



The "CARES" Connection

The Personal Values Process



Spring Clean Your Way Into Cash

By Geoff Williams

Depending on where you live, it may or may not look like warmer months lie ahead, but the calendar doesn't lie. If you're like a lot of people, you're already thinking about spring cleaning.

And, if you're like a lot of people, you're dreading it. But keep in mind that spring cleaning doesn't have to be a complete pain in the neck. If you think about it strategically, you could make money the next time you pull out the vacuum, gloves and garbage bags. Here are four ways you could clean up while cleaning up.

Hold a garage sale. According to StatisticBrain.com, there are an average 165,000 garage sales – or if you prefer, yard sales – every week in the U.S., and if we were to pool all the profits, we'd have \$4.2 million. Granted, on your own you probably won't get rich – after all, the price of the average item sold at a garage sale is 85 cents. Still, it's a relatively cheap endeavor, other than your time. You can post a free ad on Craigslist or on sites like GarageSales.com.

You could also post your items on eBay or Amazon, but if you're selling a lot of clutter, be prepared to lose some money on transaction fees and shipping costs. In other words, if you have a lot of stuff in your house that you think someone would pay good money for, but not much more than 85 cents per item, you're probably better off going with the garage sale.

Recycle for cash. You can do far more than recycle the aluminum cans or copper wiring you have lying around – although that's a start. For instance, there's a company that may recycle your cellphone, tablet or MP3 player. EcoATM.com, for example, tells you where to find the nearest ecoATM, which looks like an ATM, and into which you can drop your device for an appraisal. If you have an old iPhone, for instance, the machine might spit out as much as \$400.

"EcoATM takes over 5,500 devices, which means even old satellite phones and text pagers might be worth something," says Randy Erman, director of product marketing for ecoATM.

Or if you have an old musical instrument gathering dust in the basement, perhaps from your high school band

days, you could check out Reverb.com, an online marketplace for musical instruments and gear. You have to do the selling, which means taking a photo of the instrument and listing the item online, and there's a 3.5 percent transaction fee. In any case, if you have a good instrument that you know you'll never use, it might be a smart move.

Sell your old house parts. Maybe you're renovating and replacing something in your home that isn't broken or bad – just old – and you want something new. Before throwing said item away, do some research.

"Many house parts, including bathroom fixtures, appliances, cabinets, doors, an odd window and even scads of old switch plates and light fixtures can be sold or donated for reuse elsewhere," says Bill Golden, an Atlanta-based Realtor with RE/Max.

This isn't just wishful thinking. There are websites that specialize in selling house parts, like HistoricHouseparts.com and Rejuvenation.com. So there may be a market for the old parts you're storing inside your house. Golden suggests selling them on Craigslist, or if you have enough items, possibly doing a yard sale, highlight in the ad that you have house parts. One of his clients did just that, which prevented her from actually having to have the sale.

"A lady who saw an ad for the sale featuring almost all house-part items bought [the] entire inventory for use in her rental properties.

These things that used to be junk now often have increased cachet – and value to you – as they become part of green renovations," Golden says.

He adds: "It may go without saying, but your house parts will have greater value if there is some bulk there. Either a lot of different items or a good bit of one item."

Sell your stuff to a consignment or resale store. Some secondhand thrift shops will take your old clothes, CDs, DVDs, Wii games and so on, purchase them and resell them. If you don't feel like running a

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10 Steps to an Upgraded Financial Life

By Kimberly Palmer

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The beginning of the year offers a great opportunity

to take stock of your financial situation and make any necessary changes to build a bigger nest egg or cut back on unnecessary spending. If you're ready for a financial upgrade but aren't sure where to start, these suggestions will move you in the right direction without requiring too much sacrifice.

1. Choose a better bank.

If you find yourself constantly paying fees for using out-of-network ATMs or running out of cash when you're on the road, now is the time to find a bank that better fits your needs. FindABetterBank.com has a comparison tool that can help, as can Bankrate and Google Compare, which focuses on credit cards. Larger banks tend to offer more ATMs for frequent travelers, while smaller banks and credit unions might be less convenient but offer lower fees.

2. Upgrade your credit card.

Many people use credit cards that aren't matched to their needs, which means they pay too much in fees or miss out on rewards. If you carry debt, you'll want to find a card with the lowest annual fee possible. But those without debt can maximize their rewards. Comparison sites such as IndexCreditCards.com and CreditCards.com make it easy to search for the right fit.

