

The Cheapskates Journal April 2014

From Cath's Desk

Hello Cheapskaters,

I've had this page open on my computer for almost three weeks, waiting for inspiration to strike, for a little financial brilliance to hit me, for the mental block I have about writing this piece to shift.

How can I write anything to inspire and motivate you, the Cheapskaters who daily inspire me? And that's when it hit me: you are my motivation, the inspiration I need to finish this article.

I know that many of you have done so much more than I have. You've posted your triumphs and trials in the forum. You've submitted your amazing ideas to the Tip Store. Many of you have provided thoughtful and practical answers to newsletter questions. Some of you attended the last workshop (and wasn't it fantastic, I'm still excited about it?). Some of you have even taken the time to email me to share your successes. You've kept the Cheapskates Club alive. I can't do it on my own.

Every day when I sit at my desk I look to you, the Cheapskates Club members, for inspiration, motivation, encouragement and enthusiasm.

It is you, dear Members, who keep me going. And for that I want to thank you. And ask, if it's not too much trouble, that you please keep on doing what you are doing, so our frugal community can continue to grow and prosper because together we are doing great things for ourselves, our families and our communities.

Enjoy this month's Journal everyone, I really enjoyed putting it together for you.

Happy Cheapskating,

Cath

Feature Article

Do You Believe These Personal Finance Myths?

Most adults think they are financially savvy. However, as we know, that isn't really true. There are many people hold financial notions that simply aren't true. It's difficult to make sound decisions when they're based on false beliefs. Adjust your beliefs and you'll strengthen your foundation for sound financial decisions

Beware of these financial myths:

Money Myth No. 1: Money and Happiness aren't Correlated

Actually, a study done at Princeton University showed there is correlation between income and happiness, to a point. Happiness and emotional well-being improve with an increase in salary, up to \$75,000. Beyond that, however, further increases did not provide additional improvements in attitude.

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Other research shows that money is a factor in happiness, but it's not the most important factor. The level of respect and social influence a person receives is the most important factor. Of course, money has some influence on these two items.

Money Myth No. 2: There is no Way that 'I' Can Become Wealthy

It's not a coincidence that a disproportionate number of extremely successful people come from poor backgrounds. It's staggering how many highly successful people never finished high school. Average people tend to get average results.

If you struggle to fit into the 'norm', you might be destined for greatness, though it is likely to be challenging.

Money Myth No. 3: There will be Enough Time "Later"

Many of us put off saving for retirement or our children's education until a later time. We're under the impression that things will be easier "later". They might be easier and they might not. But will there be enough time "later" for your savings plan to be successful?

Money Myth No. 4: More Education Means More Money

In most cases, a higher degree does mean a higher income. Those with a university degree earn approximately a million dollars more over a lifetime than those with a high school education. Those with doctorate degrees average another million on top of that over the course of a lifetime.

However, in many fields, those with a degree do not earn more. Postal workers and electricians, for example, do not earn more money with a degree. In some fields, those with graduate degrees actually earn less. Editing is an example of one of those fields.

Money Myth No. 5: Budgeting is the Best Way to Save Money

A household budget is a great idea, but a budget for a single item turns out to be a bad idea. People that shop for a single, large-ticket item often spend 50% more if they shop with a budget!

That means, if you're going shopping for a new refrigerator, just go and find the fridge you need, then shop around for the best deal. If you set a budget, you're likely to come up with the highest number you can afford whether it's what you need or not.

Money Myth No. 6: You Need to Make a Certain Salary Before Saving is Possible

Baloney! Start today. Did you know that TV personality Jim Cramer (host of CNBC's Mad Money) saved 15% of his income when he was so poor that he lived in a car? How much is he worth today? He is worth nearly \$100 million.

Even if you have just \$1 to spare, save it. And remember, money isn't saved until it's safely in your savings or emergency account. Until then it's just not spent!

Did you believe in any of those myths? Hopefully, you learned something and are now in a better place for making wise decisions. Eliminating false beliefs is incredibly powerful. Continue learning and your financial expertise will continue to grow.

