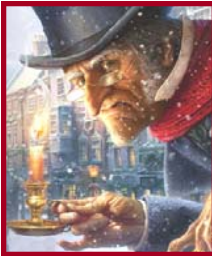


acquaintances, the best gift would be a simple card with a family picture or a plateful of homemade cookies.

3. Have a limit.



You will need to keep two limits in perspective. The first is how much you should spend on each individual, particularly each member of your family. The second is how many presents you will purchase for each individual, especially your children or grandchildren. Some have taken the biblical example of the Magi, who brought only three gifts to Jesus, as the limit of number of gifts they should give to each child in their home.

4. Develop a Strategy.

Like the real estate slogan that says, “Location, location, location,” you need to be a year-round Christmas planner with the slogan, “Listen, listen, listen.” As your spouse, children or friends casually make comments such as, “I wish I had this tool,” or “that’s exactly what I need to complete my kitchen set,” or “if I could only upgrade my computer,” write down what it is they desire and use this list, particularly as these items may come up on sale. Purchasing your next season’s gifts throughout the year puts you ahead of the traditional last-minute rush and

lets your loved ones know you are thinking of them all year, not only at Christmas time.

Another strategy is to have 80 percent of your Christmas shopping completed by the end of November. One way to accomplish this is after you have enjoyed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner and a wonderful day with your family and friends; relax that evening in your living room with the local newspaper. Take out that bulky sales section and begin matching up the items on sale with the individuals on your special Christmas list. Remember, these sales inserts are not only your ticket to a happier holiday but also the key to saving you money and finishing your shopping earlier.

No More “Bah, Humbug!”

As you struggle through this festive season and then determine to plan better for next year’s Christmas spending and giving, may your money management no longer be “Bah, Humbug!” but in the famous prayer of Tiny Tim, may yours be “*God bless us financially, every one!*”



The Stewpot

A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward

December 2010
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Become a Financial Scrooge

By Gordon Botting, DrPH, CHES



In 1843, Charles Dickens wrote his most beloved seasonal novel, *A Christmas Carol*. It is a tale full of contrasting characters from Ebenezer Scrooge, the grouchy old miser who cared for no one except himself and lived only to fill his coffers with more money, to the destitute family of his clerk Bob Cratchit, who worked long hours under inhumane conditions to provide for his family. But it is also a story whose central theme is about redemption and the true meaning of Christmas. The

turning point of this narrative comes when the spirit of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve. He informs Scrooge that his only hope of deliverance is learning that he should help his fellow human beings, and to aid him in grasping this, three ghosts will visit him in a dream—the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.

These three phantom characters not only have something to say about the poverty, want, and ignorance of nineteenth-century society that Dickens was trying to portray, but they also have a message for us as we enter the festive season of 2010. I don’t believe Charles Dickens would mind my changing the portrayal of his ghost-like characters concerned with social agendas into financial spirits that haunt our current Christmas spending.

In fact, I think he would probably agree because in real life he understood and experienced extreme poverty when, as a young man, he was forced to work in a shoe-blackening warehouse to support the family while his father was in debtors’ prison.

Christmas Past

The Financial Ghost of Christmas Past appears in the mailboxes of the majority of Americans a few weeks



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Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality and finances.

The Financial Ghost of Christmas Past appears . . . in plain envelopes containing unexciting, but exorbitant credit-and charge-card statements. To appease the Financial Ghost of Christmas Present, the best thing one can do is to stay within an already established Christmas budget.

after all the excitement and joy of the Christmas season has gone. It comes in plain envelopes containing unexciting, but exorbitant credit-card and charge-card statements. Unfortunately, this

REFERENCE	DATE	POSTED	ACTIVITY	STATEMENT LAST STATEMENT	AMOUNT
433-027152	1/25	1/25	PAYMENT TO/ARE YOU		-168.00
327247829	1/12	1/12	RECYCLE RECYCLER	ANYTOWN USA	14.49
913222222	1/12	1/12	RECYCLE RECYCLER	ANYTOWN USA	30.55
552472052	1/18	1/18	GREAT EXPEDITIONATIONS	DES. CITY USA	27.50
947237334	1/25	1/25	DEPT-HIGH PETROLEUM	ANYTOWN USA	22.54
873065321	2/09	2/09	SECRET 'N SOON	TOWNVILLEUSA	40.10

Financial Ghost of Christmas Past

financial spirit often hangs around until well after the Fourth of July celebrations, and sometimes it even joins a second companion as they overlap into the following year's Christmas splurge. To top it all off, this Financial Ghost of Christmas Past aggravates an already encumbered monetary situation by continuing to add to the family's financial burden with high interest rates and other charges. It is estimated that one out of five households will continue to live with the ghoulish reminder of their holiday financial indulgence many months into the New Year.

Christmas Present

One of the problems with the Financial Ghost of Christmas Present is that it

demands we give and give some more. Often this includes people to whom we would not normally give anything, such as fellow employees with whom we seldom socialize and to neighbors and acquaintances whom we barely know. This major role of gift giving is a relatively new practice as part of the Christmas season. For centuries in most countries, individuals exchanged gifts on New Year's Day and left Christ's celebrated birthday as a



noncommercial religious holiday. They observed the 25th of December as a day for providing food for the impoverished and disadvantaged, and in some instances a day for giving special gifts to pastors and missionaries.

To appease the Financial Ghost of Christmas Present, the best thing one can do is to stay within an already established Christmas budget. This may necessitate that you become creative and use a little ingenuity. One idea is to make up gift certificates on the computer that can be redeemed by family and friends during the next

twelve months—examples might be fresh produce from your garden in July or a homemade meal for close friends. Another idea might be to give a couple in your neighborhood who is struggling with three pre-school youngsters, coupons good for several nights of babysitting.

Another way to appease this Financial Ghost of Christmas Present is to think like Santa—make a list, check it twice and stick to it. Instead of getting another gift for your youngster's stocking or an extra gadget for your spouse—stop the commercialism and enjoy the true spirit of Christmas: snuggle by an open fire and read a favorite yuletide story to your children, or take a trip around your neighborhood and receive pleasure from the Christmas lights and decorations while sipping hot chocolate with neighbors you seldom see. Trust yourself that you have purchased the very best gifts for each member of your family, and if you have to add one more gift, let it be a personal note to a friend, fellow employee, boss or loved one telling that person how much you appreciate having him or her in your life.

Christmas Yet to Come

Although you may not like being somewhat similar to Mr. Scrooge when it comes to Christmas shopping, it will be the best present you can give to yourself and your family. Listed below are some tips from the Financial

Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come to assist you in being debt free next December.

1. Develop a Budget.

Sit down with your spouse and figure out what your family can afford to pay for gifts and other Christmas items without accumulating any credit-card and charge-card debt. To be able to accomplish this, you will need to start a Christmas savings account in January. Make it a line item in your budget and regularly contribute a fixed amount of money. Your goal should be to purchase all of your Christmas gifts, tree ornaments, a nice Christmas dinner, and other seasonal items out of the money you have set aside in this account. Creating this line item in your budget is the single most important step an individual or a family can do to control their holiday spending.

2. Make a List.



At this family conference, write down every person you want to include on your Christmas list.

Then put a pad and pen on the side of the refrigerator and add other names as they come to mind, so no one is forgotten. For family members, relatives and special friends, you will purchase a gift, but for some neighbors and