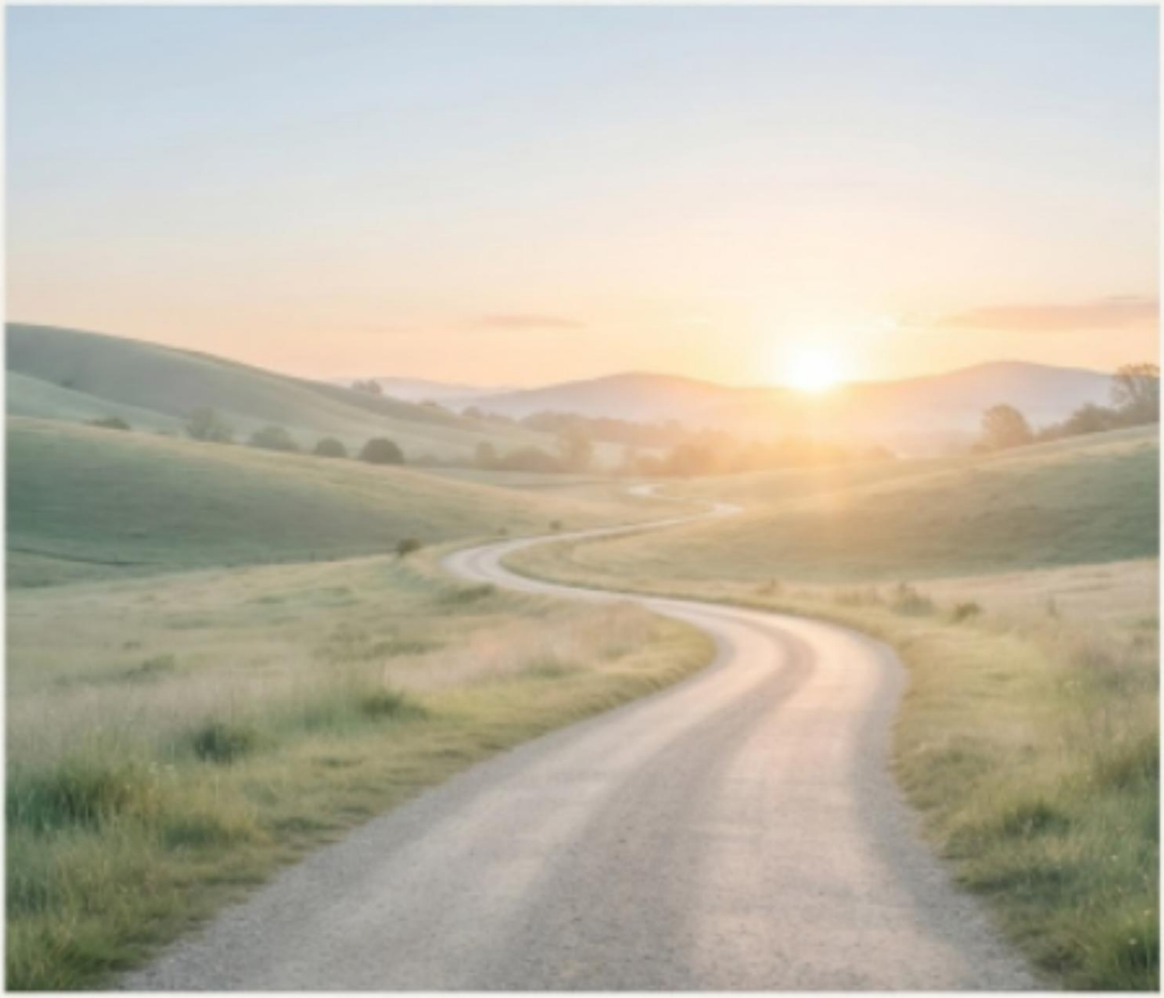
MY DEBT-FREE DATE

PDF + INTERACTIVE PLANNER



MY DEBT-FREE DATE

A 9-Step Path to $0

Not Another Budget. Your Personal Roadmap to Debt-Free.