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A Thoughtful Moment

Financial Character

1. Stewardship: It all belongs to God, we are merely managing it for Him.
2. Patience: Waiting for the right time.
3. Generosity: A hand open to give is open to receive.
4. Honesty: Telling the whole truth.
5. Servant Heart: How many people can I help?
6. Depth: Knowing true value can't be found on a price tag.
7. Gratefulness: Appreciating what I already have.
8. Contentment: It is enough.

Contributed by Melanie Deane

Articles

Sell Your Used Car for Maximum Profit with These Tips

When it's time to get rid of an old car, most of us will trade it in at the dealership where we buy our new car. However, even though the dealer manipulates the numbers to look favourable, they rarely give you the best price. We all know that. In fact, car dealers make far more money selling a used car than a new one, we all know that too.

Selling a car isn't hard and it doesn't have to be complicated either. At some point, almost everyone tries to sell a car on their own with varying degrees of success. It can be a positive and profitable experience!

There are a few simple tips that will help you maximize the profit you earn from selling your used car so you make a decent profit, giving you more cash to use when you buy your new vehicle.

1. Know the price of your car. There are many resources out there, but perhaps the best source to find out car prices is the Red Book at www.redbook.com.au. Look at the current car ads for your make and model and see what they are going for. If your car is an exotic or vintage, you'll have to find an alternate source for information.

To get the most accurate information, you'll need to know the year, make, model, mileage, engine size, and all the other options of your vehicle.

In most cases, it's best to price your car at a slightly higher price than you're willing to accept. Then, your buyer will be close to your price when they start negotiating, rather than too far below it.

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2. Clean it up. The appearance of your car greatly impacts how much buyers are willing to pay.

Do a good job of washing and polishing the car. Vacuum the inside, clean any stains on the floor or seats, and ensure the inside smells good.

Make sure the windows and mirrors are sparkling, inside and out. Check the headlining, and the visors. Make sure any marks are cleaned. And don't forget the glovebox and boot - tidy them up and give them a good clean.

Consider making any minor repairs, especially ones that will fix those annoying squeaks and rattles.

3. Write a great ad. Think about the things you would like to know if you were the one looking to buy a car and remember to include a good quality picture. If you aren't that handy with a camera ask a friend who is to take the shot for you. Remember, first impressions count, and the photo your buyers see will determine whether they give you a call or click through your ad to another one.

4. Advertise your car. Hopefully, your car is now in tip-top shape and you know your asking price. There are several places you can advertise your car.

Use the internet. If you're a Facebook or Twitter user, many people have successfully sold their cars through social media. There are also many websites that will permit you to advertise your vehicle. Some are free and others charge a fee. The most popular sites are carsales.com.au, eBay.com, and gumtree.com.au.

Tell all your friends and family that you're selling your car. The people in your life know lots of others and word of mouth is a great way to advertise. You can even put a sign in the window and park your car where others will see it.

Many automobile forums have a classifieds section. Check them out!

5. Handle potential buyers carefully. This is so important. Return phone calls and emails quickly and answer any questions as fully as you can. Allow potential buyers to test drive your car, but go along with them for the ride. Bring a friend if you feel more comfortable.

6. Negotiate. Practice your negotiating skills before you talk with prospective buyers.

Be patient. Unless you're desperate to sell the vehicle, avoid rushing. It's okay to let buyers walk away. Many of them will come back. If your price is fair, there's nothing to worry about.

Avoid letting uncomfortable silences bother you. Many times, the first one to talk ends up "losing."

7. Close the deal. Only accept cash, a bank cheque or a bank transfer. If you want to accept a personal cheque, do wait until the cheque clears before handing over the keys to the car and processing the transfer papers. If there's a loan that needs to be retired, contact your lender. Once the car is out of your possession, cancel the insurance, and check in case you are eligible for a refund on the part of the policy you haven't used.

