

Chapter Four



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Increase your income

OK, by now you should be getting the picture. There is no easy way out of debt, but there are things you can do to help yourself get back on track.

First, go back to the SOA you made in the first chapter. If it shows that you have less money coming in than going out, you're going to have to make up that gap somehow. Even if you have a surplus, it's going to be beneficial to you to pay more towards your debts to avoid paying so much interest.

To do this, there are two key things that you need to be doing:

Get more money
Spend less money

There. It's not rocket science is it? These two sentences should be your mantra from now on. Write these words on a piece of paper and stick them to your fridge, and look at them every day and think about how you are going to achieve these goals.

Here are some ideas.

Get a job

There's no escaping the fact that for most people, the main way they are going to make money is by working for it. If you're currently unemployed, even if you have a natural aversion to the 9 to 5 lifestyle, you're going to have to bite the proverbial bullet if you want to get out of debt.

Now of course, if you're a student or a single parent then your options are more limited. Work out what time you will reasonably have free- time when your partner or a relative can look after the kids (and be able to do this on a regular basis), or a regular timeslot when you don't have any lectures or studying to do. Some employers will allow you to set your own hours (within limits). Usually, places like fast-food restaurants, warehouses and supermarkets are reasonably flexible if you tell them you're a parent or a student with only a certain time to work, so make sure you tell them this when you apply. If they're not flexible, well, there's always another fast-food place up the road.

Where to look

Start by looking in your local area. Every local paper has a jobs section, and usually there will be one day a week which is 'jobs day' when most of the ads will appear, so find out what day that is. Look out for shops with 'now hiring' signs in the windows.

There are also specialist job magazines and papers. You'll probably be able to find some near the local newspapers in your newsagent. You might also be able to find at least one free one that covers your local area- look out for a free magazine stand in your local supermarket or petrol station. For specialist jobs, you'll need to look in a specialist magazine- some, such as New Scientist and The Grocer, have extensive job sections. Have a look in your local library to see if they have copies of these magazines, and request them if they don't.

Most large towns have a job centre (operated by the department of work and pensions), and although these days they do not necessarily offer the best jobs (most companies prefer to use private agencies), the job centre is still a worthwhile place to visit for the advice and facilities on offer.

Every town has at least one recruitment agency in the high street. It could be one of the big national companies, such as Manpower, or a local independent agency. These are good places to look, especially for temporary work, and will often be able to offer advice on things such as preparing a CV. Don't restrict yourself to a single agency – get loads of copies of your CV printed and get one to each of the agencies.

After your local agencies, there are other agencies that will cover your area even if they don't have a branch in your high street. Look in the phone book under 'recruitment' – post a CV and a general covering letter to each of them.



There are loads of job sites on the internet, including specialised ones for different industries or geographical areas. Start from www.totaljobs.com and get jobhunting.

CVs, applications and interviews

Whatever your employment history, your CV (Curriculum Vitae, also referred to as a résumé) is going to be the first impression a potential employer gets from you, so it's important to get it sorted out before you start your search. If you don't have a computer at home, you can often get help with a CV at a local recruitment agency.

Write your CV in a standard word processor package such as Microsoft Word (so that you can email it around with no problems). A good CV should be no more than two pages long (over-long CVs will get binned), and contain a concise history of your qualifications and employment. Keep it relevant- you don't need to include your cycling proficiency badge. If you have been out of work for a long time, give some explanation of what you have been doing in the meantime (studying, bringing up children, recovering from illness...) and if you have never worked before, for example if you are fresh out of school or college, it's OK to play up your non-work achievements but don't be over the top.

If you're handing in your CV to a high street agency, you usually don't need a covering letter (you'll probably have to fill in one of their forms instead) but if you're applying directly to a company, or over the internet then a smart covering letter is important. State why you are interested in the job on offer and why you think you are qualified. Use clear language and always, always check for spelling errors before you send it. Don't be lazy in your application- 'pls give me the job it will be gr8!' is only going to get your letter shredded.

