

# Holiday Savings Tips 2013: Award-Winning Book, "Money Smart" Shows How to Celebrate Debt-Free Holidays

Mary C. Kelly

DENVER, Dec. 10, 2013 -- Many families will ring in the New Year with debt as they overspend during the holidays. But it doesn't have to be that way.

"Showing our family and friends we care often means spending more than we can afford," says Mary C. Kelly, economist and author of "Money Smart: How Not to Buy Cat Food When You Don't Have a Cat," which won the Pinnacle Best Book Award.

"Families often get into financial trouble during the holidays because they want to surprise someone with something really special, or they want to take advantage of a good deal, such as the Black Friday sales," explained Kelly, who delivers keynote speeches and full-day training seminars for companies and associations on topics related to economics, personal finance, and leadership.

People tend to overspend in November and December and then it takes months to pay off credit cards bills, she said.

In November, the US average credit card debt was \$15,115. Kelly says only mortgage debt and student loan debt are higher than credit card debt.

How do we enjoy the holidays, celebrate our family and friends, and be generous without getting ourselves stuck in the red?

Kelly encourages people and businesses to stay solvent with these tips:

1. Create a list with categories and costs for who gets a really nice present such as family members who get a new computer or a phone; clients who get a gift basket; friends who get a smaller present, like a shirt or a book; neighbors who might get cookies; and acquaintances who get cards.
2. Establish a budget, talk with your partner and agree to stick to it. Promise not to deviate from the budget unless you both agree. "This works at home and in business," explains Kelly. "Simply being accountable for the expenses is important to staying on track."
3. Keep all the Thanksgiving, Hanukkah and Christmas cards of the people who sent you something this year and write down if there was a gift and what it was. That helps with creating your categories, and it also helps to verify addresses for people who may have moved.
4. Shop around. Kelly says your computer or smart phone can be your best friend because you may find the item online for less money. Search for the exact model of the product you want to buy.

5. Take advantage of online shopping and shipping. You'll save time and money when the merchant wraps and ships the gift for you.

6. Shop all year long. Yes, there are great deals on Black Friday, but there are also great deals all year long. By shopping all year you spread out the spending and decrease the January credit card bill.

7. Group gift. If several of you use the same supplier, get together and get their office a gift together, or collaborate and sponsor a lunch.

8. Dirty Santa. Get friends together and have everyone agree just to bring one gift and do a fun gift exchange. That way you only have to worry about one gift instead of several, and stealing and swapping the gifts is part of the party experience. Kelly says when her family gets together they reduce costs and hassle by just doing a Dirty Santa. "We put a \$20 dollar amount on it and part of the fun is finding something for \$20. We have a great time with the gift exchange and no one feels burdened."

9. Make giving a group event. Kelly encourages people to make giving of time, talent, or resources the focus of the giving season. Instead of a fancy holiday office party, throw a party for a senior citizens center, gather toys for worthy organizations such as Toys for Tots, or volunteer as a group at a food bank.

"Regardless of what you celebrate, focus on spending time together and establishing experiences that mark the true spirit of the season," she said. "Create memories that last longer than the debt."

To help families and businesses plan, Mary Kelly provides free downloadable budgets and other helpful templates at [www.ProductiveLeaders.com](http://www.ProductiveLeaders.com).