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Kelley Keehn, lecturer, business coach, corporate trainer and author of three books, including [The Woman's Guide to Money](#), uncovers "inner games" we play surrounding wealth. As a financial professional for more than a decade, she's developed a fun, practical guide to changing your money mindset at a fundamental level.

debt culture

by *Kelley Keehn*

It's sad to see many otherwise charming streets peppered with convenient cash centres. With individual debt levels reaching all-time record highs, how much do these kinds of companies assist in tipping individuals to the breaking point of bankruptcy?

Are Calgarians buying the message they can just walk into these establishments, no matter their credit status or lack of stable job, and come out with a no-questions-asked loan for dining out, taking a vacation or whatever leisure activity they desire?

Or is it more realistic to conclude Albertans are more inclined to incur excess debt? And when that debt can't be paid, they'll resort to a fast-cash centre to get their fix, no matter what the interest or repayment consequences?

According to Industry Canada, the latest annual number of bankruptcies in our country was a little over 50,000. What's alarming is although corporate bankruptcies declined by 35% between 1990 to 2005, consumer bankruptcies increased a whopping 98% in the same time, according to www.bankruptcycanada.com.

Scott Dumas, a stand-up comedian and former banker, says it's no laughing matter.

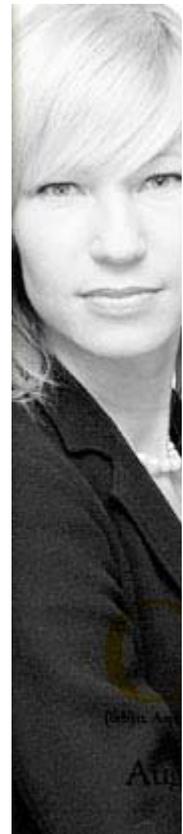
The Calgarian notes when he surveys his audience about the level of their debt, cheers, applauds and roars from the audience prove most are barely making it, as opposed to the lavish lifestyle Albertans supposedly lead.

"Everyone looks rich, but it seems we're all just deeper in debt," he says.

The early signs of bankruptcy include making the minimum payments to service debt or juggling payments.

But with that said, financial troubles don't always lead to bankruptcy.

During the early stages of debt overload, Ron Nordstrom, a trustee with Alger and Associates, suggests being open with creditors and contacting them if payments cannot be made. He notes most creditors are happy to make suitable arrangements, but open dialogue is the key.



To turn things around, first and foremost, declare, "Today, I will incur no new debt," because the lure of no-payment programs or enticing loans often leads to high hidden costs.

Second, document every dollar you spend monthly. Then categorize purchases and look for patterns of waste or areas that could be trimmed.

It's a good idea to take all cash needed for the month at one time. Once you've identified financial "fat" that can be trimmed, use those extra dollars for paying down debt.

Most trustees in Calgary provide a free, confidential analysis to help you explore your options. . To get information on the Net, try www.creditcounselling.com, www.alger.ca or www.billhelps.com for a free, online assessment.

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