Enter what you owe. Choose your strategy. Discover your Debt-Free Date.

EXPANDED WORKBOOK EDITION

Includes an Interactive Companion Planner

MY DEBT-FREE DATE

A 9-Step Path to $0

Not Another Budget. Your Personal Roadmap to $0.

Enter what you owe. Choose your strategy. Discover your debt-free date.

And the nine steps tell a very natural story:

- See Where You Are — Know exactly what you owe.
- Choose Your Path — Save the most money or see results sooner.
- Find Your Extra Number — Choose an amount you can realistically repeat.
- Build Your Personal Payoff Plan — Know exactly what gets paid first, second, third.
- Discover Your Debt-Free Date — Put an actual finish line on your debt.
- Make Your Monthly 10-Minute Check-In — Update, measure and keep moving.
- Adjust When Life Happens — Change the plan without abandoning it.
- Celebrate When One Debt Hits $0 — Roll that freed-up payment forward.
- Cross Your Finish Line — Reach $0 and decide what your money will do next.

YOUR INTERACTIVE PLANNER IS INCLUDED WITH THIS BOOK

Your *My Debt-Free Date Expanded Edition* includes access to your personal Interactive Planner. Use it as you work through the 9 steps to enter your numbers, choose your payoff path, calculate your Debt-Free Date, and track your progress.

ACCESS YOUR INTERACTIVE PLANNER:
MY DEBT-FREE DATE

Sign in with Google or your email address. New users can simply create an account.

CONTENTS

BEFORE WE BEGIN: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Nobody wakes up one morning and says, “You know what would make my life more interesting? $24,000 in credit-card debt.”

Debt usually doesn't happen that way. It happens a little at a time.

A job disappears. The next job doesn't pay what the old one did. The refrigerator quits. Your child needs braces. The car makes a noise that everyone agrees to ignore until the noise becomes impossible to ignore.

Groceries that used to cost $125 somehow become $175. You arrive at the supermarket armed with your list, the store app, and approximately forty coupons. Your child drops a box of cereal into the cart. You look at the price. You look through the coupons. You look at your child. You hand back the cereal. You don't say a word. Your child knows the look. The cereal goes back.

And still, when you reach the checkout, you're over what you planned to spend. There's $143 left in checking until payday. The groceries are $181. So $38 goes on the credit card. You'll pay it back next month. Except next month has plans of its own.

Sometimes debt began during the COVID years, when a dependable job suddenly wasn't dependable anymore. Savings kept the household going for a while. Then credit filled the gap. Eventually another job came along, but perhaps it paid thousands less than the old one. The mortgage didn't get the memo. Neither did the electric company.

Sometimes debt comes from medical bills, divorce, caring for parents, helping grown children, raising teenagers, home repairs, reduced work hours, or simply a long stretch when the money coming in wasn't quite enough for the life that needed paying for.

And yes, sometimes we bought things we shouldn't have bought. We're human.

This book isn't interested in scolding you for yesterday. We're interested in what you do next.

MEET DENISE

Denise is 41 and raising two teenagers, Maya, 16, and Jordan, 13. She works full-time, packs lunches, shops sales, and has the grocery-store app, coupons and loyalty points. She is also routinely informed by two apparently starving teenagers that there is “nothing to eat” in a kitchen containing several hundred dollars' worth of food.

Her debt accumulated $38 at a time: groceries before payday, soccer registration, a school trip, a broken phone, a high electric bill, urgent care, and eventually a refrigerator that quit. Denise is working and paying her bills. She has $16,400 in consumer debt, and she's ready to stop wondering how it got there.

MEET BOB AND KAREN

Bob is 54. Karen is 52. Before COVID, Bob had a good job as a regional sales manager. Then his position disappeared. Three months of unemployment became six. Savings became grocery money, mortgage money and utility money. Eventually the credit cards became the bridge.