If you get an interview, dress smartly and arrive on time. Know where you should report when you arrive, and who your interviewer will be. Spend some time beforehand brushing up on the company, their products and their history, even if you are only after a temporary job. Keep eye contact with your interviewer, even if he is a David Brent type who is only interested in looking up your skirt. Bear in mind that if you got the interview through an agency, the employer will report back to the agency afterwards, so be polite even if the interviewer is a complete fool, because it could affect your prospects for getting more interviews in future.

Get a second job

So you've got a job but still not enough money coming in, even if you work overtime or extra shifts. Time to consider getting a second job. For most people, who probably work 9-5:30 from Monday to Friday, unless you have a special skill a second job will probably be something like working in a bar or restaurant or shop in the evenings and at weekends. This sort of work is usually fairly easy to come by, especially around Christmas time. As the salary will probably be fairly low, it won't be worth looking too far afield unless the company offers a free transport service to and from your local area. Stick

with your local papers and local recruitment agencies to find out what's on offer.

Doing housework for other people, such as cleaning and ironing, is the perfect earn-some-extra-cash job. You don't need any specialist skills, it's easy to start doing it and stop doing it when you want, the work is generally easy to find, there's always work at odd times of the day so it can fit in with your kids and partner and so on, and although it generally doesn't pay well it can be a moderate second income for as long as you need it. You can work on your own as a cleaner or work for an agency. Check the temporary work agencies in your high street to see what's available. Alternatively, you could offer car valeting services- pop round your local business park and ask if you can put up a card on their notice board offering to valet peoples' cars while they are parked at work. If, by coincidence, you have some specialist cleaning equipment for your own house, such as an upholstery cleaner, you could use that.

There are some things you need to bear in mind before looking for a second job. The first is how it will make you feel. Working extra hours will make you tired, and it's important that your first (main) job doesn't suffer- you don't want to risk losing it- so think about whether you want to be up until 3am every night serving behind a bar in a nightclub. On the other hand, the second job won't need to be for ever, you'll only need to keep it as long as you are in debt.

It's possible the terms and conditions of your main job might prevent you from taking on a second job- check first. And, depending on your income from your first job, taking on a second job might mean your tax situation will change. For example, it might push you into the next tax bracket, so consider if it will be worth the extra hours of the second job if you are going to lose a large chunk of it to the taxman.

Improve the job you've got

If you've already got a job, and it's not paying enough for you to cover your debts, consider looking for a different one. As we are dealing with debts here, in this case 'better' means 'more highly paid', not necessarily better in terms of prospects or working conditions! There will be exceptions to this rule. For example, if you have a car primarily as a means of transport to and from work, your real salary is your take-home pay minus the costs of running the car each month (fuel, insurance, maintenance...). If you can get a job closer to home where you don't need a car, you might find that you can actually be better off without earning more.

Of course, not everyone has the time to take on a second job, such as those with kids to raise, and as it's not always easy to find a better job it's worth considering your options for improving your lot with your current employer. Of course every company has its own promotions and pay rises mechanism, but there are things you can do to improve your chances, and one of the best of these is to learn a new skill.

Depending on your job, there might be some kind of qualification scheme that will prove to your employer (and, of course, to potential new employers) that you have a certain level of proficiency in what you do. For example, if you work with computers, there are schemes such as the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) for anybody who works with Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and so on. You can become a specialist in one of these products by taking a single exam to prove you are an expert user. Most of the major software companies offer a range of certification schemes.

Your local adult education college will also offer a range of part-time courses, some of which will lead to recognised qualifications such as NVQs or City and Guilds. Your local library will have copies of the course brochures, so get down there and see what's on offer.

Of course, you don't want to get further into debt by paying for a course yourself, so check to see what subsidies are offered by your employer before paying for anything.



If you've got some spare time in the evenings and have a computer at home, distance learning is a good way of picking up a new skill. Try www.learndirect.co.uk for online IT, business and language courses.