3. Download money-saving apps.

Dozens of apps aimed at reducing your expenses are available for your smartphone, including BillGuard for help monitoring your accounts, Key Ring for storing discount cards and RetailMeNot for coupons. Because these apps go with you whenever you bring your phone along, they're more convenient to use than paper-based coupons or plastic cards in your wallet.

4. Conquer paperwork.

If you're drowning in bank statements, retirement account paperwork and health insurance forms, consider moving as much paperwork online as possible, and creating a three-ring binder and filing system for the rest. Having a shredder on hand to quickly and safely transfer personal documents to the trash can also help.

5. Stop paying for cable.

Many television shows are available online for free – viewers need only watch a short commercial beforehand. Hulu, iTunes and network websites make it easy. If you're

looking for a specific show, try a simple Web search; just be sure to avoid the spam sites that pop up.

6. Take a free vacation.

A combination of credit card rewards, airline miles and hotel membership programs can generate enough rewards to fund a getaway for two around the world. Just be sure to keep track of all paperwork, and look for opportunities to layer deals and giveaways on top of each other. And don't forget to read the fine print, especially when it relates to expiration dates and restrictions.

7. Spend less on food.

Cooking more at home, keeping an organized fridge and shopping more frequently but buying less can help cut down on food waste. Even restaurant trips can become more cost-efficient if you bring your own doggie bag and ask the server to pack up the bread for you if you don't plan to eat it.

8. Find your number.

Most Americans haven't yet calculated just how much they'll need to save for retirement, but free online calculators make it easy. Bankrate, Fidelity and Transamerica offer calculators that are easy to customize with specific rates of returns, tax rates and inflation rates, among other factors.

9. Seek frugal fun.

Successful parties don't need to break the bank. Stick with email invitations to save on paper and postage costs, and focus on a few special touches, like cucumber water, to add flare. Gifts for special occasions also can be more meaningful and less expensive when they include gifts of time, such as a coffee date.

10. Protect yourself online.

If your password is a common name or phrase, a hacker could guess it. Make your online accounts more secure by not using the same password on multiple sites and sticking with longer, hard-to-guess words or sentences. Intersperse some numbers and symbols for good measure; just be sure to remember what they are through mnemonic devices or a password-locked list.

Once you've run through this list, you'll be better poised to stay on top of your money throughout the year – and that's something worth celebrating.

garage sale, it might be worth your time to stuff some items in a box and drive to a consignment or resale store.

People often interchange the terms, but there are key differences between the two. "Resale stores pay their customers cash on the spot to buy their gently used items, whereas consignment store customers wait weeks to get their money," says Jim Wollman, vice president of franchising for the Minnetonka, Minnesota-based NTY Franchising Company, the parent company of Clothes Mentor, a chain of more than 100 resale stores throughout the country.

You could, however, get paid far sooner than expected if you opt for a consignment store. You're paid after your merchandise sells, so if it sells quickly, you get paid quickly. Still, Wollman's point is correct – with a resale store, you get your money immediately; with a consignment store, it may take awhile.

Exactly how much you get varies, and of course, all stores are different. Some focus on clothing, others sell sporting goods and some are all about selling used video games. If you go to a thrift shop, generally you're donating your used merchandise, but at least you'll get a tax deduction.

If it's not money you're after – you just want to get that old stuff out your front door – you could hire a professional organizer to help you clean your house, or you could call in a junk removal service. Either can easily set you back hundreds of dollars. But with any luck, even if you do hire professionals, maybe you can offset at least some of the cost by selling some items of your own. After all, you want to clean out your house, not your wallet.



THE QUARTER IN BRIEF

On Wall Street, the opening quarter of 2015 played out like the first quarter of 2014: gains for the Nasdaq and S&P 500, a small loss for the Dow. In another resemblance, uncertainties emerged about the strength of the economy. Hiring data and consumer confidence readings were mostly strong, yet Q1 did not see notable consumer spending or retail sales gains. Commodities suffered as the dollar rally continued. The pace of home sales wavered, but the big picture of the housing market was still very positive. While our central bank considered near-term tightening, economic signals in Asia and Europe led other central banks to ease.¹

