

# Defeat Debt

Your Company Name Here

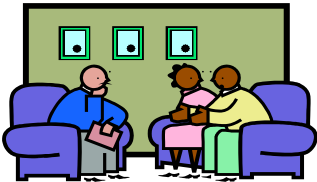
Volume 46, Issue 5

## The Real Story—Choosing a Credit Counseling Agency

Do you have credit and debt problems? How do you know when to seek help? If you think you may need credit counseling, here are some questions to help you decide:

1. Are you more-often-than-not late paying at least one of your monthly bills?
2. Are you unable to make the minimum payments on your credit cards?
3. Do you use cash advances from one card to pay another?
4. Have you found yourself avoiding calls from your creditors?
5. Have your own attempts to set up payment arrangements with your creditors been unsuccessful?

Credit counseling agencies can provide you with valuable education and services at any time, however, if you answered yes to one or more of the questions above, it may be time to seriously consider the credit counseling options available.



*Credit counseling agencies can provide you with valuable services.*

What do you need to do first? Decide what you want to accomplish. Get out of debt? Stop the calls? Create a budget? Knowing your basic goals will help you find the service that best fits your needs.

When you contact a credit counseling agency find out what type of assistance they offer. Find a credit counselor who is accustomed to handling the type of debts you have, like mortgages, auto loans, bad checks, federal taxes, finance companies and of course, credit cards. Know that, unlike **(Your Company Name Here)** not **all** agencies handle everything. Beware of agencies offering quick fixes. How long did it take your situation to reach this

point? Solutions, in most cases, will not happen over night.

Is the agency accredited by a qualified national organization, such as The Council of Accreditation (COA)? (Accreditation assures you that the agency is concerned with industry best practices to offer you the highest level of service possible.) Is the agency a member in good standing with the Better Business Bureau? What about membership in industry organizations? Ask about the agency's privacy policy. Will they sell your information to others? What is their security policy? Is the personal information you share safe? Does the agency have the electronic capabilities to make it easy for you to receive your funds and to send funds to creditors?

Does the agency have a not-for-profit status? Keep in mind that a non-profit status does not guarantee affordable fees. (Consider non-profit hospitals and the bills they send out.) Ask about fees and contributions. Can you sign up for financial educational programs? If you join a debt counseling program, how long does that agency hold your money before funds are

*(Continued on page 3)*

### Inside this issue:

<i>The Real Story—Choosing a Credit Counseling Agency</i>	1
<i>Kid's Korner</i>	2
<i>Achievement Recognition</i>	2
<i>Word Search</i>	3
<i>The Real Story—Counseling (continued)</i>	3
<i>The Kitchen on a Dime</i>	4

### Board of Directors

- YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS LISTED HERE AS BULLETS

### Officers

- YOUR COMPANY OFFICERS LISTED HERE AS BULLETS

## Kid's Korner

### Celebrating Your Child's Birthday

While we have discussed budgeting numerous times before in Defeat Debt (and will again), one area of budgeting we have not looked at is your child's special day. Trends in the United States centering on our children's birthdays indicate parental behaviors reflecting a 'more is better' attitude.

Maybe this comes from our consumer society, maybe it has to do with our desires to 'keep up with the Joneses', or simply the misguided perception that this is what our kids want and need. Whatever the reason, birthday celebrations for children are becoming more difficult to plan than a presentation at work or even a once-in-a-lifetime wedding.

Children, of course, enjoy recognition at these stepping-stones in life. While

tons of balloons, huge cakes, guest performers, and lots of people may seem fun; it can be overwhelming to a child. Not to mention, the expense can be overwhelming to your pocketbook.

So what to do?

As you have heard so many times before, the best things in life are free...or at least, relatively inexpensive. Contact your child's teacher or day care provider. They may have some great age-appropriate ideas for the event. Other ideas? Donate a copy of your child's favorite book, in their honor, to the school or local family shelter. Plan a special 'lunch date' (at school or their favorite restaurant) or picnic with your



*Celebrate your child as a valuable part of your family.*

child. Remember this lunch date can be just you and your child, not everyone your child knows. Work together with your child on an activity (baking and icing the cake), hobby, or craft that interests them.

Watch the first video of your child's life together and tell them the story of how they became part of

your family. Maybe the two of you could draw pictures together telling this story.

Most importantly, spend quality time with your child. On the special day let your child know you love them and celebrate them as a special and valuable part of your family.

## Achievement Recognition—(Your Company Tag Line Here)

### Eighty-five more families achieve their American dream of being debt free in October 2003.

#### Congratulations!!

**"It does our heart good to be able to assist these folks in their effort to be debt free," said Barry Fouts, Vice-President of a nationally recognized credit counseling organization "These are the people who accepted the challenge to examine their financial situations, learn their options and set goals for solutions to reach a brighter future."**

How did they do it?

Eighty-five families from across the U.S. followed their dreams and goals to success. Sticking to their budgets through thick and thin, reading the Defeat Debt newsletter, reviewing the (Your Company Name

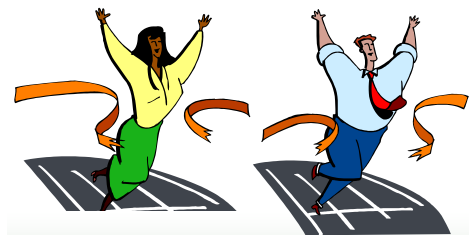
Here) statement sent to them each month, and comparing it to the creditor statements they received, these clients became credit smart in managing their debt.