Sell stuff

Now of course one of the reasons people get into debt is that spending money is a kind of addiction. A walk along any high street is enough to send anyone into a shopping frenzy if they're not careful. This in turn leads to people accumulating vast hoards of clothes, electronic goods, jewellery, anything you can name. Once you've had your 'lightbulb moment', you'll start to see these things for what they are, which is the cause of your debt misery, and you'll want to get rid of them.

Even if you haven't been racking up the credit card bills in the sales, most people have things they don't use or need, but can't bring themselves to throw away for whatever reason. The trick is to see these things not as possessions, but as potential sources of income. The chances are, whatever you've got, there is someone somewhere who is thinking 'you know, I could really do with this thing, if only I could find one somewhere...'

There are multitudes of ways to sell things, and the method you choose will largely depend on what it is you are selling. For example, if you have a car to sell, then a magazine such as Auto Trader would be a good place to start. Before you start selling things, always do a bit of research to find out what is a reasonable price. You might find that things you think have little value are worth more than you think- for example, good quality children's toys such as Lego are always in demand, often by adult collectors. On the other hand, be realistic and don't expect a fortune for what is actually a pile of old tat- look at the disappointed faces on Antiques Roadshow when they find out their 'treasures' are only worth a couple of quid.

Your local paper is a good place to start. Every paper has a 'classifieds' section, usually subdivided into separate headings. Most people only scan the sections that are of interest to them, so be sure to get your advert in the right section, and don't mix several types of thing in one advert. Bear in mind that many papers charge for adverts per word, so make your advert short and to the point.

Next stop are the papers that consist entirely of classified advertising, such as Freeads (the tabloid-size publications printed on yellow paper that you usually find near the local papers in the newsagent) and Loot. Advertising in these papers is usually free, but of course there will be thousands of other adverts in each section, so you might not get very many responses. Papers such as these are good ways of finding a reasonable market price for your goods.

If you have a lot of small items to sell, it might be worthwhile having a stall at a car boot sale. Again these are usually advertised in local papers or in shop windows. You'll have to get up early- many sales start at 7 or 8am and you'll need to get there earlier than that- and you'll probably have to pay to set up a stall so it might be worth sharing the cost with someone else you know who has things to sell. Bear in mind that car boot sales are often the domain of professionals who'd sell their elderly relatives for tuppence, and expect to be swarmed by people as soon as you've parked your car. Be careful, keep an eye on your things, and be prepared to haggle even over a few pence, and you'll be alright.

Then there is the internet. It's almost as easy to sell things on the internet as it is to buy them, and there are several well-known auction sites where you can place an item to sell, either as an auction item or with a fixed price. To list an item, sites generally charge a percentage of the selling price but will allow you to re-list it for free if it doesn't sell first time.

To start selling, you'll need a digital camera to take some pictures of your item (again, some sites charge for including pictures with listings) and a truthful description of the item. It's not a good idea to be dishonest, for example by saying an item is 'as new' when it's a bit tatty, as most sites have some sort of 'feedback' mechanism whereby buyers and sellers can leave comments about people for everybody to see. Some people refuse to have dealings with those with poor feedback.

Regarding payment, if you are selling something you can accept payment in a number of ways. Cash and cheques are common, but it's most common to use a kind of electronic payment-transfer mechanism whereby a person pays money into an online account, and then when that person buys something they transfer the money directly into the seller's account. This type of payment mechanism is perfectly safe (there are protection mechanisms to prevent people from getting ripped off), but there are, of course, charges levied on transactions.

Bear in mind that internet auction sites attract fraudsters and scammers, so keep your eyes open. Most reputable sites have security mechanisms in place to protect both buyers and sellers, but there are always people trying to find a way around them. Follow the site's guidelines for safe buying and selling, use the feedback system, never reveal your personal account information to anybody, and you'll be fine.



The internet is a global marketplace. EBay (www.ebay.co.uk) is the best known of the online auction sites, but if you have a lot of books, CDs or DVDs to sell you should also consider Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk) as you can sell your used stuff alongside their new stuff.

