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# Till Debt Do Us Part: Balancing Finances Feelings and Family

**Bernard E. Poduska**
Shadow Mountain (June 2000)
Unknown $4.99 (224pp)
978-1-57345-587-9

If successfully navigating the financial minefield were as simple as just earning more, perhaps money issues would not be the leading cause of discord and divorce in today’s relationships. According to the first of the author’s ten financial principles, families don’t have money problems, they have behavior problems. As such, this book is not simply a primer on money management, but a guide to probing beneath the surface and unearthing the values each person brings into a partnership that can drastically affect its success.

Divided into three parts, the book first states the ten financial principles. These include “If you continue doing what you have been doing, you will continue getting what you have been getting” and “You can never get enough of what you don’t need, because what you don’t need can never satisfy you.” Then, readers are asked to reach back in time to uncover the explicit, implicit, and intuitive rules that existed as they grew up. Who managed the household finances? Were purchases made on credit? What defined success in the family? The role of birth order is also discussed, because, says the author, “Personality characteristics associated with our birth order can have a profound influence on how we manage our finances.” The author next identifies personality characteristics that contribute to successful financial management, including self-reliance, flexibility, and active appreciation.

In the second part of the book, readers are again asked to delve into their pasts, but this time looking for spending and saving patterns. This is where the author really drives home financial principle number one on the relationship between money problems and behaviors. Poduska uses the term “open-ended budgeting” to define not only living beyond one’s means, but also spending any increases in income before they’re actually earned. The author also prods readers to define “how much is enough,” such as what size house really fits their needs, rather than their wants. Numerous worksheets are provided to document needs, wants, and goals, as well as a perceived budget and a survival budget.

The final part of the book puts the principles discussed in the first two parts into practice for today’s families, including specific issues faced by single-parent households, dual-income families, and blended families.

Because the author is an associate professor of family science at Brigham Young University, the book definitely reads more like a family therapy session than a crunch-the-numbers manual. Like therapy, to get the most out of this book, readers must be willing to do the work. With this work, though, should come an increase not only in money management skills, but also some important insights on values and what is truly important as well.

VICKY GERVICAS (July / August 2000)