

A saver married to a spender: How to bring balance and unity to your home finances. By Tiffany Colter, www.TheBalancedLife.com

When it comes to money it seems everyone has an opinion. You have the experts who spent years in college studying money, how it works, the tax laws and returns. They understand the theory and the treatment of money, but do they fully understand the crushing weight of sudden income loss? Have they ever driven home from the last day of work and wondered how they were going to make it? Have they ever hung up the phone and felt like the worst human alive because a collections agent just raked them over the coals?

I don't know. Many financial experts are like doctors who specialize in diseases. They can understand the theory, but can't fully understand the experiences of the person they're helping. When it comes to money management I don't have a degree that says 'I know it'...I have a life that says 'I survived it'.

Early in my marriage I heard that the ideal marriage situation was a saver married to a spender. I was told that these two personalities would balance each other out.



The problem with this concept of balance is that it is rooted in conflict. Each side is pulling in their own direction in an attempt to show why their perspective is right and the other one is wrong. Think of a tug of war where the flag jerks to one side or another. Slowly over time people on each side may give and take, but more often this set-up leads to each person going behind the other person's back to either hoard money, or secretly spend it. This leads to exhaustion and resignation, not true compromise and change.

True balance is like a weight on a scale. Two people bring their strengths to each side and they work together to bring the two plates to equilibrium. This is a gentle adding and taking away that leads to a common goal. Think about the balance scale, as weight is added to each side it may bob and weave periodically but, as each side adjusts, the needle comes peacefully to rest in the middle. There is a sense of rest-not fatigue. THIS is living a life of balance.



Understanding your 'Why'

When my husband and I decided we needed to make changes in our finances we'd been married for almost eight years. We had done everything that every expert told us to do. We lived on a budget, we planned ahead for expenses, we'd paid our credit cards off every month; we worked hard and spent little. Despite doing all the 'right' stuff, we simply could not live on what we earned. Our family had grown to five people and our expenses had grown, our income had not. With nothing to save we were not prepared when the floor fell out from under our finances--His cancer diagnosis.

But we thought we were doing everything right

In the months prior to Chris's diagnosis we had decided to take a look at our finances. We were tired of living in that state of tug-of-war balance. I'd hoard and budget and save until he exploded. He'd either throw a fit about 'never having any money' or simply go buy something and throw off the whole budget. In response, I started leaving him nasty notes blaming him for every financial problem we had. It was at that point we stopped and began to examine WHY we had the attitudes about money that we did.

Understanding each person's WHY is crucial. You must know it in order to work together, to make a common goal and solid plan and to bring the finances in balance for permanent change. I felt security in knowing that we had the bills paid. I also felt a sense of pride in our credit score. My husband wanted to give his family the world. He struggled with wanting to give them things and wanting to give us time. So he'd buy with the intention of picking up extra work-then didn't want to pick up the extra work because he missed being with his family.

We had created a pattern that dictated every penny that passed through our hands, even though we didn't realize it. T. Harv Eker calls this a "Financial Blueprint" in his book Secrets of the Millionaire Mind. Whatever you call it, take time to examine why you save, or why you spend. Then, armed with that knowledge, deal with the root of your problem.

Decide on common goals

This involves sitting down and setting out spending goals and guidelines. Naturally one person will be more inclined to actually pay the bills, but no one person should 'RUN' the budget. They only monitor. Think of the family as a business. The accountant does not run the company; they monitor the spending according to the guidelines of the business. Our family is a business that has a goal: life success.

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My husband and I have quarterly meetings where we actually look at the spending and make adjustments. We examine our goals [and progress to those goals] and we each see how our own spending affects the other.

At first this was hard for me. Those first few meetings I had to accept I was part of the problem, but they prepared us for the day we found we were suddenly without income. My husband, the family's sole income, had stage IV cancer. We'd spend the previous two years building together, so when the unthinkable happened we simply set our eyes on a new goal: survival.

What is your 'it'

For us, the thing that took us to the brink financially was the debt from his year of treatment, and then the following year of unemployment due to an on-the-job injury. When things pile on you, as is happening with many families today, it is tempting to rush back to old spending habits.

For the spenders it is tempting to say "Hey, we don't have it anyway-might as well enjoy it." And then run up debts that there is no way to pay.

The savers suddenly go in a state of panic trying to squeeze every conceivable penny from every place then go in to a near meltdown if someone spends an extra dollar. Instead of that, focus on what you've learned. If it is job loss, then think about ways to earn money. Are there education programs you can take advantage of while you look for work? Look at the change as a potential opportunity, and adjust your spending to the new reality.

Is it sudden illness of a child or income earner, then find support organizations who may be able to help with things like medicine, food or utility bills. When people offer to help, let them. Don't tell them everything is great when it isn't.

When there isn't a single 'it'

Maybe there isn't one event. Maybe spending has simply caught up with you. The minimum on those cards are too high and there is no way to pay them. This is when you need to earn additional money temporarily. On the Balanced Life website I talk about "the equation". This is the best way to grow savings and pay down debt at the same time.

When things are still okay

This is the best possible time to change. By developing balanced spending habits [using the equation on my website], focusing on a common goal and changing your financial attitude, you can prepare yourself financially for the unexpected when it comes. This isn't something a person has to be rich to do. In fact, many times it was the extra \$5 I didn't spend that added up to be the emergency fund that repaired my car.

When you begin to live your life in full balance you are better able to enjoy time with your spouse. When your focus transitions to common goals, rather than proving the validity of your argument, there is a stronger sense of purpose in your work. Finally, when you are able to understand your attitudes about money you can develop healthier attitudes in other areas of your life.

About the Author:



Tiffany Colter is a passionate freelance writer whose credits include *Today's Christian*, *Charisma Magazine*, *Toledo Business Journal*, and the *Afictionado E-zine*.

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When not teaching online classes and webinars, Tiffany enjoys speaking to business groups, writers conferences and various family groups. Tiffany lives outside Toledo, OH with her husband, a recent cancer survivor, and their four girls. She can be reached through her website, www.thebalancedlife.com or www.writingcareercoach.com

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