

### Money: How to nix the impulse purchase

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Consistent, sound financial planning has always been one of those things like flossing my teeth every day or watching intellectually challenging films that don't involve explosions or robots that become cars: It's something I know would be good for me, but that I still never do.

Apparently, I'm not alone in this.

"There's definitely a lack of financial planning for Canadians across the board," says Tamara Smith, vice-president of marketing and brand management at the Financial Planners Standards Council.

The Toronto-based not-for-profit organization has declared this week to be Canada's inaugural "Financial Planning Week."

"What we're hoping to achieve is that, at least for a moment, more Canadians think about financial planning," Ms. Smith said. "There are lots of ways that everybody can start to incorporate some financial-planning habits into their lives."

Indeed, for anyone looking to cut some financial corners and stretch their dollars, I've asked financial planners from across the country to give me their one best tip on how to save money. Some are a little more unexpected than others, but all of them will help you keep your hard-earned cash.

"Try to wait at least one day before you make a purchase," said Tina Tehranchian, a certified financial planner in Richmond Hill, Ont. "You will know whether you needed that item or just wanted it if you give yourself time to think and act rationally."

Perhaps, though, you're having a hard time getting that impulse-purchase monkey off your back?

Valerie Chatain-White, a CFP in Winnipeg, has seen it before and recommends taking a hard-line approach.

"Sometimes, clients spend too much money at lunchtime because they work near a shopping mall. Everything is on sale! It is so easy to just put it on the card," she e-mailed me. "I was guilty of this very problem once upon a time.

"Simple tip: Leave the purse/credit cards with a trusted work colleague. Take only that beverage money and ID that you need when you 'mall walk' at lunch. Yes, you will see those sales and things you must have. The difference is that you will be forced to go back after work, if you really want it. Chances are, you will rarely go back. That's how I broke my shopping-for-sales habit."

If I was really smart, I would just leave my credit card at home. But no, I'm walking around with it in my wallet like an idiot.

Then again, I must earn some points for riding my bike to work.

"I find that walking instead of driving short distances when I need just a few items saves me money, especially at today's gas prices," wrote Beatrice Grant, a CFP in Surrey, B.C. "This has been very beneficial to my health, and in addition prevents me from buying more than I need as I have to consider carrying it home. I also started walking to work last year, when gas prices became so high. On a daily basis this is a substantial saving on gas and parking fees."

Walking – it's healthy and uplifting. Now, on to some downer advice.

"The single most important tip is to insure that people have adequate life and income-protection insurance. Eighty-five per cent of Canadians are underinsured or have no insurance," Mark Halpern, a CFP in Markham, Ont., told me.

"While everyone has time for retirement planning, an unexpected crisis brought on by a premature death or disability will knock out the best-laid plans."

Yes, thinking about life insurance is a buzz kill. And from what I gather from popular culture, the people who sell it are really annoying and tiresome. But maybe in real life they're chipper fellows? Regardless, you don't want to leave a spouse or loved one holding the bag because you were too lazy or scared to confront your mortality.

While still flesh and blood, however, you probably need to find a way to shave some money off your phone bill.

"Cancel your voice-messaging service and buy a digital answering machine. You'll have all the same features, but they'll be free once your savings have paid for the machine," advised Patrick Murphy, a CFP in Calgary.

This strikes me as pure genius, especially when almost all phones, especially cellphones, come with call display. How many times have I seen on my phone that my brother called me, only to find that he's left a message saying, "Hey, it's your brother. Call me." Why do I pay for this?

Finally, Erika Penner, a CFP in Richmond, B.C., offered this: "Managing your tax bill is one of the best ways to maximize your income. Choosing tax-efficient investment products, taking advantage of tax credits and understanding what expenses can be written off all help to reduce the amount of tax you pay."

Just hearing the words "tax-efficient investment products" makes my eyes glaze over and causes my brain to ache. But, like all the advice here, I know it's ultimately going to be good for me.