

# You can be a philanthropist

*Three simple steps to help you spend less and give more* | By KAREN STILLER

LIKE MOST WOMEN I KNOW, I AM THE CFO—crabby financial officer—of our household. I write the cheques for the class trips, compulsively monitor our accounts online, buy the groceries and routinely unbalance our chequebook. Part of being the mother-money-monitor is figuring out what we have available to give away. Sometimes it's not nearly as much as I wish it could be, usually because we've gone to one too many movies or succumbed to one too many delicious deals. Jessica Holmes, a comedian and World Vision child sponsor, says a recent trip to Tanzania underlined for her the impact her spending decisions can have on others. "I realized that the tiniest sacrifices on my end could mean so much more," she says. But identifying these sacrifices can be a challenge for even the crabbiest of money managers. So, here are some tips for all the CFOs out there who wonder where, oh where, does all the money go—and how to spend less to give more. >>



## ONE

### Do the dirty work. Track your pennies.

Recently my husband and I tracked every penny we spent in one month, leading to the revelation that we handed over a whopping \$41 to Tim Horton's, enough to sponsor another child through World Vision. "Most people don't know how much money is really coming in, and they certainly don't know how much is going out," says Karin Mizgala, co-founder of Women's Financial Learning Centre in Vancouver. "We spend without thinking. When people realize how much they spend frivolously, they realize they can spend less." Examine credit card bills and bank account statements for the last three months to give you a solid picture of where your money goes. "The very act of reviewing these is going to raise your consciousness about spending," says Mizgala. "All the little bits we have discretion over—things like magazines, wine, books, gifts—are areas where we tend to spend way more than we think."

## TWO

### Now for the hard part: Tighten your purse strings.

Now that you know how you're blowing your money, it's time to stop. Try the old trick where you put your cash budgeted for things like DVD rentals in an envelope. When it's empty you'll just have to wait until next month to view that new release. Don't be afraid to play some disciplinary mind games with yourself. Open up several online savings accounts at a bank and give them fun names. It's harder to withdraw money for a new outfit you don't really need from an account called "Save the Lives of Children Around

the World" or "My Volunteer Trip of a Lifetime." Thanks to her trip to Tanzania, Holmes hasn't found it that difficult to spend less. "The short-term perk of shopping doesn't fill me up nearly as much as giving a child a future," she says. Holmes recently passed on buying a new outfit for her show and added that amount to a donation she was making to Haiti earthquake relief efforts.

## THREE

### Let the fun begin. Share your wealth.

Now you're ready to re-imagine your life the way you would prefer to be living and spending it. It's time to align your budget with your values. "Often when people think of money, they jump to how much they don't have coming in. There is very little opportunity to step back and say, 'This is what I want to do with my money and with my life,'" says Mizgala. Make a list of what is most important to you. Plug in dollar amounts beside the items on your list of values. If a volunteer trip with a charity is a priority for you, name that on your budget and rank it before dining out with friends. Then, invite the gang over for a potluck instead. After all, you can spend less and still have fun. But remember, if giving more is one of your priorities, it is far more likely to happen if you plan it first out of your total income, rather than last from the leftovers—because often there aren't any.

There are still days when I sit with my CFO hat on and think about how much I want that special edition coffee maker that has been calling my name (I think it might have even winked at me). But starting to control money, instead of money controlling me, reminds me how much power we all have—no matter how much or little we have—to live life the way we want to: abundantly and generously. ☐

tips, tricks, etc.

## FIVE NOT-SO-OBVIOUS WAYS TO SAVE MONEY

- 1 Find a "money-buddy" who wants to spend less. Hold each other accountable for frivolous purchases.
- 2 Check online for grocery flyer coupons. Plan your meals around them.
- 3 Call your television and phone providers every six months to make sure you have the latest deal.
- 4 Cash in on A+ credit ratings by asking your credit card company to waive your annual fee.
- 5 Be bold. Ask your employer for a raise!