

Get Control of Your Debt: Feelings – Behaviors – Solutions Part Two



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In my last article we discussed that in order to really get control of spending and current debt, you need to examine what money means to you. We began that process by discovering how you interact with money. That issue led to some discovery on your views towards money and spending. In part two, we will discuss behaviors that relate to your feelings toward spending money and some of the basic causes for these behaviors. Note that people can exhibit both positive and negative behaviors towards money and their spending habits. However, this does not automatically mean they possess actual bad feelings towards spending.

Let's begin by understanding the difference between "good behavior" and "bad behavior". Merriam-Webster defines behavior as, "the manner of conducting oneself". Good behavior would be making the right choices at the right time for your financial well-being. You understand that there are times you may have to do without what you want in order to provide your basic necessities of life. With bad behavior, a conscious decision is made regardless of the consequences. You know what you are doing is not right, but you choose to do it anyway. Behavior, good or bad, is learned over time. While bad behavior is difficult to correct, with the right education you can do it.

Take a look at the following scenarios. They are an example of what can happen financially if you're spending habits are derived from "bad behavior." Have you ever been in either one of these situations?

1. You have just been paid and are facing an uphill battle to make these funds last until next payday. Like most Americans you live from paycheck to paycheck with absolutely no savings. You must pay cable, three credit card payments, internet, gym membership, tanning bill, cell phone, online dating membership, two magazine subscriptions, and get your hair highlighted. In your head, you have added it all up and seem to have enough money to cover them all and squeak by. You break out the checkbook and start writing checks to some while paying for others through your online bill-pay. Before you go to bed that night you discover that you really need to go grocery shopping. The cupboards are bare and all that is left in the fridge are some condiments and old take-out that has a garden growing in it. The next morning you're on your way to work and stop by the local Starbucks to get your \$9.00 coffee and pastry for the morning. The friendly clerk says, "Good Morning Jim/Sue" because they see you practically every day and hand you your breakfast. You're off to take on the world for another day. You stop at a red light, the light

turns green, and you step on the gas because you're already running late. However, when you step on the gas your car sputters and dies. You try everything you know possible and the car just won't start. Frantically you look for your cell phone and realize that you left it on the counter at home. As the traffic quickly starts to back up, a tow truck mysteriously pulls up and the driver lets you know that they will have to move you so traffic can start to flow normal again. You say to yourself, "Where am I going to find the money for this?" The day could not get any worse...right?

2. You just get home from work after a long exhausting day. It was one of those days when you asked yourself about every thirty-minutes, "Why am I doing this again?" You went online to a website to figure out how many days it was until retirement, or at least you hope to retire at 65. You throw down your purse and keys on the counter and make a beeline to the mailbox. You're thinking to yourself, "What kind of goodies has the mailman left me today." Ruffling through all of the credit card offers, you laugh out loud and think to yourself, "Who in their right mind would give me more credit, when I already have eight credit cards." You come to what looks like a legitimate piece of mail from one of your actual credit card companies. You open it up to discover that you forgot to pay your bill last month. What a wonderful way to start your evening? You walk into the house and your daughter runs up with a folder full of stuff you have to look at right this second. Meanwhile, the cat is meowing and rubbing up against you to feed it. You open the folder and take out an orange sheet. Your daughter says, "That is the order form for my new school t-shirt, I have to get one!" Then you come across another sheet that is entitled, "Last Chance to Order School Pictures!" You say to yourself, "Where am I going to find the money for this!!!" Does this sound like your house?

Both of these scenarios are quite common today. I would imagine that a large majority of those who read this article would relate in some way to both of them. Now you may be asking yourself, "What do these two scenarios tell me about my behavior?" In between the lines you can often gain a lot of insight.

In the first scenario you have twelve separate bills to pay during one pay period. Some people may see that as a perfectly fine amount of bills, but go back and take a closer look at the types of bills that were paid. Were any of the bill payments basic necessities? You paid them all, but you have just enough to squeak by until next payday. How are you going to buy basic necessities like

food? Can you live off of Starbuck's and pastries alone? What about lunch and dinner? With nothing in the refrigerator or cupboards you cannot last long. Each and every day you go out to eat instead of going to the grocery store and stocking up. Your behavior and spending habits have put you in the situation where you now wonder, "Where will I come up with the money for this one." Specifically, your bad behavior has put you in this situation. You simply have spent too much money and do not have the reserves to pay for an emergency need.

In the second scenario, the main thing that should just jump right out is the fact that you have eight credit cards. You laugh to even think that another credit card company could be foolish enough to lend you more money. In this case your bad behavior is your spending habit exhibited when you over-use and over-extend yourself with credit card debt. Even if you make enough money to cover the payments, having eight credit cards is not a healthy thing in itself. Your exclamation at the end of the scenario should tell you that you cannot afford the eight credit card payments. Again, your bad behavior and spending habits have put you in this situation. This time you have spent too much money and do not have the reserves to pay for what many people see as a small discretionary expense.

Now, you can get a better picture of how bad behaviors can have an affect on your spending habits. My hope is that you can identify these behaviors more easily and are ready to address the issues that keep you in debt. So, you can see that your feelings about money and being able to identify your "bad behaviors" is important in helping you reduce debt or get control of spending. In my final article on this topic, we will look at ways to get your spending under control and begin to look at the process of how to have a healthy attitude toward money and spending.