Rent a room out

If you live in a large enough house, getting a lodger is a good way of getting extra income, as long as you're prepared to have extra people staying with you. Before you start, think about


If you live in near a university, they will have a housing office which will hold a registry of available accommodation for students, so that would be a good place to start. Although students can be noisy, they will generally not be around for the whole time. They'll probably also go back home at the end of term- if they move out at that time, you can advertise again, but if they want to come back in the new term you'll still be collecting the rent for the time they are not there! Generally, you'll have no problems with payment from a student, because even if they haven't got any money themselves they might be able to get assistance from the university to pay rent.

If you don't have access to a student population in need of a reasonable place to stay, your local paper will be the best bet. Vet people on the phone before inviting them round so you don't waste your time and theirs. Have a good excuse ready so that if someone rings up and is clearly a bit, well, strange, you can fob them off without causing offence. Don't promise someone they can move in and then turn them down later- it's not fair on them.

Make sure you set out the ground rules before you allow anyone to move in. Lodgers don't have the same legal rights as tenants, but as they are going to be giving you money it would still be sensible to write down a list of what's acceptable and what isn't, so that you can refer to it if there are any disputes. This should include things like whether smoking is permitted, whether bills are included (and if they are not, what proportion the lodger is expected to pay), if the use of things like the washing machine and so on are included, and whether it is OK to leave milk in the fridge until it goes green and smelly.

Regarding the rent, think first whether you want to ask for a deposit to cover any damage done by the lodger during their stay (and to cover you if they run off without paying). Check in your local paper to find out what the going rate is for rooms in your area. You could even ring round a few of them to find out what other people are offering.


Rent that you get from a lodger is counted as taxable income, so before you start, read up on the Rent a Room Scheme. Currently, you are allowed to receive up to £4,250 a year (a little over £350 a month) in rent tax-free, so read the information and then decide if the scheme is worthwhile for you. You'll probably be able to find information about the scheme at your library.

	To find out more about the Rent a Room Scheme, and other topics related to renting out rooms in your home such as health and safety, read the information on the government's public services website (www.direct.gov.uk). From the front page, click 'home and community', then 'private renting and letting', then 'letting your home'.
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Use your skills

Everybody can do something that most other people can't, and if you are after extra income you can use any unusual abilities you have to your advantage. Don't look at me like that- I wasn't thinking of being able to touch your nose with your tongue or anything daft like that- oh never mind. Here are some examples of what I was really thinking of, and also other skills that you might have that you can put to good use to make some extra cash. Remember that any income you get will be taxable.

Even if you are only doing these things as a spare-time job, it will help you get customers if you act professionally. If you have access to a PC and a printer, make up some business cards and some headed stationery. Advertise in the 'local services' column of your local paper, or even in your parish magazine, if you have one. Check your local supermarkets, community centres and so on to see if they have a 'local services' advertising board.

	Get your services listed and promoted on www.localbusinessdirectory.co.uk
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Some of these sections list training courses for particular skills, but of course training can be expensive if you are already struggling with debt. Many local colleges offer free courses for people on certain benefits, but if you aren't, and can't find low-cost or free training on a particular subject, don't put yourself into extra debt by paying for training that might not turn out to be very useful. There is sometimes government support available for adults who cannot afford to pay for training by themselves.