DOMESTIC ECONOMIC HEALTH

The first quarter brought some good news and some question marks. Monthly job creation reached 201,000 in January, 264,000 in February and then just 126,000 in March – a sudden drop that made some analysts conclude that the strong dollar was now eating into company profits and expansion. The unemployment rate was down to 5.5% in March; the broader U-6 rate including the underemployed with the unemployed was at 10.9%. Wages were up 2.1% on an annualized basis, but that was countered by a slight reduction in the average workweek.² Another question mark involved the manufacturing sector. In March, the Institute for Supply Management's respected factory PMI slipped to 51.5 – down for the fifth consecutive month. (It was at 53.5 in January, 52.9 in February.) ISM's service sector PMI was more encouraging, coming in at 56.7 for January, 56.9 for February and 56.5 for March.³⁻⁴ Personal spending figures were also unimpressive, and so were retail sales numbers (although lower gas prices impacted both indicators). According to the Commerce Department, household spending fell off 0.2% in the first month of 2015 and then ticked up 0.1% in February. Retail purchases were down 0.8% for January, 0.6% for February. Household incomes did rise by 0.3% in January and another 0.4% a month later. The plunge in gas prices helped send the Consumer Price Index south 0.7% in January, but then it advanced 0.2% for February.⁵⁻⁶ Consumers may not have spent freely in Q1, but they were upbeat. The Conference Board's consumer confidence index came in at an impressive 103.8 in January, and rebounded to 101.3 in March after a dip to 98.8 in February. The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index ended the quarter at 93.0 after reaching 98.1 in January and 95.4 in February. (For both indices, readings above 90 are considered quite strong.)⁷⁻⁸

On the factory front, the Producer Price Index moved south like the CPI, falling 0.8% in January and 0.5% for February with the drop in fuel and energy costs as a major influence. Headline hard goods orders rose 2.0% in January, then fell 1.4% in February.⁵⁻⁶ The Bureau of Economic Analysis made its third, final estimate of Q4 GDP: 2.2%, unchanged from the second estimate. By the end of the quarter, some economists thought Q1 GDP would pale in comparison. The Atlanta Fed projected Q1 growth at 0.1%, and S&P Capital IQ felt Q1 would bring a 3.0% dip in corporate profits.²⁻⁵ The Federal Reserve found a new way to say what it had actually been saying for the past few quarters – and the subtle change in wording in its March policy statement seemed reassuring. It removed the word “patient” from its statement (as Wall Street analysts thought it would), but it also cut its 2015 GDP forecast to 2.3-2.7% and its 2015 inflation projection to 0.6-0.8%, an indication that any notions of raising interest rates in spring or summer may have subsided.⁹

GLOBAL ECONOMIC HEALTH

Outside our borders, the quarter was notable for two developments: the European Central Bank's new quantitative easing effort and a wave of interest rate cuts. Strong measures were clearly needed to try and improve the euro area economy. In February, the region's consumer prices were down 0.3% year-over-year while its jobless rate was twice that of the United States (11.3%). So on January 22, the ECB stated that it would buy €60 billion worth of eurozone bonds per month through September 2016, in imitation of the Federal Reserve's QE programs.^{10,11} By quarter's end, some signs of an economic pickup had emerged: Europe's stock markets were lifted, and indicators showed improved money supply credit, household confidence and retail sales (which had improved 3.7% annually).¹² Fading oil prices meant reduced inflation in emerging market economies. Several took swift action against deflation risks: India and China cut their benchmark interest rates twice in Q1, and easing also occurred in Indonesia, Thailand, Australia, South Korea and Singapore. Asia Pacific factories were not exactly humming: China's official manufacturing PMI barely showed growth in March at a reading of 50.1, and there were significant drops in factory orders in Japan and Indonesia and exports in South Korea by March.¹³

“CARES” Kids

What Are You Teaching Your Kids About Money?

By Sophia Bera

How did you learn about money? Did your parents teach you how to write a check, balance a budget and open banking and investment accounts? Or did you learn through another trusted adult, like a teacher or college professor? Or did you overdraw in your checking account, go into credit card debt, and had to spend your 20s or 30s digging yourself out? Well, you're not alone. The state of financial literacy in America is scary.

According to numerous studies conducted by a variety of organizations, America needs to improve its financial literacy. Participants in a Financial Industry Regulatory Authority's Investor Education Foundation survey were asked these questions:

1. Suppose you have \$100 in a savings account earning 2 percent interest a year. After five years, how much would you have? More than \$102, exactly \$102, less than \$102, or don't know?
2. Imagine that the interest rate on your savings account is 1 percent a year and inflation is 2 percent a year. After one year, would the money in the account buy more than it does today, exactly the same, or less than today?
3. If interest rates rise, what will typically happen to bond prices? Rise, fall, stay the same, or is there no relationship?
4. True or false: A 15-year mortgage typically requires higher

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5 Simple Ways to Save on Your Health Care Costs

Mention the term health care and you're likely to get a variety of responses. Regardless of your political leanings, one thing is for certain – health care is an expensive necessity in today's economic climate.

