous vacation for the two of you – and tucking the tickets into a card that costs only a few dollars – is likely to get just as enthusiastic a reaction as the jewelry, especially if your significant other loves to travel.

However, if you think jewelry is what your Valentine would really love most, you don't have to spend thousands – or even hundreds – of dollars on it. Some less costly alternatives include:

- Created Stones, which are synthesized gemstones – such as diamonds, rubies, and sapphires – in a laboratory, and just as stunning.
- Costume Jewelry, also known as fashion jewelry, is one option. If your girlfriend cares only about how a piece of jewelry looks and not about what the stones are, you can save even more money.
- Vintage Jewelry. Antique stores, secondhand shops, and pawn shops carry many unique pieces.
- Handmade Jewelry, which are on multiple websites that carry unique jewelry sold directly by the artists who make it.
- Making Your Own. Finally, you can truly customize a piece to your sweetheart's tastes by making it yourself.

Dining Out

Along with exchanging presents, many couples go on Valentine's Day dates, typically for a romantic, quiet meal.

If fine dining is too much for your budget, you don't necessarily have to switch from the romantic bistro to McDonald's. There are several less expensive ways to enjoy a romantic meal for two on Valentine's Day, such as cooking dinner yourself, eating out for a less expensive breakfast or lunch, or just going out for dessert and coffee.

Alternative Gifts

The best gift isn't the most traditional one, but the one that's the best fit for your partner. Here are some original Valentine's Day gift ideas that capitalize on creativity.

Books

In some ways, a book is the perfect gift for any occasion. Consider your partner's personal taste in reading and spend far less than a traditional Valentines gift.

Music

The gift of music a great way to show how well you know your partner. One idea is buying a CD or a song download by their favorite artist, or create a whole playlist of songs you think they'd enjoy. Writing a song to express your feelings for your Valentine is another unique gift choice, and one that will be remembered forever.

Activities

Couples on a budget can choose from many fun but inexpensive date ideas such as Art Museums, Community events, shopping, going to the movies, playing games or going for a walk.

Final Word

When it comes to Valentine's Day gifts, it really is the thought that counts – not just that you thought of getting something, but that you really put some thought into what you chose. The best Valentine's gift isn't the most expensive one, but the one that does the best job of showing how you feel about your loved one.

[Read the full article.](#)

What You Should Know Before A Credit Pull



Date/time to schedule: Monday, Feb. 24 at 6:50 p.m.

Preheader Text: Hard vs. Soft Pull

Facebook Share Text: Did you know there are two types of credit inquiries? Soft & hard. Learn the difference & why it's important to know.

Body Copy:

Every time you turn around, someone wants to run your credit. New apartment? The landlords want to see your credit. Applying for a job? Same thing. Oh, and that really cool “freebie” blanket you could get just for signing up for a new credit card? They'll definitely run your credit first.

One thing you've probably heard is that credit pulls can hurt your credit score. How can that be? If you're going to get credit, there needs to be a credit inquiry first, right? There are two types of credit inquiries: hard and soft inquiries. What are they? How are they different?

In this article, Tyler Omoth from the Penny Hoarder shares what you need to know to keep your credit score looking shiny.

Hard Inquiry

Simply put, a hard inquiry happens when a lender, like a bank or credit card company, runs your credit history as a part of its decision-making process. They may run your credit with one or more of the major credit bureaus.

Will they give you that loan? Will you get that credit card? What they see on your credit report may make it happen...or not.

Soft Inquiry

A soft inquiry happens when you check your own credit score or even if a lender checks it for the purpose of prequalifying you for a loan or credit card. If a potential landlord or employer does a credit check, that also counts as a soft inquiry. Think of it as a glance at your credit rather than a deep dive.

How Do Credit Inquiries Affect Credit Score?

Here's where it gets interesting. Each type of credit pull affects your credit differently.

Hard Inquiry

- Because a hard inquiry is used by someone who is specifically checking your creditworthiness for the purpose of issuing you some form of credit, it factors into your credit score.

- Having multiple hard inquiries in a short amount of time could mean that you're attempting to open multiple accounts and could mean you are trying to use credit to survive during financial troubles.
- Since that's a red flag to lenders, hard inquiries have a negative effect on your account for a short time.

Soft Inquiry

- Soft inquiries are not used to issue new credit to you and, therefore, do not affect your credit score. In fact, with a couple of exceptions, you are the only one who can even see soft inquiries on your credit report at all.
- The two exceptions are that insurance companies can see other insurance company inquiries, and lenders can see if you've had inquiries from debt settlement companies.
- Soft inquiries are not a factor in your credit score at all, so there's no need to sweat them.

Next month, watch for a continuation of this educational article entitled, "3 Reasons Not to Worry Too Much About Credit Inquiries."

[Read the full article.](#)