



From the President

Seven Tips for Better Money Management

by Phyllis Anne Teeter Ellison, Ed.D.

*“Money changes everything.
Money, money changes everything.
We think we know what we’re doin’.
That don’t mean a thing.”*

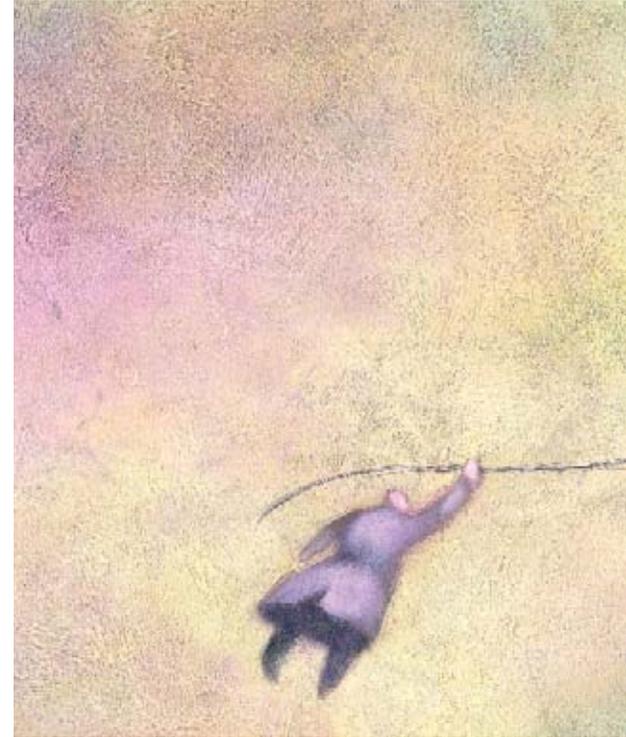
—Cyndi Lauper

These lyrics have been in my head ever since I learned that the theme for this issue of *Attention!*[®] is finances. Managing one’s finances can be a challenge for anyone at any age. I remember when I got my first checkbook in my first semester of college. My father still balanced my monthly statements and gave great financial advice—much to my dismay.

The first lesson I learned from him was to stop writing checks for \$5. As I tried to explain to my dad, I wrote small checks thinking that I wouldn’t spend so much if I didn’t have a lot of cash in my wallet. At the time gas sold for 25 cents a gallon—yes, four gallons for a dollar. I could fill up my VW bug and still have a dollar left. However sound, my reasoning did not account for the cost for each check. With my dad’s counsel, I began to see how writing a check for \$25 saved me check-writing charges and helped me learn invaluable lessons on how to manage my money. Well, I do remember losing my checking account privileges for buying that special purse that was way too expensive. I was on probation for awhile until I could show more spending restraint and better judgment.

These lessons learned early in life can be very helpful, but for adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), struggles with finances can be a daily challenge. So many ways to get in trouble—balancing the checkbook, listing the amount of every check that is written, keeping track of money credited to your debit card, paying bills on time, budgeting, saving for household emergencies, filing taxes on time, saving for the future and controlling impulse buying. Money can become a source of stress, the focal point of arguments with your spouse and the cause of endless headaches.

