

A Few Suggestions in a Grim Recession

By M.J. Clark

Times are tough. We feel it and see it every day. I have a theory, and I know I share it with others, that the universe gives us what we need when we need it. Well, we must have needed this message to slow down.

With the holidays so close, I have been thinking more about my clients, friends and family and how all of us will endure this spending-driven season without incurring severe financial debt and experiencing a great deal of stress.

It's hard for many of us to pare back our spending during economic downturns. We get so used to having what we want when we want it. We are used to being able to give gifts at the holidays, and yet this year, that might be a challenge for some of us.

I want to offer some suggestions to help you thoroughly enjoy the holidays in a stress-free, financially sound way.

- If you will struggle to buy holiday gifts, talk openly with family or friends to explain that you would prefer to exchange small, token gifts this year or that you will not be able to exchange gifts. These are people who love you. They will understand. Don't let your pride lead to financial distress.
- Start pulling out your holiday decorations now, so you won't feel as harried as the holiday nears. You don't have to put them out yet, just see what you have and what you might need to replace before you will actually begin to decorate. Taking this slowly will make it a more calm experience during a very rushed time.
- Schedule some "me" time for yourself over this holiday season. What makes you feel calm – a walk in the park, a neck massage, a hot bubble bath, petting your dog? Schedule some time for things like this that are important, but not urgent. When your stress level goes up, so should the time you allot to rejuvenating yourself with peaceful, fun activities.
- If you are experiencing financial stress, decide what you will be able to live without through the end of 2008. How many times do you normally eat out each week? Can you cut that number back? Perhaps you can focus on entertainment that is less costly, such as getting movies from the local library instead of going out to a movie, or doing without the popcorn and other treats when you do go to a movie. Can you brew your own coffee instead of stopping at Starbucks in the morning? Can you pack your lunch instead of going out for lunch, even just a few times a week?

It's not easy to discipline ourselves to change our habits. We have to take time to think about our lives and make new, better decisions. This takes patience. It takes commitment. I wish all of you peace and happiness during this challenging economic time. We still have so very much to be thankful for.