

Financial worries taking their tolls on families

by Mark Pavilons

"Most people work just hard enough not to get fired and get paid just enough money not to quit." ??George Carlin

Most working adults are fully aware of the harsh financial realities of living in our society.

It seems enjoying our current lifestyle is so damn expensive it's beginning to impact us emotionally, physically and professionally.

A startling 44 per cent of Canadians believe their financial situation negatively impacts their mental health, according to a recent survey by Capital

One Canada (Capital One) and Credit Canada Debt Solutions (Credit Canada).

"Money is an emotional topic and is one of the biggest sources of stress in people's lives, but it is rarely talked about," said Patrick Ens, VP of Strategy and Brand, Capital One.

According to the #MoneyMindfulness survey, 30 per cent of Canadians cite financial stress as a larger worry than their overall health. Additionally, on average, Canadians said they spend seven hours per week worrying about their finances ? meaning the average Canadian is wasting 365 hours per year. However, what's even more concerning is that those who cite financial stress as their largest day-to-day worry spend on average 16 hours a week stressing about it, amounting to 832 hours of lost time per year.

Sadly, more than three-quarters (76 per cent) of Canadians have already missed out on special experiences in order to save money, including vacations (53 percent), expensive dinners (44 per cent) and personal grooming (36 per cent). Over half (56 per cent) said they are willing to make drastic sacrifices to become debt free, including never travelling or vacationing again (23 per cent), not eating out (21 per cent), and even embracing a no-spend diet (20 per cent).

The Canadian Payroll Association (CPA) is raising the alarm for employers, encouraging them to get involved in supporting their employee's financial wellness.

Results from the CPA's 2018 Employee Research Survey show that 46% of Canadian workers say that financial stress is impacting their workplace performance.

"Decreased productivity, absenteeism and high turnover are just some of the negative ways that stress arising from finances can affect employees," says Peter Tzanetakis, CPA's president. "Employers are uniquely positioned to support employee financial wellness, either by offering them financial resources or methods to help employees save."

Canadians continue to struggle with debt and savings, with the survey illustrating that 44% of Canadian workers are living pay cheque to pay cheque. A staggering 40% of Canadians feel overwhelmed by their level of debt, up 5% from last year, and more than one-third of survey respondents say their debt load increased over the year (up to 34% from 31% the year previously). The primary reason for growing debt is increased spending.

When asked about their major financial concerns, respondents note that a higher cost of living is most concerning, followed closely by worries about higher interest and mortgage rates. Most Canadians (96%) anticipate their cost of living will increase over the coming year.

Significant changes, such as an economic downturn or an increase in interest rates, could have a dramatic impact on workers ability to save, manage debt and plan for retirement. The Bank of Canada's decision to raise the benchmark interest rate five times since the

summer of 2017 will not only make borrowing more expensive for Canadians, but could also create additional financial challenges for those with variable mortgages or whose mortgages are up for renewal.

Right now, our society is a mix of seniors, Baby Boomers and Millennials, all with different challenges.

Many of our seniors are simply not living the high life, enjoying the sunshine after decades of loyal service. In reality, their fixed income is shrinking, given the offsetting increases in well, everything.

I find it kind of funny that financial types tell us how much money we should save for retirement, and how much we will need to enjoy a decent lifestyle in our twilight years. I wonder if those same money gurus predicted the current price of gas; cost of carrying million-dollar homes; cuts to OHIP and out-of-control increases in utilities. If these are all taken in to consideration, today's seniors would need double the amount to live a decent lifestyle.

So how will we Boomers fare in the next decade?

Sure, I own an expensive home, but like most other average Canadians, I'm asset "rich" and cash "poor."

The above-noted survey results are only the tip of the iceberg. I think our overall stress levels are rising, just like the spring water levels. This filters down through everything -- impatience at the check-out line; road rage and really bad manners; our lack of concern for our fellow men and women.

The provincial government is looking closely at spending and waste. They were elected on a platform of frugality so they're trimming and realigning funds.

Of course, it has generated a public outcry. But if Canadians are stressed about their own finances, and willing to make drastic cuts, why should our government follow suit?

Many of us have to make tough choices and this has become the new normal.

Navigating today's financial waters is challenging, especially if you only have one oar in the water.

What we -- the people and the economy of Ontario -- need are opportunities and avenues to increase overall wealth.

Most are willing to sing for their supper, so let's tune up our collective vocal cords!

And let's try to put things in perspective:

"Measure your wealth by what you'd have left if you lost all your money."

-- Jackson Brown, Jr.