



credit&debtsolutions

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"Can We Talk?"

One of the more significant challenges couples face around money, is arriving at a mutually acceptable set of financial priorities; in spite of their fundamentally different money values.

For example:

It would not be unusual for one spouse to view a major outlay of cash, say for children's activities, as important, while the other might want to set some limits on costs in this area and instead concentrate on saving, liquidating debt, or generally to spending in other areas.

In my experience, women tend to have entirely different "shopping lists" than men. And the variety of the things on their list tends to be effected by whether or not they have dependent children. Sorry guys!

Last spring I was working with a couple who had three children. They were cracker jacks at money management. Their view of the world though, was somewhat different; they saw themselves as disasters. They were spending just under \$120.00 per month on each of their children for the things the kids liked to do. The total, \$360.00, fit well within their means and the monthly outlay did not cause any difficulty for them at all. Then Mom began to notice that kid number three was somewhat shy and withdrawn. So she began looking at ways to challenge him a little. She feared that if he continued as he was, by the time he arrived at the dreaded junior high years, he'd have evolved into a textbook nerd and would be the brunt of endless schoolyard taunting. Seems she'd been there, and had done that. Dad was of a different mind. Yes, challenges were in order for this young man in his view. But if they came with a cost, was it right to invest more money in only one child? Was doing do fair? He reasoned that there was nothing wrong with the school of hard knocks. Maybe Dad's time in school was accompanied by only gentle barbs while Mom, as a student had to cope with razor wire.

The reality is that neither Mom nor Dad were wrong; they just viewed things differently. In the end the young man in question began drum lessons, (Now that's one way to be heard!) and the parents both agreed to re-evaluate things six months later.

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Mission:

"To educate consumers in the wise use of credit and to facilitate the equitable resolution of financial problems for individuals and families in Newfoundland and Labrador."

What were Mom and Dad really saying? Was the outward conversation about the money or were they really getting at something else? I felt they were, and that both were actually talking about the same thing. It was something that genuinely troubled the two of them.

Both parents were actually talking about their worst fear. Mom worried that her child might have “issues”, as they say these days. She was prepared to do whatever was necessary to minimize their long-term effect. Dad had the same concerns; but his chosen means of changing a prospective outcome was somewhat different from his wife. In the end, they both made concessions, and they both got a little of what they wanted.

Most households are just like this one. An extension to the family home may be about space on the surface. But in reality it’s about privacy for growing children in the estimation of one parent, while it’s an equity question for the other. A second vehicle – or in some households a third – may look to be about convenience; but its more likely and typically to be about safety and efficiency in the adult’s minds, while to teenagers there’s probably a little bit of status in there somewhere, just for complication.

When we grow to distinguish what’s being said from what is truly meant, we’re more likely not to resent or resist our mate’s stated position. So if you are ever unsure about your partner’s financial position, why not ask a simple question. “So what you’re really saying is...” or “Help me understand...” or maybe even “I don’t quite get that, could you say it again?”

Remember, in a typical household there are eight major categories of cost and over 75 actual places where we spend our money. In your house there may be many more or maybe less. So you can expect perceptions to be different almost everyday. There are also different personalities, and as our children grow, their opinions, views and “five cents worth” finds its way into the mix as well.

Money is, and has always been an incredibly sensitive area for us as human beings. This is where our power surfaces and is most evident to the people around us. Needless to say, human beings like that place, and we resent it tremendously when someone; anyone takes it away, especially for themselves. What we really need to do is talk it out, not have it out!

Al Antle is the
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