While anyone of them could have given in or given up and filed for bankruptcy, these successful people planned their steps and worked their plans. Even in the difficult times, when it seemed as if the creditors would never cooperate, or the income to make payments would not cover all expenses, these (Your Company Name Here) clients were motivated to keep their eyes on the goal—and achieve!

#### You can achieve it too!

Just follow the leaders. Keep reading the informative articles in Defeat Debt. Check your creditor statements. Compare them to your (Your Company Name Here) statements. Send us any creditor

statements showing discrepancies. Make your payments on time. Access the (Your Company Name Here) website at (Your website) You can read more informative articles to increase your credit knowledge, access your (Your Company Name Here) account for up to the minute status, make use of interest payment calculators, and bank rate monitors. Go for the goal and achieve your dreams!



*Get out of debt with no regret!  
You can achieve it, too!*

## Word Search\* Word Search

Word Search this month takes a second look at the credit counseling agencies available to help you achieve your financial goals. (**Your Company Name Here**) is a premier credit counseling agency.

Agency      Consumer      Financial  
Benefits      Counselor      Goal  
Budget      Credit      Privacy  
Certified      Debt      Secure  
                         Education

C O N S U M E R F  
O R T E G D U B I  
U L E V C C D E N  
N G Q D W E P N A  
S P O V I R X E N  
E E Z A I T J F C  
L U C V L I M I I  
O B A U W F T T A  
R C Q O R I M S L  
Y S E A G E N C Y  
K R Y D T D E B T  
E D U C A T I O N

## Credit Counseling

(Continued from page 1)

sent to the creditors? What happens to the first funds (payment or deposit) you send?

Ask specific questions about the counselors you speak to. Find out about their education and training. Are they certified credit counselors? Does the credit counselor evaluate your budget *before* suggesting solutions? Are fees and contributions considered within the budget?

Ask about benefits that are available from creditors if you decide a debt management program is right for you. Understand that these benefits are at the discretion of the creditor only and subject to change without notice.

Does the agency report to the credit bureaus? Will and how, will credit counseling show up on your credit report? Will it affect your credit score? For example, First USA, now Bank One, will report your account as delinquent until three consecutive monthly payments at the approved new minimum amount are received. They will then list your account as current. Others, like Citibank, add a note to the credit bureau listing that your account has been placed with a credit counseling agency. Once you have completed your program and paid in full your accounts such notations are dropped as you are no longer in credit counseling. Know that Fair Isaac & Co,

*The majority of creditors will work with you in your attempt to resolve your debt problems.*

who developed the formula for determining credit scores that most creditors use, no longer considers notations of debt counseling in its calculations.

The majority of creditors will work with you in your attempt to resolve your debt problems. Joining a debt counseling program notifies creditors that you have a sincere desire to pay what you owe. They also know from experience that the likelihood of your success increases dramatically in a debt management program.

What should you expect once you join a program? Be realistic! **Do not** expect to receive additional credit during the time you are in credit counseling. Many creditors will eliminate your benefits if you acquire more debt. **Do** expect to learn about managing your money and how you can avoid similar situations in the future.

According to creditors and consumers who have successfully completed a debt management program, the number one strategy is: **STICK WITH IT!** Number two? **BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT!** Are you making your monthly deposits to the agency in a timely manner, so that the agency can send prompt payments to your creditors? Open your statements from creditors. **READ THEM.** If you have questions about what you are seeing talk to your counseling agency.

If your agency has supplied you with a client handbook—**READ IT!** Client handbooks can help you understand unfamiliar terminology and processes in a debt management program so that you can ask the right questions to get the information you need to make more informed choices.

Most importantly, find an agency that you feel comfortable with. You will be working with this agency to accomplish your goals to make a better, more financially sound future for you and your family. Only the best from you and the agency you choose will help you become a *credit smart* consumer!

Your Company Name Here

YOUR COMPANY ADDRESS HERE

YOUR COMPANY CONTACT INFO HERE:

PHONE  
FAX  
EMAIL

**We're on the web!**  
**YOUR WEBSITE HERE**

**YOUR COMPANY TAG LINE HERE**



## The Kitchen on a Dime—Holiday Brisket

With Holiday Brisket on your table, you'll look like you worked hard in the kitchen. What your guests don't know is it's only 20 minutes to get this dish into the oven, and by planning ahead (and buying on sale) only \$1.01 per serving. What a holiday treat!

- 1 3 to 4 pound fresh beef brisket
- 1/4 teaspoon seasoned pepper
- Dash of salt
- 1 large oven cooking bag
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 3 medium carrots, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 3 medium onions, chopped
- 1 7-1/2 ounce can recipe-ready tomatoes
- 1/2 cup port wine
- 1 envelope onion soup mix

1 teaspoon dried basil

1 bay leaves

Remove excess fat from brisket, sprinkle with seasoned pepper and salt. Place flour in oven cooking bag, shake, and add brisket. Set bag with brisket in roasting pan.

Combine carrots, celery, onions, undrained tomatoes, wine, soup mix, basil and bay leaves; pour over brisket in bag. Close bag; cut slits in top of bag.

Roast in a 325 degree F oven for 2-1/2 to 3 hours or until tender. Remove bay leaves. Slice meat across the grain into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Skim fat from pan juices; serve with meat.

Makes 12 main-dish servings.



*Holiday Brisket fresh from the oven makes your table festive and hearty.*