What strategies make sense—how can money management become less of a burden



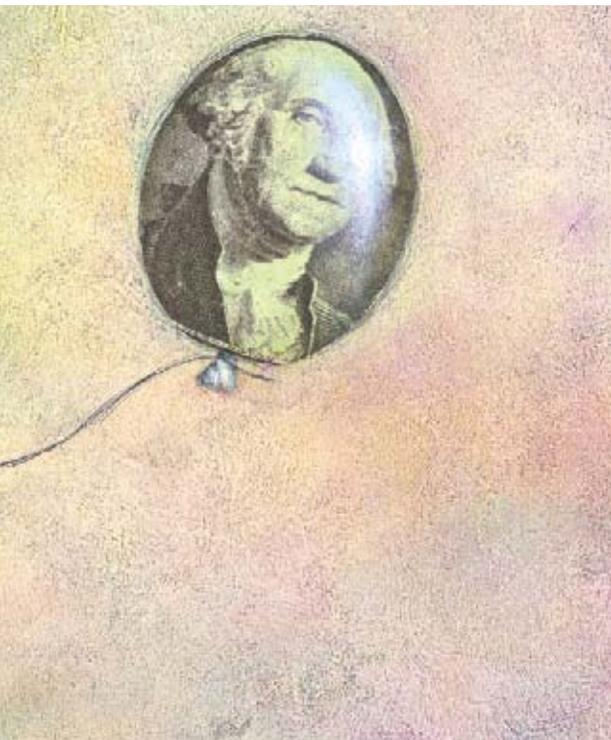
for individuals with AD/HD? Here are some tips that might be useful.

1. Get organized. This is the first step. Use a daily/weekly planner to keep track of when all of your major bills are due.

2. Find a special place for your bills and important papers. Go to an office supply store and buy a file cabinet, ledger, special binder and/or manila accordion folders. Use an accordion divider or folder for monthly bills so you always know what needs to be paid. Keep a ledger to track your monthly expenses, and have a special place for important papers, such as insurance, retirement and mortgage papers.

3. Get a routine. Schedule a regular time of the month to pay your bills. If you get paid once a month, then plan to write checks once a month on the same day and time. Make sure you pick a time when you can concentrate and turn everything else off; too many mistakes are made when we are rushed or dual tasking.

4. Find a system that works for you. Some people love using technology, and computer pay systems may work for them. Others prefer to have a paper copy of everything; using a



checkbook or ledger may be best. Just remember tip #3 and set aside a specific time and day to write checks and balance your accounts. Whatever system works best for you, stick with it.

When I changed to a computer pay system, I had a steep learning curve and made a few serious mistakes when I was too rushed. My first month I programmed every credit card payment as a recurring bill without realizing that the same amount would be paid to the credit card. Of course my payments are never the same, so I overpaid some of my credit cards and underpaid others. It was a little bit of a mess to get it all cleared up, but I love it now. However, I make sure I have enough time to re-check all my payments.

5. Plan ahead for big expenses. Yes, some things are predictable and you need to anticipate which things must take priority. Tax time is upon us; it comes the same time every year. How much do you need to save to make sure you can pay your taxes on time? Use a financial planner, a tax person or a computer tax program or do it by hand—just do it! Tax time can be stressful. Just today my husband asked

me for some W2 forms that we needed to prepare our tax returns. I usually keep a large, manila envelope for storing all my receipts, my charitable contributions and other tax forms we need. Of course, the one form that he needed was not in my special place, so I will have some hunting to do after I finish this column. Even when you have a plan, it is hard to keep everything organized and in its proper place.

6. Pay yourself first. This sounds counter-intuitive, but it makes sense when you put money aside for your retirement, for the trip you've been hoping to take, for dinner at the expensive restaurant you've wanted to try or for that special treat (or purse—yes, I still have a love for purses) you've always wanted. Reward yourself. This practice helps you decide where you spend your hard-earned money. It also makes it easier to forgo that morning latte when you know you are putting away money for some bigger reward. Every month put a little aside for your retirement. It may seem like a long way off, or it may seem like you have nothing extra left over. Even a little goes along way; start now and don't make exceptions.

7. Don't panic if you have serious financial problems. If you are in financial trouble, see a financial specialist. There are many solutions to even the worst problems—overdrawn checking accounts, overdue credit card bills, overspending or overwhelming debt. Sometimes the first step is the hardest—sharing the problem with your spouse or significant other and seeking professional help. There are many options available for all these problems, and you can restructure your credit card bills and other financial obligations. Seek advice and stay on course. With time and restraint, you can become a successful manager of your finances.

Be patient with yourself. Forgive your mistakes. Stay focused. Get organized. Then we can change the lines of the song—money, money changes everything because we know what we're doing and it does mean a thing. ■

Ann Foster Ellison



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