

The EAP
is a **free** service
for you and your
eligible family members.

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You Can be Stronger - How to Develop a Resilient Personality

Resilience is the ability to overcome adversity and to deal with stressful and difficult circumstances. The most resilient people recover from traumatic experiences and are stronger and wiser.

Everyone is born with the potential to develop these abilities, says Al Siebert, author of the award winning book *The Resiliency Advantage* and the best seller, *The Survivor Personality*. He says the five levels of resiliency are:

1. **Maintaining your emotional stability, health and well-being.** This is essential to maintaining your energy.
2. **Developing an outward focus with good problem solving skills and concentrating on the challenges at hand.** Problem-focused coping is better than emotion-focused coping.
3. **An inward focus.** Have strong self-esteem. Your self-confidence is your reputation with yourself. You expect to handle new situations well because of past successes. Remember them.
4. **Expect things to work out well.** Have optimism guided by internal values and a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

5. **Recognize serendipity.** It is the ability to recognize what could turn misfortune into good fortune.

Siebert recommends having friendships and loving relationships. Those who do are more resistant to stress.

Wonder about things. Wonder what is different, and "What if I did this?"

Resilient people can have many sides. They can be strong and gentle, sensitive and tough, logical and intuitive. They can think of negative ways to reach positive outcomes, asking "What could go wrong and how can it be avoided?"

Being resilient helps them block attacks and sidestep cons, games and manipulations. They find allies. ☺



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Credit Score: 8 Steps to Raising Your Score in a Year

First-time home buyers, especially young people, may have never seen their credit score or even considered their credit worthiness, but when they want to buy a home, that changes. These days, a credit score of 700 is usually considered a good starting point for a home loan. However, FHA loans may be more lenient. But the most important thing is to start immediately to establish, build or improve your credit.

Here is a One-Year plan for better credit that works for everyone, not just first-time home buyers:

- 1 Go to www.annualcreditreport.com and look over your free annual report from each of the three credit reporting agencies. Look for errors. Then immediately take steps to correct them.
- 2 Pay your bills on time. You must never be late even once. One of the most common comments bill collectors hear from young borrowers is: I have the money, I just forgot to pay the bill. Stop forgetting. You must establish an ironclad history of paying your bills on time.
- 3 Work on getting your credit balances below 50 percent of your maximum credit limit. That raises your score. If your balances are below 30 percent, it raises your
- 4 score again.
- 4 If you don't have a credit card, look into establishing a secured card. With a secured card, you send the card company a deposit and then they send you a credit card. You can only use the card for the amount on deposit. But when you get the card, you should use it. Buy something, and then make your payments perfectly.
- 5 Don't apply for a store account every time the clerk says you can save 10 percent. Each time you fill out an application, the company hits your credit report. Inquiries like these count against your credit. Don't make applications for credit unless you actually need it.
- 6 If you have unused credit accounts, don't close them if you are planning to apply for a mortgage. That can actually make your score drop.
- 7 During your credit improvement year, don't buy a car. Lenders don't want to see buyers committed to several large credit accounts. Never finance a car before you try to take a mortgage.
- 8 Plan to open three new credit accounts during your credit improvement year, even if they are secured accounts. Be sure to space your new accounts by three months. Use each account and pay each off COMPLETELY every month. This is the kind of credit management that improves your credit score AND teaches you how to manage credit.

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Laugh at Work Week - April 1-7, 2010 - Fun Facts about Laughter

Laughter is aerobic - it increases oxygen intake and gives our diaphragm a good workout, too.

Stress hormones are lowered by laughing. Stress hormones can constrict blood vessels and suppress immune activity.

The chemical dopamine, which is released during the "Fight or flight" response that Dr. Hans Selye discovered in the 1960's, decreases with laughter.

Muscles relax during and after a good laughing session.

Laughter has a positive effect on all body systems.

Laughter can actually help to lower blood pressure and because of the positive effects on the circulatory system, is also very good for people with diabetes.

Americans laughed 20 minutes out of every day in the 1950's. Today, we laugh for 6 minutes out of every day. Something has changed between then and now.

In a study published in the Journal of Holistic Nursing, patients were told one-liners after surgery and before pain medication was administered. Those exposed to humor perceived less pain when compared to patients who didn't get a dose of humor as part of their therapy. ☞

How to Gift the Hosts When You Stay

You may wonder what you could do to show your appreciation when you will be a house guest.



The length and frequency of your visits are factors to be considered. If you visit only once or twice a year, it's nice to bring a gift, though it may not actually be expected. In cases where the hosts bring a gift when staying at your place, it is appropriate to reciprocate by bringing a gift when staying at their place.

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Manage Your Debt by Creating a Spending Plan, and Stick to It

If you really want to reduce your debt, the first thing you will need to do is create a spending plan, then stick to it. Your spending plan, or budget, needs to focus on paying down your debt and not adding to it. This may mean cutting up credit cards and avoiding sales and bargains that are too good to be true. Set your primary financial goal to be out of debt in six months, a year, two, or whatever it takes. Write it down. You need to stick to this plan until you have achieved your goal.

