

[P R E F A C E]

Let's talk about money—out loud. How much do you make? How much does your next-door neighbor make? How much do you have in savings? How much does your boss earn, and what does she do with that money? How much total debt do you have, and how much do you pay in interest every year? What do you spend your money on? When will you be out of debt? Who is in charge of your money? Do you have enough? How much is enough?

If someone had asked us these questions fifteen years ago, we would have suddenly remembered an appointment we had to get to. We would have politely excused ourselves and made a quick getaway. Like most people, we didn't talk openly and honestly about money. Actually, we didn't talk at all about money. We had only some vague notion we weren't handling it right. Internally, we each had a running monologue of inaccurate information and self-deceit, as well as an often-repeated declaration that we didn't have enough money, and if we just had more, everything would be okay.

At that time we both worked in the social service fields with substance abusers and victims of trauma. We spent our workdays counseling people about what didn't work in their lives. The nature

of our work was to talk about what people don't talk about. In spite of that, we didn't talk about money. As a therapist friend of ours puts it, in our profession we speak about money "just enough to get paid."

We married in 1989, and, as part of our vows, we made a commitment to learn to live in financial independence. We didn't actually know what that meant, but we had given financial dependence a good try by depending on partners and parents to take care of us; neither one of us liked it. We knew very little about money, and what we knew was inaccurate. We knew one or two people with a little money, but we never asked them how they got it or kept it. We had the absolute belief that everyone is just supposed to know about money—like we all just know how to breathe. We believed that by our age (late thirties) we should have learned it, and because we hadn't learned it, too bad for us. We thought that we missed the learning window on money at some point when we were growing up and it was now too late. We never imagined that having money could be fun, easy, or peaceful.

We both knew about recovery, but it had never occurred to us that to achieve financial independence, we had to apply what we had learned about recovery to our relationship with money. Neither of us has a memory of anyone saying "Now that you understand recovery, handling money will be a breeze. You'll finally have enough, and you'll use it to take care of yourself in real prosperity and abundance."

We used our own best thinking to try to create financial independence. We switched from depending on people to take care of us to depending on the unsecured-credit industry to take care of us. In the absence of guidance, we sought on our own to achieve financial independence. We began acquiring unsecured-credit-card debt and unsecured personal loans, never saved money, and

had no financial plan of any kind. Our creditors expected us to pay the money back with interest!

We started the credit-card abuse cycle: get a credit card, max it out, and get another. We got three credit cards, maxed them out, refinanced our home, and then paid off the credit cards. We took on another job, earned more, and charged more on our credit cards. Then we got one more card, took a cash draw on it, and used the cash to make payments on the other cards. We got financial windfall after financial windfall and found just the right way to end up in more debt. At one point we had seven jobs between the two of us. We became masters at this process. We thought if we just worked hard and paid our bills we'd get ahead. We never did.

By September 1995, we knew we had to find a way to stop this downward cycle. Our way didn't work. It wasn't that it didn't work a little—it didn't work *at all*. We had had *enough*. We finally knew something accurate about money: we knew nothing about money. We did know something about recovery: it worked. We began to use what we knew about recovery to stop making our finances worse and to get out of debt.

We attended financial recovery support groups, kept records, made plans on how to use our money, worked less, and earned more. Our financial problems disappeared. We began living a life we enjoyed. We were down to one job each. We had a household income of about \$75,000 per year and if we didn't think about retirement or the possibility of wealth, everything was great.

Then a friend brought a book over to our house (Jerrold Mundis's *Earn What You Deserve*) and we read a term we had never heard: "underearner."¹ We knew when we read the term that it applied to us—we had never earned enough money to support the lifestyle we desired. A new level of recovery and learning began for us, and the outcome has been incredible. We began to read more

books about money, to talk to successful people, and to listen to financial experts. In the past we imagined only hardship and deprivation, and we lived in hardship and deprivation. Imagination had worked against us, but now it was working for us. We were learning new ways to correct old behaviors. We now had tools to back up our intentions. We began to use our newly acquired knowledge and new actions to create lives we loved.

As our lives progressed, Suzanne went back to school and got her license in clinical social work, and after years of working in non-profits, she began a private therapy practice. Sam went from counseling individuals and groups to managing a counseling agency and eventually starting his own counseling agency. Together, we now own and operate several counseling centers in California. Our professions allow us to help others solve problems in their lives as part of their process of increasing health and happiness. We are now able to comfortably address issues of finance and prosperity with clients and staff, and we are committed to doing so.

For us, freedom and value have come to include performing conscious financial planning and allowing ourselves to live prosperous lives. We wanted to give others the opportunity to find freedom and value in their lives, so we wrote this book for counselors and their clients about a process that leads to financial happiness. We have included tools for you to learn and teach your clients about money consciousness, prosperity, and abundance.

We've noticed that the taboo of talking openly about money extends throughout the counseling fields. Helping professionals often do not address money issues with their clients—in spite of the fact that few factors touch as many areas of life as does money. In this book and our related trainings, we address ending that silence in your personal financial life and in your work with clients.

You—the helping professional—have the opportunity to examine your own relationship with money. This book also includes samples of exercises for your clients, and if you take the time to complete the exercises yourself, you'll likely gain a much clearer understanding of your historical and current relationship with money. The exercises will help you determine if you're using money in a manner that will help you achieve your goals.

You may discover that, like so many others in our nation, you've often found that being vague about what's happening to your money is more comfortable than being clear and conscious about what you do with your money. The clarity you can gain from a thorough examination of your relationship with money will benefit you personally and financially. This clarity will give you insight into the kinds of financial experiences your clients may be having, and you'll gain a new understanding about how life experiences shape our perception of money and self-worth. The comfort once found in vagueness will be replaced with serenity and a clarity about what you are doing with your money.

It's important to know how much people earn, how rich is rich and how poor is poor, what impact education has on earning, and how the use and misuse of credit cards impacts net worth. These numbers that people don't talk about are tackled in chapter 2. If you notice while reading the chapter that you're skipping through, getting anxious, or feeling overwhelmed, take a breath and read the chapter summary first, or go to the next chapter and return to chapter 2 later—but do come back to it. Having an understanding of this basic information will allow you to take greater advantage of the materials at the end of the book and make your work in this area much easier. The glossary contains definitions of financial terms that will be helpful in understanding the information in chapter 2.

We also discuss the emotional effects of anxiety, depression, and trauma on personal finances. We provide clear steps for introducing concepts of self-care to your clients. We also provide examples of how to address financial problems with your clients in both individual and group settings. We include samples of a wide variety of worksheets, exercises, and handouts and encourage you to take advantage of them for yourself and your clients.

This information will help you and your clients enrich and change your lives. We want to inspire you to increase your understanding of your personal and economic worth and then pass that understanding on to your clients. We live an inspired and abundant life, and we hope that you and your clients will begin to experience that abundance as well. They're worth it, and *you're worth it!*