Bob finally found another job, but it paid $17,000 less. He took it. Of course he took it. Several years later, both are working, yet the old debt remains. Bob keeps asking, "We're both working. Why are we still in debt?"

MEET MIKE AND ASHLEY

Mike is 35. Ashley is 34. They have three children, ages 9, 7 and 4. Their life is backpacks, lunchboxes, soccer practices, birthday parties, daycare bills and shoes that fit perfectly on Monday and are apparently two sizes too small by Thursday.

Their oldest needs braces. Their youngest is in daycare. Their minivan has 112,000 miles and has begun making a noise Mike describes as "probably nothing." Ashley does not share Mike's confidence. They make decent money, but many months end $100, $200 or $300 short. The difference has been going on a card.

MEET LINDA AND TOM

Linda is 61. Tom is 63. Their children are grown. They thought this would be the inexpensive part. That was adorable.

Their granddaughter Sophie needed braces, and the orthodontist wanted $1,800 upfront. Their daughter said she'd figure it out. Linda said, "We'll help." Tom gave Linda the look husbands give when they discover they've just volunteered financially for something. Visa paid the orthodontist.

Then Tom backed into a concrete post outside the pharmacy. No other vehicle was involved. Just Tom and the post. The $870 repair was below their $1,000 deductible. Visa paid for that too. Retirement is close enough that debt suddenly feels different.

MEET CAROL

Carol is 69 and widowed. She always assumed she'd be debt-free by this age. After her husband died, one Social Security check disappeared. The property taxes, insurance, heating bill and roof did not.

Carol also has a financial weakness: grandchildren. She can put back a $90 sweater for herself without blinking, but let one grandchild say, “Grandma, I need…” and her wallet practically leaps from her purse. She wants to change the putting-it-on-the-card part.

STEP 1— LET'S SEE WHERE YOU ARE

Before we can build your plan, we need to know where you're starting.

Gather your latest statements or open your accounts online. For each debt, enter just four things:

The name of the debt • Current balance • Interest rate (APR) • Minimum monthly payment

Don't worry about which debt you should pay first. We'll figure that out together.

MY DEBT	BALANCE	INTEREST RATE (APR)	MINIMUM PAYMENT
________________	$__________	_______%	$__________
________________	$__________	_______%	$__________
________________	$__________	_______%	$__________
________________	$__________	_______%	$__________
________________	$__________	_______%	$__________
________________	$__________	_______%	$__________

Need more rows? Add additional debts to your Interactive Planner or use a separate sheet.

NOW ADD YOUR NUMBERS

MY TOTAL DEBT: $________________

Add all the balances above.

MY TOTAL MINIMUM MONTHLY PAYMENTS: $________________

Add all the minimum payments above.

That's it. Now you know exactly where you're starting.

Whatever that total is, don't panic. Yesterday you owed the same amount but didn't have a clear plan. Today you do.

WHICH INTEREST RATE SHOULD I ENTER?

Look for the APR (Annual Percentage Rate) that currently applies to the balance you're paying off.

Your credit card statement may show more than one APR—for example, purchases, balance transfers, cash advances, or a promotional rate.

Not sure which rate applies? Don't guess.

Check the details on your statement or contact the lender or card issuer and ask:

"What APR currently applies to the balance I'm paying off?"

Have a promotional rate? Make a note of when it ends. Your rate may change after that date.

BOB AND KAREN FIND THEIR NUMBER

Bob was reasonably certain they owed about $20,000. Karen wasn't. Karen had been paying the bills.

Saturday morning they sat at the kitchen table with coffee, two laptops, a stack of statements and the Interactive Planner. Visa. Mastercard. The balance-transfer card. Karen's store card. The remaining car loan.

Bob remembered another card. Karen stared at him. "What card?"

"The one we used when the water heater went."

"The water heater was three years ago."