Identify and prioritize essential expenses. Limit your spending to the bare essentials: food, shelter, utilities, etc. It may be difficult to define what is essential and what is "luxury," but if you are to get out of debt, you must be tough. Make a list of essential expenses and how much they cost on average each month. Do not forget those expenses you pay only once or twice a year, such



Your monthly debt payments are not expenses. Except for your mortgage payment, which is like rent, debt payments are the ghosts of prior months' expenses you incurred when you did not have enough cash to pay

you will need to take additional action. Some people simply start juggling debt payments by making minimum credit card payments or paying one bill this month and another the next. This is a bad move.

Revisit economizing. Look at those expenses again. Economize where you can. When you get to the point where you simply cannot cut expenses any further, you have one of two choices: earn more income or lower your monthly debt payments. It might be necessary to take another job, or have a non-working spouse take a job to bring in additional household income.

Reducing your monthly debt payments is a little trickier. Avoid the temptation to juggle payments—that only costs more in the long run, and it

Set your primary financial goal to be out of debt in six months, a year, two, or whatever it takes. Write it down. You need to stick to this plan until you have achieved your goal.

as insurance premiums or property taxes. If you can economize and reduce some monthly expenses, do that. You may reduce utility bills by carefully adjusting the temperature in your home by raising the thermostat in summer and lowering it in winter. Turn lights off in rooms when no one is in them. Spend less time on the telephone. If you set your mind to it, you can come up with many ideas that may save you pennies a day, which add up to dollars you can use to reduce your debt.

Write your expenses down. Write down how much they cost each month. Once you make your list, do not buy anything that is not on it until you reduce your minimum debt payments to below 15% of take-home pay.

for them. They are causing you to pay more and more for those prior expenses because they have hidden expenses—interest and finance charges.

Make a list of all your take-home income. This is what you have available to pay your debts and essential expenses. Do you usually get a large income tax return each year? If so, adjust your withholding at work so you get the money each month when you need it.

Now deduct your monthly debt payments (except your mortgage) from your income. This is what you have left to pay essential expenses. Here is where many get into trouble. If you find that you do not have enough to pay debts and expenses,

may damage your credit rating. If you set a priority of being out of debt by a certain date, you will need to determine how much you must pay each month until that date to reduce your debt payments below 15% of your take-home pay. This is particularly important if you have a lot of revolving credit, installment credit, or credit card debt. To calculate this amount, you will need a financial calculator. You can find free financial calculators on many Web sites. Below are the basics to determine how much you should be paying each month to eliminate your debt by your target date:

Determine how much debt you want to eliminate by the target date—this is the principal (P). For

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example, suppose you have several credit cards totalling \$10,000 and a student loan balance of \$10,000. If you only want to pay off all the credit cards and half the student loan in three years, your principal will be \$15,000.

Determine an interest rate to use. The highest rate from all your loans might be the best one to use, as it will help you calculate your way out of debt faster. For example, you have one credit card balance with \$7,000 at 15%, another with \$3,000 at 7%, and the student loan (\$10,000) at 3%. Choosing 15% as the rate (R) will help you calculate payments to most quickly reduce your debt.

Set the term (N) as the number of months or years to achieve your goal. In our example, we are using three years or 36 months.

When you plug these numbers into a financial calculator, you will come up with a monthly payment (PMT) equal to approximately \$520. This is the number you should use to get out of debt in the time you set as a goal. All you need to do now is to allocate how much of the payment should go toward each of the loans you are paying off. The best way to allocate the payment is to pay off the highest-interest-rate loans faster than the lower-rate loans. In our example, we might allocate the largest amount to the 15% credit card, with lower amounts to the others.

If your calculated payment is still more than you can afford, you will need to consider refinancing methods. However, if this works for you, why not continue to make those larger monthly payments to your savings and investment plans after your debt is gone? This will help you stay out of debt. ☺

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When visiting over night or for a weekend, taking the hosts out to breakfast before you leave is a nice touch. Other tips from Charlotte Ford's *Guide to Manners for the Modern Age*:

Instead of bringing a gift, some people wait until after the visit to send one. Then, they have an idea about what the hosts would like.

If you frequently visit with the same person, but they are unable to travel to your home, taking them to dinner at a restaurant is nice. Or, instead of gifting each time, you could reciprocate with a membership to a wine- fruit-or cheese-of the- month club.

A thank-you note is always appreciated by the hosts, but sending a thank-you note by email is now acceptable. ☺

How to Use Your EAP

When help is needed call 1-800-433-2320. The office coordinator will ask for your name, employer and a brief description of your presenting concern. If an emergency exists you will be given immediate assistance. If your situation is not an emergency, you will be offered telephone assistance and/or in-person sessions to complete an assessment and make a referral for treatment if needed.

Meetings with your counselor are completely confidential. Your employer will not know you have used the EAP. No one will be provided any information about you without your written consent. Exceptions would occur only in the event of you being considered dangerous to yourself or someone else.

At the first appointment you should be prepared to give the counselor some background information to assist in formulating an action plan. Many people find it helpful to prepare a list of things they wish to discuss at each session.

PORTLAND:
503-639-3009

SALEM:
503-588-0777

If you live outside the Portland/Willamette Valley areas, call the toll free number listed below. You will be referred to a mental health provider in your area.

1-800-433-2320
www.cascadecenters.com



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