

Planning For Your Future

How Close Are You To Your Financial Independence?

(NAPSA)—You can combat many of the things that can stop you from enjoying financial freedom: debt, overspending, poor credit history, bad investments, lack of information—to name only a few of them. With so many factors to consider when getting your funds on the right track, however, it can be easy to lose sight of the



Weston

basic steps that can make your finances sparkle. Consider the following tips from the woman known as the Internet's No. 1 personal finance columnist, Liz Pulliam Weston

of MSN Money, to help you get on the road to financial liberty:

Break out the BBQ. Just barbecuing one night a week instead of eating out can save you a lot of cash. "Don't spend more than you earn. It sounds easy but many people struggle with overspending," Weston said. One of the best ways to curb this problem is to track where you're spending money with a program like Microsoft Money. For many people, large purchases are not to blame for their money problems; it's more likely that small to medium-sized purchases are eating up their checking account. Once you've added up how much you spend dining out or going out for coffee in a month, it's easy to identify less expensive alternatives and reduce the amount you spend.

Try a buy-nothing month. Led by Weston, dozens of people posting on the YourMoney message board on MSN resolved to spend money only on necessities for one month. The typical amount saved was \$400. The experiment helped people realize how much of their spending was voluntary—and often unnecessary.

Being debt free is something to celebrate. Many people believe that credit card debt is normal in the United States but Federal Reserve System figures show that the majority of U.S. households have no credit card debt and that the median balance among those that do is only \$2,200. People who pay off their credit card debts not only improve their finances but also boost their credit scores, the three-digit numbers lenders use to gauge credit worthiness.

Get finance savvy. It's always a good idea to learn as much as you can about money and finance. Web sites such as MSN Money are great resources to help you stay informed with up-to-the-minute financial data, including access to the insight of money experts, tax tips, valuable stock-tracking tools and investment information.

Weston is just one of many finance experts who write a twice-weekly column for consumers. Her column offers helpful tips and tricks about anything finance related, from buying a home to getting out of debt. Visit <http://www.money.msn.com> to learn more.