They found the card. There was still a balance.

When they finished, the total was $31,842. Bob sat quietly. Karen took a sip of coffee. "Well," she said, "staring at it doesn't make it charge less interest."

Yesterday they owed $31,842 without a plan. Today they knew where they were starting.

YOUR TURN: WHAT SURPRISED YOU?

About what I expected: ______ Higher than I expected: ______

Lower than I expected: ______

Was there a debt you had almost forgotten about?

____

____

You didn't create the number by writing it down. You simply turned on the light.

STEP 2— CHOOSE YOUR PATH

There are two simple ways to decide which debt gets your extra money.

Neither is the “right” choice for everyone. Choose the one you are most likely to stick with.

PATH A — SAVE THE MOST MONEY

PAY THE HIGHEST INTEREST RATE FIRST

Continue making at least the required payment on all your debts.

Put your extra money toward the debt with the highest interest rate.

When that debt reaches $0, roll the entire payment you were making into the debt with the next-highest interest rate.

Why choose this path?

Paying the highest-interest debt off first generally reduces the amount of interest you pay over time.

This may be right for me if:

- Saving as much money as possible motivates me.

PATH B — SEE RESULTS SOONER

PAY THE SMALLEST BALANCE FIRST

Continue making at least the required payment on all your debts.

Put your extra money toward the debt with the smallest balance.

When that debt reaches $0, roll the entire payment you were making into the next smallest debt.

Why choose this path?

Paying off a smaller debt first can give you an earlier win—and seeing one balance reach $0 may help you stay motivated.

This may be right for me if:

- Seeing a debt disappear will motivate me to keep going.

WHICH MATTERS MORE TO YOU?

- I want to save the most money. → Choose PATH A
- I need to see wins to stay motivated. → Choose PATH B

There is no gold star for choosing one over the other.

The best plan is the one you'll actually follow.

NOT SURE WHICH INTEREST RATE TO USE?

Look on your latest statement for the APR (Annual Percentage Rate) that currently applies to the balance you are paying off.

Credit-card statements may show several rates, such as purchase APR, balance-transfer APR, cash-advance APR, or a promotional rate.

Not sure which one applies? Don't guess. Check your statement details or contact the lender or card issuer and ask:

"What APR currently applies to the balance I'm paying off?"

If you have a promotional rate that will expire, make a note of the expiration date. You'll want that information when you build your payoff plan.

TWO PEOPLE. TWO PATHS.

Bob couldn't stop looking at the interest rates. One card was charging more than 27%. "Do you know how much we're paying them just for the privilege of owing them money?" Karen did. She had been opening the statements.

Bob chose Path A. Highest interest first.

Denise saw things differently. She had a card with a $726 balance. It wasn't her highest-interest debt, but she looked at $726 and thought: I can get rid of that.

Denise needed a victory, so she chose Path B. Several months later the balance reached $0. She took a screenshot and sent it to her sister. Her sister replied: "ABOUT TIME." Denise didn't care. That zero was beautiful.

Two different paths. Neither was wrong. Each chose the plan they believed they could keep following.

STEP 3 — FIND YOUR EXTRA NUMBER

Here's where your plan becomes personal.

We're NOT going to create a 97-category budget.

We're going to answer one question:

HOW MUCH CAN I REALISTICALLY ADD TO MY DEBT PAYMENT EACH MONTH?

Not your fantasy number.

Your repeatable number.

Look through your recent spending. Is there an amount you could comfortably redirect toward debt each month without making your plan miserable?

Maybe it's: $25 • $50 • $75 • $100 • $150 • $200

Or maybe your number is completely different.

The amount matters less than choosing something you can keep doing month after month.

MY EXTRA NUMBER $_______________ PER MONTH

Now add it to the minimum debt payments you found earlier:

My Minimum Monthly Payments: $_______________

PLUS, My Extra Number: + $_______________

MY MONTHLY DEBT ATTACK $_______________ PER MONTH

That's your number.