	The Learn Direct advice website http://www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/helpandadvice/ has a section about getting help with the cost of training.
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Computer skills

Despite the fact that there are millions of PCs in people's homes, there are still plenty of people around who don't have a clue how to use them. If you know your stuff when it comes to computers, you can offer your services to those unfortunate folks. There's a huge range of services you can offer (if you know what you are doing yourself, of course). Here's a list of a few:

- Basic repairs or hardware upgrades – there are plenty of people who are a bit scared of opening their PCs to put in new graphics cards and so on
- Virus cleaning
- Preparing CVs, presentations, theses, general word processing and secretarial-type services. If you have any specialist knowledge, such as legal knowledge, you might be able to use this by offering to write letters for people.
- One-to-one teaching of specific software packages (Microsoft Office is a common one), or teaching people how to use the internet

Gardening

There's always a demand for gardening services, especially amongst busy people who haven't got time to do it for themselves (or people who are just plain lazy), so if you're a bit green-fingered and know one end of a nasturtium from another, this is an ideal way to make some extra cash. Of course, the demand for gardening is going to vary according to the season, so you'll probably have to find another way of making money over winter. Usually, you can expect your clients to provide major tools such as lawnmowers, but if you have your own basic tools so much the better.

Many people would be understandably reticent to allow someone they don't know very well loose on their prize geraniums, so if you fancy making a go of it, check with your local college to see if they offer any horticultural courses.

Childminding

If you have kids of your own you know what a strain it can be, so you'll also know what a relief it is to get them off your hands for a while. Childminding services are always in demand by busy parents, either while they are at work or if they just want an evening out by themselves.

Bear in mind that before you can look after other people's children in your own home, there are things you must do first. You need to register with Ofsted, the government's children's inspectorate- the same people who inspect schools. You will also need police clearance as any type of work with children requires this. Your home will be inspected, with little or no notice, and this inspection will be repeated periodically. You will also have to follow various regulations regarding health and safety and so on.



If you are considering childminding, Ofsted should be your first port of call. Go to www.ofsted.gov.uk, and look for the link 'resources for childcare providers'. When the new page opens, find the link 'resources for childminders'. There are various documents under here- start with the introductory 'Childminding is it for you?'

Modelling

You don't have to be stunningly beautiful to be a model. If you are stunningly beautiful, just clear off and leave the rest of us ugly folks alone, alright?

Models are always in demand. By 'model', we're not just talking about the high-fashion Kate Moss catwalk type, but the more everyday sorts of folks in catalogues, adverts in newspapers and magazines and so on. Given that every company has a target market, they will need people that look like that target market to appear in their adverts and catalogues. There are companies that market to, say, the elderly and the, er, 'plus sized', so no matter what you look like there might be a modelling job for you. The common factor is that models always seem to have nice teeth, so be sure to brush twice a day. If your kids are fairly appealing looking (be honest), they can join in too. It beats shoving them up chimneys like in the old days.



If you are considering modelling, start from a general modelling information site such as www.modelresource.com and read from there.

Alternatively, if your ambitions are more modest, your local art college might have a demand for life models. Go down there and have a look at their notice board. Art models don't have to be good looking, as they are there for the students to paint (meaning, make paintings of, not paint directly... you knew what I meant), not to advertise anything. Of course, you'll have to be confident enough, and be able to sit still for a long time, and be able to keep a straight face when you see the students' efforts.

To get work as a model, you'll need a portfolio. Getting a professional photo shoot done is expensive, but if you know someone who's handy with a camera they might be able to help you out. You could try that local college again- see if they do any photography courses. You should agree with the photographer first who is going to 'own' the pictures- and don't do anything that you're not comfortable with or that you'll regret later!

Music

If you can play a musical instrument reasonably proficiently, you've got a whole extra income right there. Assuming, that is, you haven't sold your instruments to pay off your debt. There are two basic ways of making money from music: playing and teaching.

Of these, playing is naturally the most rewarding. Of course, every bedroom guitarist dreams of being Eric Clapton (or, if you're of a younger generation, Joe Satriani, etc), but even a moderately skilled player can have fun, and make a few quid, by playing in a covers band doing the rounds of pubs and clubs. Tribute bands are also popular, and bands like the Bootleg Beatles are well known in their own right. You'll be able to make extra cash by playing at birthday parties or at Christmas and new year, if you're prepared to grit your teeth, throw your integrity to the wind and play cheesy party songs.