Selling a car yourself for the first time can be a little intimidating. It doesn't have to be. It's a great way to make some extra money instead of trading it in. Take the time to find the accurate price of your car and ensure the car is in good shape cosmetically. Then enjoy the process and the profits!

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Solar Power: Sustainable Electricity for Beginners

Solar power is appealing. It's easy to feel the sun on your face and imagine being able to put that heat and light to work for you in some way. But many people are intimidated at the thought of getting started with solar power. There's really no reason to be hesitant!

Consider these basic facts about solar power:

A basic PV system is what most beginners have in mind. PV stands for photovoltaic. This system consists of a solar panel, an inverter, and then the power is either stored in batteries or sent back to the utility company (or both). In Australia at this time power is usually fed back into the grid. Storing it is difficult and extremely expensive to set up - not impossible, but at around \$10,000 for batteries to store enough power for around 3 days, it is not the most popular option.

A PV system can lower your utility bills. It's not easy to determine how much it will lower your utility bills, though. This is especially true if you're putting your power back into the grid. Utility companies have different ways of crediting you for this power.

A PV system is simple to maintain and very reliable. Most systems will be guaranteed for 25 years and will last that long or more with no minimal maintenance whatsoever.

There are many subsidies offered by the government. There are also rebates and tax breaks that help to make solar power easier to afford. It's possible to reduce your initial cost by as much as 50% in some areas.

Consider installing a solar shower. Solar showers are very inexpensive. It's basically just a special bag, filled with water, that's hung in the sun. Solar showers can get extremely hot, so be warned. You can always bring it inside for your shower, if that's more convenient. We use solar showers when we are camping. Even on a cool day the water gets hot enough to shower or bathe with. A simple solar shower will cost between \$15 - \$50 dollars, depending on where you buy it and of course the quality of the bag and hose. You'll find them at camping stores.

A solar-powered attic fan is another easy way to get started. These fans, or roof ventilators, can really save you money by removing hot air from your attic space in the summer. It can get up to 80 degrees+ up there. They only cost around \$450 and are easy to install.

Consider your climate. Good solar designers consider the climate when building a solar system. This includes available sunlight throughout the year, days of sun, smog, temperature, rainfall, wind, and snowfall (well we do have some alpine areas that get a decent dump of snow over winter). The fact that wind is an issue surprises many people, but wind is hard on equipment and also cools water-heating panels.

It's not difficult to get started with solar power. There's so much information available and enough manufacturers to make pricing competitive.

Solar power isn't just good for your wallet. It's great for the environment, too.

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The 5 Commandments for Managing Bill Payments

Paying bills every month can be pretty monotonous, yet overwhelming. If you have the responsibility of taking care of your own bills, you can definitely relate! Unfortunately, managing bill payments is an essential part of adult life.

Paying your bills each month is essential so continue to have the services you need and the credit you've earned without interruption. However, life happens and there are times when that doesn't mean you are always on top of getting those bills paid.

How can you best manage recurring expenses?

These five commandments for managing bill payments can help you stay on track:

1. Focus on necessities first. In many cases, the challenge with bill payments comes from trying to manage expenses. You have a limited income, so you want to ensure the money is spent most efficiently. To do that, ensure you're paying for necessities first.

- Since utilities like electricity and water are most important, ensure you take care of those before anything else.
- In order to keep the roof over your head, be sure to allocate the correct portion of your earnings for the rent or mortgage payment.
- If you feel like you'll lose your mind without cable, how about just adjusting the package you have? Instead of the premium package with all the channels, why not cut it down to Sports and Movies?
- Look into getting things done without taking on an additional payment. Do as much as you can yourself. Become a dedicated DIYer, even if it's just DIYing your exercise program.

2. Review bills for accuracy. You'd be surprised how often billing companies make mistakes! In order to pay only what you're supposed to, constantly review your bills.

- If printed bills arrive in the mail late, switch to electronic versions. Those are usually available as soon as they're generated.
- Call the billing company to clarify any charges you're uncertain about.
- Document when you request to add or remove services in your diary or on the family calendar.