You don't need to suddenly find another $1,000 a month.

A modest amount, consistently applied, can make a real difference in how long you remain in debt.

And remember: your Extra Number isn't carved in stone. If your circumstances change, you can change it.

WHAT IF I CAN FIND A LITTLE MORE?

This is where things get interesting.

Your Extra Number today might be $50. But what would happen to your Debt-Free Date if someday you could make it $75? Or $100? Or $150?

You don’t have to decide now. First, choose the number you know you can repeat.

DENISE GOES GROCERY SHOPPING

Denise originally wanted her Extra Number to be $250. Then she went grocery shopping.

Maya put strawberries in the cart. Denise looked at the price. “$7.99?”

“They're strawberries.”

“For $7.99 they should come home and clean the kitchen.”

The strawberries went back.

Jordan appeared with cereal. Denise looked at the price, then at the coupons spilling from her hand, then at Jordan. She handed him the cereal. No words were necessary. He put it back.

At checkout, despite the sales, coupons and several successful uses of The Look, Denise was still well over what groceries used to cost her.

She reconsidered $250. Could she do it this month? Probably. Could she reliably do it every month? Probably not.

She changed her Extra Number to $100. It wasn't as impressive. It was much more useful.

AND WHAT IF YOU CAN'T DO IT THIS MONTH?

Suppose you choose $100. You make it the first month. You make it the second. Then Month 3 arrives.

The refrigerator quits. The car needs a repair. Your work hours get cut. Your child needs something you hadn't planned for. And the $100 simply isn't there.

Don't judge yourself.

Don't declare that the plan doesn't work. Don't decide you'll start over next January.

Ask a much simpler question: What can I do this month?

Maybe the answer is $50. Maybe it's $25. Maybe this month you can only make your required payments.

Your Extra Number is a tool. It is not a test of your character.

Update your numbers. Adjust. And next month, come back.

STEP 4 — BUILD MY PERSONAL PAYOFF PLAN

Now let’s put your plan in order.

Earlier, you chose your path:

PATH A — Highest Interest First

or

PATH B — Smallest Balance First

Now list your debts in that order.

ORDER / DEBT	BALANCE	MINIMUM PAYMENT	EXTRA PAYMENT	TOTAL PAYMENT
#1 ___________	$_________	$_________	$_________	$_________
#2 ___________	$_________	$_________	—	$_________
#3 ___________	$_________	$_________	—	$_________
#4 ___________	$_________	$_________	—	$_________
#5 ___________	$_________	$_________	—	$_________
#6 ___________	$_________	$_________	—	$_________

YOUR FIRST TARGET

TARGET #1: _________________

Continue making at least the required payment on every debt.

Your Extra Number goes to Target #1.

Minimum Payment: $_____________

PLUS, My Extra Number: + $_____________

MY TOTAL PAYMENT TOWARD TARGET #1: $_________

WHEN TARGET #1 REACHES $0…

DON'T SPEND THE PAYMENT YOU JUST FREED UP.

ROLL IT FORWARD.

Suppose you were paying $175 each month toward Target #1.

When that debt disappears, you don't have to find another $175. You already have it.

Take that entire $175 and add it to the payment you're already making on Target #2.

Target #2 now gets a bigger payment. When Target #2 reaches $0? Roll that payment forward again. And again. And again.

YOUR PAYMENT GROWS WHILE THE NUMBER OF DEBTS SHRINKS.

That's how your plan builds momentum.

MIKE AND ASHLEY PUT THEIR PLAN IN ORDER

The noise in the minivan was not, as Mike had predicted, "probably nothing." It was $612 worth of something.

For years, that kind of bill had gone straight onto a credit card and joined all the other bills waiting for "later." This time Mike and Ashley had already begun their plan.

They listed every debt in order. Their smallest balance was a store card from the refrigerator they bought two years earlier. Ashley wanted that one gone. It was small enough to see the finish line.

