

Walking the Talk



Chellie Campbell

When Chellie Campbell teaches her financial stress reduction workshop, she recognizes the nervous, wide-eyed look on her students' faces. She knows the feeling all too well because she's been there — and back again.

"I have been as down and out as anybody. If I can recover, anyone can," Campbell says. "The No. 1 student in my class is me."

After a business failure in the early 1990s, Campbell, 60, found herself in financial devastation, foreclosing on a home and facing a seemingly insurmountable pile of credit card debt.

"It was a series of unfortunate events," Campbell says. "After four years of working for a small company, I bought my partners out. Nine months later, my biggest client (75 percent of my income) left the company with two weeks notice. I couldn't make payments on my home, and before I knew it I owed \$160,000. I was the most financially stressed person I knew."

Campbell faced reality head on. With a strict regimen of budgeting, saving and positive thinking, she turned her financial situation around and got her life — and her balance sheet — back on track. "I got myself back on my feet. Life is good if you follow certain financial principles," Campbell says.

While working hard to pay off bills, Campbell says it was also important for her to remember to take time to enjoy life. "I re-discovered all the fun I could have while not

spending money. Going to the park, playing scrabble, having a potluck with friends ... these were easy ways for me to find hope and pleasure in life."

Now Campbell helps others get their finances in order with financial stress reduction workshops. The eight-week workshops don't offer any claims of getting rich quick, but help students master their finances.

"I saw that people who had money were worried they were going to lose it and people without money were worried they were never going to have it. Everybody was stressed," she says. "When I would help them on this money issue, their lives would blossom in every area."

In her classes, students get creative with budgeting as they establish a low-end budget for when money is tight and a "You-Deserve-Getting-Everything" budget for more prosperous times.

"It's refocusing. If you really commit to the low budget, it's amazing how much money you can save up," she says.

Looking back on the past two decades, Campbell says she feels like a new person with new freedom. "Human beings are resilient. We do survive those financial rough spots."

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Money Tips

If money trouble is causing stress, Chellie Campbell suggests several ways to relax and get back on track to make your money work for you.

Get it together. Make decisions based on your individual needs and budget. Don't move with the herd because of media hype or market scares.

Get clear on your budget. Create a detailed balance sheet of all your assets versus debts.

Get your money. Go to anyone who owes you money and set up terms to collect.

Get educated. Learn about money, from how to read credit card statements to understanding your mortgage. The more knowledge you have, the less stressed you'll be.