3. Setup recurring payments. Sometimes the challenge lies in trying to remember when to pay bills. If that's the case, and if the bill totals are usually the same each month, setup recurring payments.

- Setup direct deposits from your bank account to the account of the billing company. You won't have to worry about remembering when to pay. Just ensure there's enough money in the account to cover the bills!

4. Pay bills online. If time is a real issue for you, avoid standing in line to pay bills. Many companies facilitate online payments. Make use of it, it's easy and can be done when you have the time!

5. Know your due dates. Being able to keep track of due dates can help you manage bill payments.

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- If the dates for different bills vary, you can know how to use your money. It's not always necessary for you to pay all your bills at one time. Put your money to other uses as long as you know the money will be available before the bill is due.

These are pretty easy commandments to follow to effectively manage your bill payments.

Remember it's your responsibility to maintain a positive history of payments. Use these strategies and you'll be surprised at how easy it can be!

The High Cost of Entertainment Eating

What is the one area of the Spending Plan (aka the budget) that you have complete and utter control over? And what is the one are of the budget that can blow out faster than an over-inflated balloon?

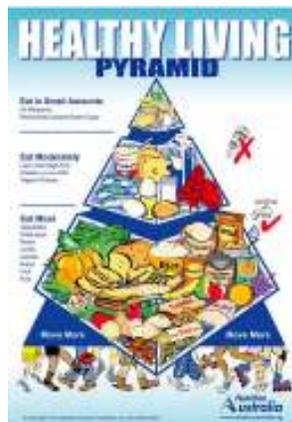
Food!

Personally I love food. I like to eat, and so do the other members of the family. They'd happily graze in the fridge and the fruit bowl and the biscuit tin all day if I'd let them.

I don't. Not because I'm mean. Not even because they really don't need to eat so much. I don't let them because entertainment eating (and that's all it is, really) is expensive. Really, really expensive. It can easily add 50% or more to a family's food bill.

In our house food is looked at as essential. We need to eat to survive. We need to eat healthy, tasty and attractive meals to fuel our bodies for optimum performance. Anything we eat over and above that is a waste, pure entertainment eating, and not at all necessary.

In our house, necessary food is what's on the healthy eating pyramid:



Don't get me wrong, eating is one of my top priorities and I am absolutely not telling you to stop eating. What I will tell you is that we look at food differently in our home: there is necessary food and then there is entertainment food.

Necessary food consists of proteins, fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy: the foods we need to stay fit and healthy. How much of these foods we need to consume is dictated by our age, activity levels and

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metabolism; I need a lot less than the boys or Wayne because apart from the fact that they are much, much bigger than me, they also do a lot more physical work and use a lot more energy than I do.

Entertainment food is:

- biscuits, slices, cakes - the "treat" foods we eat for afternoon tea or as dessert
- dips, chips and crackers
- chips and chocolate while watching TV
- takeaway meals when you can't be bothered cooking
- restaurant meals (on the odd occasion we do actually eat in a restaurant)
- the muffin and coffee after shopping
- and any other eating that isn't necessary for life and/or performance.

When you have a limited budget spending your money on entertainment eating can mean the difference between going hungry at dinnertime and paying the gas bill. While that block of chocolate and packet of chips is tempting you as you zoom through the supermarket, it can easily eat up \$7 plus of your food budget that you'll need to find from somewhere else.

I have nothing against entertainment eating other than all those foods drastically add to the cost of the grocery bill. If eating out is important to you, just make sure you can afford it. Build it into your Spending Plan to ensure you can afford it. If you are going to indulge in entertainment eating, pay for it out of the entertainment budget.

And understand that when you eat your money, you don't have it to spend on something else.

Dear Cath

Q. Hi Cath, Do you know where I could find info on cleaning fresh urine (not stains) out of a mattress? *Maxine*

A. Hi Maxine, Treat it much as you would an older stain. The secret is to get as much moisture out of the mattress as you can before you attempt to clean it. Use a dry towel and blot the wet patch, changing the towel as it becomes wet, until you can't get any more moisture out. This can take a while because depending on what the mattress and topper are made of it could hold moisture for a very long time. Press down really hard to make sure you get as much as possible out.