Start by getting your band together. Your local music shop probably has a notice board you can advertise on. Think about what you are going to play, rehearse, put a few songs on a tape or CD, send it round the local pubs that have live bands, and off you go in the back of your Transit van. Recording doesn't need to be expensive- most modern PCs have all the capability you need.

Teaching an instrument can be lucrative, especially if you know a popular instrument such as guitar or piano. Of course, if you know an unusual instrument, your clientele will be more selective but your teaching skills might be more in demand because of a shortage of teachers for that instrument. Bear in mind that if you are planning to teach children, you will need the appropriate clearance, and if you are planning to teach them in your home, you will need to register with Ofsted. See the section on childminding for more details.



If your music shop notice board isn't fruitful, try www.musofinder.co.uk. If you're planning to offer music teaching services, start with the advice from the Musician's Union. Go to www.musiciansunion.org.uk and pick 'advice' from the main menu to get started.

Teach a course

Local colleges are often on the lookout for teachers for adult education courses, so if you have a skill you can pass on, off you go to find out if they are interested. Most adult education colleges offer short evening courses in fun lifestyle topics like cooking, aromatherapy, embroidery and so on, and if you can speak a second language fluently, the demand is limitless. So, if you can convince them of your ability, and of course you can devote the time to teaching the course (which will include preparation), the extra income can be yours.

To teach a short course at a college you usually don't need any special qualifications, but you will be more successful if you hold a qualification in the subject you wish to teach and also an adult education certificate such as the City and Guilds 7307 'teaching adult learners' certificate.



To find out about teaching adult learners, and where in your local area you can learn about teaching, start from www.cityandguilds.com and use the 'qualification finder' to find training and development qualifications.

Mystery shopping

Fancy getting paid to go shopping? Like the idea of being a clandestine undercover operative reporting back to a shady Mr Big character? Just want to get out of the house for a bit? If these sound like your dream job, you should consider being a mystery shopper.

Mystery shoppers are people who are given assignments by an agency to shop at a particular shop or buy a particular product. The 'product' might be a normal supermarket item or it could be a financial product like an insurance policy or any of a million other things that can be bought. They might even be given an assignment to eat at a particular restaurant (mystery dining!). They carry out the assignment according to a set of instructions and report back to the agency, giving feedback about the quality of service they received, the knowledge of the staff involved, the availability of the product, the presentation of the product, and so on. Assignments usually have to be completed by a deadline, for example to report on the availability of a time-limited special offer.

You won't get rich doing mystery shopping, but it can be a useful extra bit of cash. It's suitable for anyone, even those with kids to look after as you can take them shopping with you. There aren't any special qualifications, but you'll need to be able to commit to do a task by an assigned deadline and be able to produce a reasonable report at the end of the task. Start by signing up to any or all of the various agencies that handle contracts from the supermarket chains and other retailers. It might be some time before you get your first assignments, depending on how many other people are signed up. Get your tasks done by the deadline to earn brownie points with the agency and you might find that work comes your way more regularly.



Read more about mystery shopping on the Motley Fool discussion board on the topic. Read through some of the messages to find out how to contact agencies and find out who's looking for shoppers at the moment.
<http://boards.fool.co.uk/Messages.asp?bid=51534>

Proofreading

Proofreading – checking typeset manuscripts for mistakes before publication – is an ideal candidate for a spare-time job. No special equipment is required, as proofreading is normally done on manuscripts that are already typeset and printed. Freelance proofreading can be done at home by anyone with some spare time.

Proofreading involves checking for spelling and grammar errors, and may also include checking for factual accuracy, so to be a proofreader you will need an excellent grasp of the language you are using, and attention to detail, or nitpicking if you prefer.

There are no special qualifications required, but you will have an advantage if you have a qualification in English (or whichever language you will be working in). There are also proofreading training courses which will be helpful and will show potential employers that you have a certain level of proficiency.



The Society for Editors and Proofreaders is a good place to start for proofreading courses. Grants may be available for these courses. Start from www.sfep.org.uk and look under the 'training' heading for details about the courses and grants offered.