According to Statistic Brain, we spend about \$10,000 per person on health care costs every year. The good news is that there are ways to reduce those costs if we are purposeful about it. Cutting costs becomes even more important considering smart spending now, on preventative measures, for example, can cut costs down the road, too. Here are some ideas for keeping your own health care costs down:

1. Take Advantage of Tax Savings

One of the best ways to save on health care costs comes in the form of a flexible spending account or a health savings account. Both are tax-advantaged accounts that allow you to put aside funds for health care needs. In many cases, your employer may offer matching funds, up to a certain amount. Ultimately, using either the FSA or HSA should reduce your taxes and help you think more like a consumer when it comes to your health care spending.

2. Try Cheaper Facilities

Many people don't realize that a fair number of doctors operate at several facilities. The fee to see your doctor will stay the same regardless of where you see him, but the charge assessed by the facility can vary quite a bit. If that's not an option for you, consider other ways to see a doctor. Many grocery

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Quote

"If you don't build your dream, someone else will hire you to help them build theirs."

-Dhirubhai Ambani

Riddle

For some, I am used to get around. I never even touch the ground. Sometimes I fall and sometimes I float, If I'm in the air, then take note.

What am I? (Answer below Amazing Facts)

Amazing Facts

- 1. There are more than 10 million bricks in the Empire State building.
2. In every episode of Seinfeld there is a Superman somewhere.
3. Venus is the only planet that rotates clockwise.
4. "I am," is the shortest complete sentence in the English language.
5. The only 15 letter word that can be spelled without repeating a letter is uncopyrightable.
6. The only two days of the year in which there are no professional sports games are the day before and the day after the Major League All-Star Game

(Riddle Answer: A boat)

How Can I help You?

Please give me a call and let me assist you and your family!

monthly payments than a 30-year mortgage, but the total interest over the life of the loan will be less.

5. True or false: Buying a single company's stock usually provides a safer return than a stock mutual fund.

Only 39 percent of participants answered four or more questions correctly. Yikes! How do we fix this? One step forward would be to have parents take a more active role in teaching kids about money and financial responsibility.

Monkey See, Monkey Do

Kids watch what their parents do and learn from what they observe. (Many children believe that money originates from the ATM since they observe parents using ATMs to withdraw cash.) Use cash whenever possible around them so they can see money being exchanged for a good or service (and they can also see when it's spent, it's gone). Hold on to receipts and explain that you need to keep a record of your purchases so you can track your spending. Share, Save, Spend has great tools for parents and kids

With older kids, encourage them to ask questions about budgeting and investing - and give them a glimpse of how you successfully manage your own money. Show your teenagers your paycheck stub and teach them about how taxes work, what a 401(k) contribution is and the difference between gross pay and net pay. Many people go to college without realizing how these basic money concepts work. The Jump\$tart Coalition is committed to "educate and prepare our nation's youth for life-long financial success." How can you help educate the next generation?

Ask how to receive a free Kid's Guide to Money Booklet!

Citations

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5 Simple Ways to Save on Health Care Costs
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(5 Simple Ways to Save on Your Health Care Costs continued)

stores offer in-store clinics manned by a doctor or nurse. Assuming you're needing to see a doctor for something relatively common, this method can be a great way to save money.

3. Get a Prescription for Over-the-Counter Drugs

One drawback to the FSA or HSA is that you can no longer use the funds to purchase over-the-counter drugs. A way around this is to get a prescription from your doctor for medicines that you regularly use, like pain relievers and allergy medication. Just remember to ask for the prescription to be similar to what you're currently taking to avoid any negative impacts.

4. Get Free Money

With the advent of more high-deductible health plans, more employers are offering incentives to employees that can result in free money for you. This varies by employer, of course, but usually is in the form of taking a health care assessment in exchange for a certain amount to be put in your HSA. Some employers also offer free or low-cost weight loss or smoking cessation programs. These programs help your employer save on their costs plus giving you the chance to get in better health.

5. Get a Cash Discount

If you've dealt with health insurance much, then you know what a hassle it can be. It can be the same, if not worse, for a doctor's office. Help reduce the hassle by offering to pay cash -- for a discount off your insurance's agreed-upon rate. Not every doctor will offer this but it is well worth asking for, especially if you've not met your deductible yet for the year. If this isn't an option, consider asking for a discount for paying for the entire bill all at once. Again, this may not always work, but can be well worth a simple request.

Health care costs can get out of hand, but with a little creative thinking, there are ways to save money without sacrificing care.

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