



Holiday Spending



WVNG Coffey Break

By Elizabeth Coffey

Break (brāk) definition *verb*: To interrupt or stop *break a habit*; *noun*: A respite or brief pause *taking a break*.

We will get in over our heads regarding expenses. This article will provide tips on how to spend within your means and avoid the post holiday spending blues. You can stick to a budget without being a “Scrooge” and you can give gifts to friends and loved ones without being an over-the-top “Santa Claus.” It’s all about balance. The holidays require a lot of planning, from wish lists, to shopping lists, baking lists, and more. But the *very first* thing you need to do is decide up front how much money you can afford to spend on the holidays this year. Let’s take a moment to rethink the meaning of gift-giving and consider some creative ways to curb your holiday spending and make the entire holiday season less stressful for you and your family.

Why we Go Into Debt for Holiday Gifts

- Gifts are a Token of Love - In our society, it’s not uncommon equate gifts with love: a nicer gift means you’re more loved. We all want our loved ones to know how much we care, but during the holidays it gets tempting to go overboard with spending to prove it.
- Giving is Unselfish, Right? - How many of us have found ourselves buying our children toys that we only *wish* we had had during our own childhoods? The holiday season of giving provides the perfect excuse to do that a little more than necessary. The temptation can be there with friends and older relatives as well. Some people find it easier to do nice things for others even when being frugal with themselves.

“It isn’t the size of the gift that matters, but the size of the heart that gives it.”

Eileen Elias Freeman

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www.jointservicesupport.org/

Welcome to the November 2010 edition of the WVNG Coffey Break, a monthly Wellness publication for all WV National Guard members and their families. The objective is to promote wellness, readiness and resiliency by providing information and resources on topics relevant to daily living.

This month’s topic is Holiday Spending: Scrooge vs. Santa Claus. It’s getting near the time of year again where thousands upon thousands of consumers will be flocking to retail stores for holiday gift items or to find those once a year sales we just can’t seem to resist. And inadvertently, some of

Why we Go Into Debt for Holiday Gifts

Ignorance is Bliss -

Many people truly don’t realize how much money they’re spending until later — when the credit card bills come in January. If you’re unorganized, it’s so what easy to not know how much to budget for each person or spend more than you realize in other ways. Many people are unaware of their overall financial situation. They have no clue how much money to allot for holiday gifts, so they just buy what seems right at the time and pay for it later.

“The only gift is a portion of thyself.”

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Coffey Break



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Why We Go Into Debt for Holiday Gifts (cont.)

- Meeting Expectations - Maybe it's due to our competitive nature, maybe it's because of the media or maybe the cause is a little of both in addition to other factors. Whatever the cause, many of us feel high expectations during the holiday season. We feel pressure to create the perfect family gatherings, send the perfect holiday cards and buy the perfect gifts. It may seem like the ante is upped each year, or we may not notice if our standards go up, but some of the holiday spending we see may be an effort to meet high expectations that we never think to challenge.
- No Other Options, Right? - We may endure the stress of going into debt, because we see no alternative. The alternative — not exchanging gifts for the holidays — seems extremely Scrooge-like, doesn't it? At a glance, the above going-in-to-debt reasoning seems to make sense; however, this year, many people have even *less* extra money to spend on gifts, and many others are looking for ways to decrease financial stress and try something new. In the interest of keeping stress levels — and debt levels — manageable, it may be a good idea to experiment with some new ways of spending less during the holiday season, while still retaining the giving, loving spirit of the holidays.

Holiday Spending Strategy # 1

Avoid Buying Holiday Gifts on Credit

Those plastic cards are so easy to use. However, we often get into trouble by using them. Dave Ramsey from Fox Business Network says that if you're reaching for a credit card because you can't really afford an item, you should start paying for all your gifts and holiday expenses in cash. If you don't do that, you'll still be paying for the holidays in the summer. The average consumer plans to pay off their holiday bills in three months, but Ramsey says the true time frame is more like six months. Don't worry about keeping up with your neighbors. They may be overspending as well.