They kept making required payments on everything else and aimed their Extra Number at Target #1.

The plan wasn't dramatic. Nobody sold the house. Nobody announced that the children would henceforth live without birthdays.

They simply knew where the next extra dollar was going.

That mattered more than they expected.

STEP 5— DISCOVER MY DEBT-FREE DATE

You know what you owe.

You've chosen your path.

You've found your Extra Number.

You've built your payoff order.

NOW LET'S PUT AN END DATE ON YOUR DEBT.

MY ESTIMATED DEBT-FREE DATE __________________

This is the date you're working toward.

It isn't a promise carved in stone. Interest rates, changing balances, unexpected expenses, and changes in your payments can move your date.

That's okay.

Changing dates are still a destination.

MY TARGET DEBT-FREE DATE ___________________________

This is your finish line.

Write it on your calendar. Put it on the refrigerator. Make it the wallpaper on your phone.

Whatever helps you remember:

YOUR DEBT IS NO LONGER "FOREVER."

IT HAS AN ENDING.

CAROL PUTS A DATE ON IT

Carol had been saying, "I just want these cards gone," for years.

Gone when?

She had no idea.

When she entered her numbers and saw an estimated Debt-Free Date, her first reaction was disappointment. It was farther away than she wanted.

Then she looked at it again.

It was a date.

For the first time, the debt wasn't an indefinite cloud hanging over the rest of her life. It had a finish line.

Carol wrote the date on a small card and put it on the refrigerator.

Her granddaughter saw it and asked what it was.

“That's the day Grandma gets a raise.”

Technically, Carol knew it wasn't a raise. But when the money she'd been sending to creditors became hers again, it was going to feel remarkably similar.

STEP 6— MY MONTHLY 10-MINUTE CHECK-IN

ONCE A MONTH. TEN MINUTES. THAT'S ALL.

You don't need to watch your balances every day.

Once a month, take ten minutes to see what changed, celebrate what disappeared, and make sure your plan still works for you.

NOW CHECK YOUR DATE

Last month's estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My new estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

Did the date move?

That's useful information — not a grade.

Maybe you paid a little extra. Maybe you paid a little less. Maybe an interest rate changed. Maybe life simply happened.

Your plan can change when your life changes.

LOOK AT WHAT DISAPPEARED

Don't obsess over the amount you still owe. Look at what you eliminated.

$26 is progress. $143 is progress. $417 is progress.

Progress is progress.

The goal isn't perfection.

THE GOAL IS FOR NEXT MONTH'S NUMBER TO BE SMALLER THAN THIS MONTH'S.

BOB AND KAREN: MONTH THREE

Month 1: their debt went down. Month 2: it went down again.

Month 3: it went up $146.

Bob was furious.

"We're supposed to be getting OUT of debt."

Karen reminded him that the car needed two tires.

"The number went up."

"And we needed tires."

They updated the balances. Their Debt-Free Date moved back. Bob hated that.

But they did not quit.

Three months later Bob got a small raise. After taxes, it meant about $127 more each month.

Karen suggested putting all of it toward debt.

Bob paused. "We could."

Another pause.

"Or we could put $75 toward debt and occasionally order a pizza."

Karen voted for pizza.

They increased their Extra Number by $75. Their Debt-Free Date moved closer.

A plan you can live with is a plan you can keep.

YOUR 12 MONTHLY ASSESSMENTS

Use one assessment each month. Ten minutes. No judgment. Just information.

MONTH 1 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $__________ I actually added: $__________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: __________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: __________________

My Extra Number next month: $________________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 2 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 3 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: ________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: ________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 4 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: ________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: ________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 5 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 6 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 7 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 8 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: ________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: ________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 9 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 10 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 11 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

MONTH 12 ASSESSMENT

Starting total debt: $_______________

Ending total debt: $_______________

Difference: $_______________

My debt this month: ☐ Went down ☐ Stayed about the same ☐ Went up

Did I add new debt this month? ☐ No ☐ Yes Approximately: $___________

What happened?