For a fresh stain a solution of 3% hydrogen peroxide will give the best results. Saturate the stain with the peroxide, being sure you cover it entirely. Leave it for 5 minutes then repeat the blotting process above. Let the mattress air dry or use a hair dryer to completely dry it. Peroxide may bleach the mattress cover. Sprinkle the area with bicarb soda, rub it in with your fingers and leave it overnight. Vacuum it up the next day.

Q. Hi Cath I've been a Cheapskates member now for a year. My Husband and I would like to use the payment push plan to reduce our debt. Some of our debt we don't pay interest on, do we concentrate on them first or do we concentrate on the ones we pay interest on? *Emma*

A. When it comes to the Payment Push stick to the guidelines.

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Order your debts from smallest to largest, ignoring interest rates.

Pay the minimum monthly payment on all debts except the smallest. On that debt you'll pay the minimum plus throw every other spare cent you can find at it until it is gone.

You'll then keep paying the minimum on all the other debts except the smallest. On this debt you will pay the minimum PLUS what you were already paying for the deb you've just cleared, and throw every other spare cent you can find at it until it is gone.

Repeat the process for all your debts.

When you have debt, of any kind, you need to stop spending on everything but the absolute essentials until it is cleared. That won't be easy. It probably took you a little while to accumulate the debt, it's going to take a little while to clear it - if you stop spending. If you keep on spending on things that aren't absolutely necessary it will take you longer and cost you more. Stop spending for a short time - until the debt is cleared. Then re-work your Spending Plan to allow for paying cash when you want to spend.

And remember, once the debt is cleared, save for what you want. Then you'll really own it and you'll only be paying the ticket price - not a whole lot more.

Stick to your Payment Push and make sure you get all your debts cleared quickly.

On the Menu

Curry in a Hurry

Curries are family favourites and not only because they are so easy to prepare. They are tasty and filling and best of all cheap. A curry uses very little meat, so it can be a very economical addition to your meal plan.

They don't need to be hot, when you make your own curries you control the intensity of the heat and adjust the seasonings to suit your family's tastes. Even little ones can enjoy a curry when it is made to suit their tastebuds.

Sweet Lamb Curry

A regular in my curry repertoire is an old Australian favourite, Sweet Lamb Curry. This dish is traditionally made with the leftovers from the Sunday roast, stretching a very little meat for another family meal.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 brown onion, finely chopped

2 to 3 tablespoons mild curry powder

500g cooked lamb, diced

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1/2 cup fruit chutney

1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, finely chopped

1/2 cup sultanas

1/2 cup chicken stock or water

Plain yoghurt, to serve

Method:

Heat oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Add onion. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes or until tender. Increase heat to high. Add curry powder and lamb. Cook, stirring with a wooden spoon, for 5 to 6 minutes or until browned. Stir in chutney, apple, sultanas and stock or water. Bring to the boil. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes or until mixture thickens. Serve over steamed rice with a dollop of yoghurt on top.

Curried Sausages

I'm not a fan of sausages as a rule but this dish does the humble snag proud. And it's economical - allow 1 sausage per person for a truly cheap dinner.

Ingredients:

4 - 6 thin sausages

1 onion, sliced into rings

30g butter

2 tsp curry powder

2 tsp chicken or vegetable stock powder

3 cups milk

2 tbsp cornflour mixed to a paste with 1/4 cup milk

1 tbsp tomato sauce

Method:

Bring a pot of water to the boil. Add the sausages and cook for 5 minutes. Drain. Peel the sausages. Chop sausages into 2cm chunks. In a large saucepan melt the butter over a low heat. Add the curry powder and the stock powder. Cook for 1 minute. Add the sausage chunks and onion rings and cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the milk and bring to a simmer, stirring constantly. Stir in the cornflour paste, stirring until the mixture thickens. Stir in the tomato sauce. Cook for a further 5 minutes until the sausages are cooked through. Serve with steamed rice or mashed potato and steamed greens.