Holiday Spending Strategy # 2

Examine your Intentions

What is the point of gift-giving? Is it to reciprocate the dollar amount of a gift that was given to us, or one that we *think* might be given to us in the future? No! The point is to acknowledge that other person's positive influence on your life. "Thank you" and "I love you" are phrases that don't come with dollar amounts attached to them, so don't allow yourself to be caught up in spending more on holiday gifts than you can afford.

Holiday Spending Strategy # 3

Set Realistic Expectations and Guidelines for Gift-Giving

You have to set realistic expectations for your family and friends. It's ok to say that you won't be buying gifts for everyone in your extended family this year -- some of them might even be relieved. "If your relationship with your family is based on what you give them, you don't have a functional family," Ramsey said. "You've got to just look at them and tell the truth." Perhaps you can draw names so that each person only buys a gift for one adult, and focus on gifts for the children in the family. But even children don't have to get everything they ask for. There are lots of ways to temper the "gimmies" our kids can be so prone to during the holidays. Consider setting a specific dollar amount for each child, and sticking to it. Or decide that you'll limit the number of gifts to three items per child. Remember, there are always going to be people who will spend more on their kids, but attempting to "keep up with the Jones'" comes with a heavy price. Teach your children early that thoughtful gifts don't have to cost a lot of money, and what's most important is appreciating all that we've been given already.

A hug is a great gift -
one size fits all, and
it's easy to exchange.

~Author Unknown



If you're out of work, your budget is tight, or you're paying down debt, you can still enjoy your holiday. The season is about spending time with family, not getting more stuff.

Holiday Spending Strategy # 4

Keep Track of Your Spending

Spend less money by using a Holiday Gift-Giving Worksheet to keep track of all the gifts you intend to buy or make, and record the amount of money you'll spend on each person. This simple tool can help you stay within your spending budget and actually enjoy the months that follow the holidays. At the top of the Worksheet, indicate the total amount you plan to spend on gifts. Then, write each person's name down for which you plan to buy a gift along with gift ideas and how much you will spend on them. You can also include headings such as where the gift is to be stashed or if a gift needs to be mailed (and if so, by what date).

Holiday Spending Strategy # 5

Do it Yourself or Buy Slightly Used Gifts

If you're on a limited budget, consider making gifts for everyone on your list. This can be a fun project for the kids, and it can really help you spend less money during the holidays. Homemade gifts like bread, cookies, candy, or fudge are delicious, thoughtful ways to convey a "Thank you" or let someone know how special they are to you.

You can also save a lot of money by purchasing nearly-new items on eBay.com or asking several relatives to "go in on" a special gift with you.

Being creative and keeping your mind focused on the real meaning of gift-giving will help you keep the culture's "buy more" influence at bay. Keep in mind, too, that the efforts you make to curb your holiday spending now will free up more cash for the coming year. And *that's* the best holiday gift you can give yourself and your kids.

A Personal Note:

This is the last edition of the WVNG Coffey Break under my current title as WVNG Director of Psychological Health. I have accepted the position as the 130th Wing Director of Psychological Health, effective Nov. 8, 2010. To the WVARNG, I would like to say that I have grown tremendously in my professional career as a result of working with you these past 2 years. We have made great strides in breaking the stigma of seeking help on behavioral health issues and it is my hope that we continue in this endeavor. To all the soldiers, thank you for your service to our country. Please challenge yourselves not to be afraid to ask for help when you need help. To the 130th, thank you for welcoming me with open arms and embracing me as one of your family. I look forward to serving you in this new capacity. As we continue to grow the Psychological Health Program in the WVNG, all of our men and women in uniform will benefit. Expanded services mean better coverage. It is my hope, that as the new WVNG DPH and the 167th Wing DPHs comes on board, we can work together to form a strong behavioral health team for the WVNG.

Feedback on this article is welcomed. As always, if you have a concern about yourself or a family member, feel free to contact me. Services are free and confidential. I look forward to hearing from you. So.....Step back , take a Coffey Break, and Drink to Your Health!

Elizabeth Coffey, Director of Psychological Health (DPH) West Virginia National Guard
elizabeth.coffey@ceridian.com elizabeth.coffey@us.army.mil
 304-561-6690 (office) (mobile) 304-206-6137

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"You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. "

~Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*



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