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HOLIDAY SPENDING

It's hard to believe it is the holiday season again. Holidays can be a strain on the wallet and on the savings.

While generosity isn't a bad thing, post-holiday spending guilt and financial strain can sour holiday memories and haunt people with bills long after the holidays are over. To avoid being swept overboard by the spirit of giving, practice good money management tips as the holidays near.

Decide to pay for everything with cash or with a debit card to keep spending within reason and within budget. This way, when there is no more money available, no more money can be spent.

If you do use a credit card, consider tracking your spending on an index card kept wrapped around the holiday credit card. This way there will be no surprises when you examine your monthly credit card bill.

A variation on this would be deciding on a reasonable spending amount at the beginning, placing that figure on the index card, and then subtracting from it at every purchase. This record reveals how much money you have left to spend.

Keep diligent records this holiday season. By tracing the running total of holiday spending, there will never be any debt surprises. In addition, seeing those numbers may help curb spending.

Sometimes, the popular holiday spending frenzy and the advertisements at every turn cloud good financial judgment. Be aware of this pressure and hold out against urges to spend unnecessarily.

Put some extra thought into purchasing each gift. In addition to trying to choose the right gifts, also think about the motivation behind purchasing the gifts. Take steps to purchase gifts based on rational reasons. For example, if you are buying gifts out of guilt, come up with ways to reduce guilt-spending in advance.

It's important to maintain a sense of perspective. For all the hours and expense put into shopping, sometimes people forget gifts soon after the holidays. Use this awareness to keep a reign on purchases. Consider the gesture may be more important than the gift itself.

Use the holiday season to count blessings instead of bills. Focus on family and friends instead of the spending and excessive work that may go unnoticed or soon be forgotten. Give the priceless gifts of time and attention to your family and friends.

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