Maximise your benefits

If you are unemployed or on a low income, you should make sure that you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to. Not all of them are very well advertised, so it is worth spending the time to hunt through the lists of those available, and apply for any that you think might be relevant to you. It will not cost you anything and the worst that can happen is that you are turned down.

Common benefits include housing benefit, council tax benefit, income support, child benefit, disability living allowance, bereavement allowance, attendance allowance, carer's allowance... the list is endless and it is way beyond the scope of this book to describe them all or cover who might qualify for them. Many benefits are means-tested, which means there are conditions attached such as not having too much money in savings and so on. Your local Citizen's Advice Bureau will be able to give you advice on which benefits you can apply for. Look in the phone book to find the CAB nearest to you.

Be aware of the rules regarding working while you are on benefits. You must declare any income you receive to the department of work and pensions. Benefit fraud is extremely serious, and getting caught will only make your situation worse. Don't do it.



The benefits homepage is at <http://www.direct.gov.uk/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/fs/en>

People who live alone are entitled to a reduction in the amount of council tax they pay. This is something that is easily forgotten in the confusion of moving home, or if you were living with someone who has moved out. Check your council tax statement to make sure the reduction is shown. If it isn't, contact your local council to make them aware.

If you have children that were born after 1st September 2002, make sure that you are using the £250 child trust fund (CTF) voucher that you are entitled to. This allowance is so that you can make a little bit of savings for your child's future, even if you cannot afford to save any more for them. The voucher must be paid into one of a selection of available savings accounts.

It was revealed recently that about one-third of parents who received CTF vouchers in the first 'wave' have not used their vouchers, which is a bit daft, since it is free money. Parents on low incomes are entitled to an extra £250, so make sure you are getting the amount you are entitled to.



Make sure you are getting all the CTF money you are entitled to at www.childtrustfund.gov.uk

Take advantage

Very occasionally, companies offer money for nothing. Or next to nothing, anyway. For example, banks may offer an amount of cash as an incentive for opening an account. Companies might give away things such as MP3 players in special deals, which can then be sold.

There are always conditions attached to such offers. Check these very carefully before signing up for anything. For example, a bank might say that you have to deposit a certain amount into an account for a number of months before you get the incentive cash. If you're already in debt, you will probably need all your money elsewhere, so some of these offers might not be available to you. Other companies might require you to buy things or recommend friends (who might not be your friends for very long if you keep bombarding them with offers of things they don't want) before handing over the goods.

The good offers don't stay open for long. News spreads fast, especially on the internet, and a company or bank might find itself saying 'oh lordy what have we done' pretty quickly, and close the offer when it is obvious that it is massively oversubscribed. Make sure you get the chance to participate by keeping your eyes open for new offers when they appear- finance websites often have an area advertising 'offers of the week'.

It is possible to make a bit of extra cash from a cashback scheme on the internet. Retailers offer incentives to other websites for hosting advertising, and usually the host website keeps this cash, but there are some sites that will pass this back on to the purchaser (i.e., you).

The amount will usually be a small percentage of the purchase price of an item, say 1% or 2%, but that is better than the proverbial poke in the eye. The drawback, of course, is that you have to buy something, and when you are in debt buying a lot of things is not what you want to be doing. However, if you need to replace an essential household item, such as a cooker, you can at least get a few quid this way. Start from a website that lists all the comparable schemes, and pick the one that gives you the most back for the least outlay.



Martin Lewis, the TV and radio journalist, has a personal website, www.moneysavingexpert.com, which has a mailing list you can join to find out about special offers, which sometimes disappear quickly. The website www.discountedorfree.co.uk lists freebies and cashback schemes.

Dos and don'ts for improving your income

Do get down to the library. There's more information there than you realise.

Do read your local papers. Find out what's in demand and what's going on in your local area.

Don't expect money to come to you. You're going to have to go out and get it.

Don't do anything illegal. It's not worth it. Someone could 'grass you up' if there's a reward involved.
