

Ask the money lady

by CHRISTINE IBBOTSON

I always find it difficult over the holidays to keep the costs down. Have you got any tips for making it through Christmas without spending too much? Thanks, Francis

Great question Francis!

Everyone feels the financial pinch over the holiday season and most tend to buy on credit and then try to deal with the bills in January. I know it can be extremely hard to stick to a budget so here are some money saving tips to keep in mind this holiday season!

It is best to make a list, determine a budget for each gift and stick to it. If you can't find a gift for your price point ? then opt for gift cards so that they can be used after Christmas in all the retail sales. Why not consider ?teaming-up? and go in on gifts with others to limit costs and maintain your budget. Set expectations with family so that everyone plans to spend specific amounts on gift giving. You could also choose to have an adult name picking or secret Santa. Don't forget the Dollar Store, they are great for Christmas stocking stuffers, wrappings, cards, and decorations. Who says you have to spend a lot to get into the Holiday Spirit!!

Make sure you delegate the dishes or have a potluck dinner to reduce the cost of a large family meal. Everyone has a specialty that they could bring if asked and it is up to the Hostess to coordinate the meal and tell people what to bring. Don't forget to tell your guests to also bring their own alcohol. If you are hosting the event at your home, you shouldn't be expected to foot the bill for all the drinks. Instead have a Christmas Punch and let everyone BYOB.

Consider buying gifts really early or too late. When you buy early you can take advantage of store sales and discounts, but don't fall into the trap of buying more and going over your budget. When you buy really late ? meaning on the 23rd or 24th of December ? everything in the stores is already marked down in anticipation for the Boxing Week Sales. I have always done my Christmas shopping on the 24th and got amazing deals.

Why not consider buying everything on-line. You won't get tempted to buy more when shopping at the mall, and it is super easy to stick to a budget. If traipsing through one store after another and standing in long line-ups is not for you, why not remove the stress and have everything delivered to your door. It's like your own little valet service.

Another idea could be to give the gift now and have it keep giving all year round. A magazine subscription or wine club membership are great gift ideas for a hard to buy family member. The payments can be spread out over the year and make it easier on the wallet during the month of December. Ordering tickets to a play, ballet or opera are also great ways to give a gift now with the added anticipation of a future intimate outing.

Be generous and gracious this season. Homemade cookies and gifts, a thoughtful Christmas message in a hand made card, or a letter of devotion and love, can be cherished more than any store bought item. Be kind to one another, watch your manners, forget the grudges and enjoy your family. Remember, happiness isn't defined by how much you spend, it is what you do, how much you love, how caring and supportive you are, and above all your true compassion for others.

Merry Christmas to everyone!

Best wishes,

Christine Ibbotson,

Author of ?How to Retire Debt Free and Wealthy?