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Crockpot Beef Curry

Need dinner in a hurry? Put the ingredients in your crockpot when you get up and dinner will be ready when you need it to be. Cook some rice in the microwave while you set the table and dinner is done. The long slow cooking turns what are ordinarily tough cuts into tender morsels full of delicious flavour.

Ingredients:

750g stewing steak or gravy beef

2 onions

2 carrots

2 tsp curry powder

1 tbsp soy sauce

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

2 tbsp chutney

1-1/2 cups beef stock

1 tbsp cornflour

Method:

Peel the vegetables. Dice the onion and slice the carrot into rings. Trim all visible fat from the meat. Put all the ingredients and stir well to combine. Cook on 4 -5 hours on HIGH or 8 hours on LOW. Mix the cornflour with a little cold water to make a paste. Stir into the curry and cook a further 10 minutes until sauce thickens. Serve with steamed rice.

Quotes of Note

Lead the life that will make you kindly and

Friendly to everyone about you,

And you will be surprised what a

Happy life you will lead.

~~Charles M. Schwab~~

~~~~~

The waste of money cures itself,

for soon there is no more to waste.

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~~M.W. Harrison~~

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Forewarned, forearmed;
to be prepared is half the victory.

~~Miguel de Cervantes~~

~~~~~

Strive not to be a success,  
but rather to be of value.

~~Albert Einstein~~

~~~~~

I attribute my success to this:
I never gave or took any excuse.

~~Florence Nightingale~~

~~~~~

Life is what happens to you  
while you're busy making other plans.

