

# MONEY MATTERS



## Confessions Of A Former Shopaholic

by MP Dunleavey

(NAPSA)—You might think paying down debt would be near impossible in this economy, but think again. The Women in Red, a nationwide network of hardworking women (and some men, too), has shed more than \$4 million in debt over the last 3½ years.

What's their secret? Are they financial superheroes? No, they're



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just ordinary folks like you and me who have managed to strip away the myths around money and overcome the odds

and their own bad habits to beat debt and find financial sanity.

Here are five tips for eliminating debt:

- **Commit more than money.** It's essential to change your habits—how you think, how you live, how you spend and how you eat. You not only have to give up the actual habit but the habit of letting yourself want things. You have to begin to live the debt-free life long before you're debt-free.

- **Know where your money goes.** Tracking spending is often what makes the biggest, continuing difference in people's financial lives. Buy a notebook and jot down every penny you spend, or use your phone, PDA or computer to do so. Knowing you have to write it down will deter you from spending.

- **Be extreme.** Small measures are good but drastic moves are better. Get a roommate or a second job. Extreme measures are necessary because it can take more time and money than you think to dig out of debt.

- **Use cash whenever you can.** Debit cards and credit cards make spending seem painless, but numerous studies have demonstrated that people spend more when they use plastic. Get real about your spending and leave the plastic at home.

- **Speak up.** It's important to discuss money with family and friends. Tell them what you can or can't afford. It's painful to tell a friend you don't have the money to attend her birthday weekend at a fancy resort, but being honest with yourself and others about what you can spend is crucial to getting out of debt.

To learn more about debt reduction tips and to follow the Women in Red, go to [www.money.msn.com](http://www.money.msn.com).

- *Ms. Dunleavey is an award-winning financial columnist who, with her husband, recently paid off the last of her own \$30,000 of credit card debt. On MSN Money, Dunleavey fosters an online community of women striving to eliminate debt and provides a forum for them to share their stories, advice and experiences.*