~~John Lennon~~

~~~~~

Life is 10% what happens to me
and 90% of how I react to it.

~~Charles Swindoll~~

Living Green in 2014

Simple, Environmentally Friendly Ways To Save Big Bucks

You probably already know that many environmentally friendly habits are also budget friendly. For example, when you turn down the heat on your hot water service you save money on your utility bill and you save energy too.

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Or when you replace your standard incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs you save energy and you save money on bulbs because the CFL bulbs last so long.

Good news! I have a three more simple and environmentally friendly ways you can save money and the earth.

Install Motion Detectors in Your Outside Lights.

Your porch light, garage door light and any other outside lights can save electricity and money when you install motion detectors. The detectors turn on the lights when there's movement and they turn off automatically. No more leaving the porch light on all night by accident.

Sign Up for eStatements

Most banks and financial institutions offer a choice of frequency for a printed statement to be mailed to you (monthly, quarterly) and send paper statements to you. They usually come with multiple sheets and a pile of junk mail. Sign up for electronic or eStatements. You save money and fewer trees are cut down and made into paper. (Not to mention no one has to deliver that statement to you which reduces fuel emissions and you don't have to file all those statements.)

Get Digital Subscriptions

Did you know that most magazines and newspapers now offer digital subscriptions, just like your Cheapskates Journal (which you can read online as a web page, or in newsletter format)? That means you can read them on your computer. It reduces paper consumption, ink and printing by products and of course emissions created by delivering the magazine or newspaper to you. Again, you don't have to deal with piles and piles of scrap paper and old magazine. And in many cases the digital subscription is much cheaper than the print subscription rate.

Cheapskates Tip Store

Recycling Framed Prints

Approximate \$ Savings: Variable, up to \$60 per item

I am always looking for ideas to update home decor and for innovative gifts to friends and family. I often see beautiful framed prints in some of the upmarket designer stores and magazines and was inspired to seek a less expensive alternative. I started checking out poster prints online and was pleasantly surprised at the relatively low cost. Modern styles from as low as \$12 for a 60 x 80 cm size. I am a dedicated recycler and often come across great quality frames that are perfect for updating with a new print. As framed prints often cost up to \$80+ for a quality product, the savings are significant!

Contributed by Jennifer Cintolo

Get the Best Interest Rate for Your Savings

Approximate \$ Savings: Ranges depending on how much is in your account

Most of us these days have savings accounts on top of our everyday accounts. The best rates are usually found at each banks' "online savings" accounts however most of these only have

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promotional rates for 3-4 months (currently around 4.1%) and are advertised for "new accounts" only. After this period, they often revert back to base rates which can be around 1%.

If you're not keen on having to open a new account with different banks every 3-4 months, go into your bank's branch office and ask what the current best rate on their online saver for new customers is. Often they will help you open a new online saver and give you the "new account" promotional rate and even help you to close your old accounts so they don't build up (just remember if you open mid-way through a month, you should wait until the end of the month after any residual interest has been paid before closing it).

This way you can get up to 3-4% more interest on your savings, stay with the same bank and it takes less than half an hour of your time every few months. I've even had a really nice manager once match a higher interest rate from a competing bank!

Just as an example, if you had \$10,000 in a savings account at 1% vs a 4% interest rate, you would earn an extra \$25 every month, adding up to \$300 every year. The more you have, the more you earn!

And before anyone says "yes but you have to pay tax on the extra income", this is true but even paying 30% tax on extra income still means extra income regardless (unless it pushes you into a higher tax bracket then maybe you'd need to rethink the strategy).

Contributed by Martina Ho

Beating Telstra for Discount

Approximate \$ Savings: \$20 per month for contract life

I have been with Telstra for mobile broadband for a number of years. I saw on their site that you could get \$20 off your bill per month, if you bundle services. Well since I only have the one account I asked if I could get this discount only to be told no, but I was advised to ring customer service and see if they would do this as a loyal customer discount. Well I applied and got it and have had it for the last 2 years. I have recently upgraded my monthly allowance and again had to ring the customer service to see if I could still keep the discount. After two phone calls and an online chat I was assured that yes I could keep this discount, so my monthly payment has only gone up by \$10. Don't ask in-store as they are not helpful or deny any knowledge of this discount being available. But with persistence and using the in-store phone to call customer service this discount is there for anyone if they are insistent.

Contributed by Chris Boxall

Fun Cushions for Kids

I just saw these fun cushions on Facebook and thought what a great idea and had to share with all your readers. Round up 5 old pillow cases that you don't use anymore, because we all know it's better to reuse than to buy new. Sew them across the seams leaving the opening clear at the sides so you can insert pillows. You can leave ends open or add a snap fastening or buttons for easy removal of the pillows when it's time to wash the pillowcases. Great for kids to lounge around on the floor.

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Contributed by Marilyn Hyde

One 5 Minute Phone Call Equals Home Loan Interest Savings

Approximate \$ Savings: \$600 plus per annum

Bank of Melbourne is currently offering super discounted home loan interest rates to attract customers from other banks. Check out their website and see what discount you are eligible depending on your home loan amount. Call your bank and advise them of BOM rates and ask if they can beat this rate. I called NAB and in 5 minutes I saved myself \$3,000 per annum (combined mortgages over 3 investment properties) as they BEAT the BOM rate being offered. No paperwork to fill in, I just received a letter in the mail saying my rate had been reduced. I advised a friend of this and she did it with ANZ and saved \$600 per annum, again with a 5 minute phone call.

Contributed by Michelle Webb

File Your Herbs and Spices

Approximate \$ Savings: \$20 year

I also buy herbs and spices in the plastic packets but found storing them a nightmare, spilling all the time and losing their pungency faster than jars. I now place the entire packet sideways inside a snack size zip lock bag and label the top then "file" them sideways in a recycled box so they stay neat and I can see at a glance what I am running short of. No need to tip them in the bag, just a small cut to the top of the spice packet and then pop the whole thing in the zip lock bag. Saves room in the pantry rather than lots of glass jars, is very inexpensive to set up and easy to use, I grab the entire box out when cooking for a bit of this and that and best of all no more wasted spices!

Contributed by Ashlea Gibson

Organized Meals = Organized Shopping and Big Savings

When I do my fortnightly shopping I have my pre-prepared list to include my ten dinners for the two weeks following. The core of the list is dinners, then other items follow in order of importance. I also try to duplicate the ingredients (i.e.: mince for lasagne in first week and mince for hamburgers the second week as I have found that buying a larger quantity and splitting in two portions is cheaper, this is especially so with meat.) Being organised like this prevents you from dashing to the shops at the last minute to buy that one missing ingredient, as I believe that is when you completely blow your budget by purchasing items not really necessary. Stick to your list, try to go without the kids and if necessary split your shop between multiple stores i.e.: butcher, greengrocer etc. (preferably all in the one centre) to maximise both time and savings.

Contributed by Erin Bridges

A Miracle Way to be Rid of Ants

I have just discovered that 'miracle spray' is great for ant problems. Light spray along the ant trail and a heftier one at the source and job done. Within seconds the ants are dead and no sign of new invaders.

Contributed by Tracy Hicks

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Editor's note: Miracle Spray really is miraculous! If you haven't tried it yet, here's the Tip Sheet with the recipe and some other uses for it. *Cath*

Dogs Dinner Deluxe

Approximate \$ Savings: \$5-10 per week

If you like to make your own stock - as I do - and you also like to make sure your pets are eating good food that costs little - try the following: make stock for soups, risottos- etc. using carrot and celery. When you drain the stock keep the left over vegetables and add to some cooked mince steak and rice for the cheapest doggie dinners. It is wonderful to find two uses for the same product and saves hundreds of dollars over a year in buying pet food. Everyone wins! Note: Don't use onion or garlic in your stock; add it to your recipe later. Onion and garlic are toxic to dogs and can make them very sick, even kill them.

Contributed by Andrea McCarthy

Tea Leaves

Approximate \$ Savings: Around \$30 per year

Ok its only pennies every week but Cath has taught us that every cent counts. We have recently added Kombucha Tea to our probiotic fermenting projects (it is worth Googling if you haven't heard of it) and making it has increased our consumption of teabags noticeably. We prefer Madura Premium Blend which advertises low caffeine (around 2.8%) and when I went to purchase the teabags I noticed the loose leaf was \$2.66/100gms compared to \$4.14/100gms for bags. We have switched to leaves as of today. All it will cost me is a little extra time in cleaning up after. It is true that we pay more for the conveniences but also that we sacrifice the pleasure that comes with MOO. We are embracing the 'slow' food movement and saving money along with it.

Contributed by Angie Fimmano

Easy Clean, Re-usable, Bird Cage Liner Sheets

Approximate \$ Savings: \$300+ per year

We have a pet budgie and I did not want to use newspaper as a cage liner as I read that the newsprint can be toxic to pet birds. I was also horrified at the cost of shop bought grit and sand sheets for lining the bottom of the bird cage (about a \$1 a sheet).

I wondered what I could use that would be:

1. safe for the bird
2. environmentally friendly and
3. easy on my purse.

I bought a pack of 3 flexible coloured plastic chopping mats (\$3 for a pack of 3 at The Reject Shop). Our bird's cage is large so I use 2 of these mats (slightly overlapped) on the base of the cage. They are food grade (so no toxins) and can be washed and re-used over and over again saving me hundreds of dollars each year and without any harm to our bird.

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Contributed by Nadine Billingham

Sorted Laundry

We have very little space in our laundry and I was sick of pulling the entire contents of the laundry hamper out and on to the ground for sorting. So, I took a redundant wardrobe hanging storage unit (purchased years ago at a \$2 shop) and hung it where the laundry hamper used to be. Then, I made labels for each category of washing that I do with what type of items get washed, which wash cycle to use, which powder and any other "add ins" (i.e. face-washers) so that I don't forget the little items too. It saves so much time on the sorting and a lot of mental energy too. Not to mention the water and power because now I can see when a category is full enough for a load. An added bonus is that it's now simple enough for my husband to use (given it's all spelled out) and when our fist bub arrives in June I may be able to rely on him to help out :)

Contributed by Krysten Ioannides

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