☐ Groceries/everyday expenses ☐ Car ☐ Medical/dental ☐ Kids/school/sports

☐ Home repair ☐ Reduced income ☐ Family emergency ☐ Something I wanted ☐ Other

Did I make my planned Extra Number? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of it ☐ No

My Extra Number was: $_________ I actually added: $_________

What went RIGHT this month?

____

____

Last estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

New estimated Debt-Free Date: _________________

My Extra Number next month: $_______________

One thing I will do next month:

____

STEP 7 — WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

The car breaks.

The furnace quits.

Your hours get cut.

The dog decides Tuesday would be an excellent day for a $700 veterinarian bill.

Life did not receive a copy of your debt-payoff schedule.

And that's okay.

A BAD MONTH DOES NOT DESTROY A GOOD PLAN.

Your Debt-Free Date is a destination, not a deadline you can fail.

If life gets in the way of your planned Extra Number this month, don't abandon everything you've accomplished.

JUST ADJUST.

If you can’t make your planned extra payment:

1. Take care of essential expenses first.

2. Make at least the required payments you can afford.

3. Don't punish yourself by abandoning your entire plan.

4. Reduce or pause your Extra Number if you need to.

5. Resume it when you're able.

6. Check and update your estimated Debt-Free Date.

Your date may move.

YOUR DESTINATION HASN’T.

WHEN THINGS GET BETTER

Life can surprise you in the other direction, too.

Maybe you get a raise. Pick up some extra work. Finish paying another expense. Receive money you weren't expecting. Or simply discover that you can comfortably increase your Extra Number.

Great. Update your plan.

Even another $25 a month may move your estimated Debt-Free Date closer.

Your plan should change when your life changes.

WHAT IF I CAN'T MAKE MY REQUIRED PAYMENTS?

That's different from simply having a difficult month.

If you're struggling to make required payments, contact your creditors promptly and ask what options may be available.

If your numbers show that you simply cannot keep up with your obligations, consider speaking with a reputable nonprofit credit counselor who can review your individual circumstances and available options.

Asking for qualified help is part of making a plan — not abandoning one.

DENISE'S REFRIGERATOR MONTH

Denise had made her $100 Extra Number for two months.

Then the refrigerator quit.

She stood in front of it with the door open, as though one more stern look might persuade it to resume cooling.

It did not.

This was not the month for her $100 extra payment. In fact, it became a month when she had to use credit again.

Her first thought was: Great. I'm right back where I started.

But she wasn't.

She knew what she owed. She knew her path. She knew where the new charge belonged in the plan.

So she updated her balance, made the required payments she could afford, changed her Debt-Free Date, and came back the following month.

Denise didn't fail her plan. Denise had a refrigerator.

Life happened. She adjusted. Then she continued.

STEP 8 — THE DAY ONE DEBT HITS ZERO

STOP.

Don’t immediately move to the next number.

Take a moment.

Look at what you just accomplished.

PAID IN FULL

NOW PUT THAT PAYMENT TO WORK

Remember our rule?

DON’T SPEND IT. ROLL IT FORWARD.

Take the entire monthly amount you were paying toward the debt you just eliminated and add it to your next target.

MY NEXT TARGET

You didn't have to find more money.

You simply gave money you were already paying a new job.

AND NOW SOMETHING IMPORTANT HAPPENS

Your first debt may have taken months to eliminate.

But your next debt now has a larger payment attacking it every month.

When that one reaches $0, its payment gets added to the next. Then the next.

YOUR PAYMENTS GET BIGGER.

YOUR DEBTS GET SMALLER.

YOUR MOMENTUM GROWS.

And every $0 moves you closer to your Debt-Free Date.

ONE DOWN. KEEP GOING.

LINDA AND TOM GET THEIR FIRST ZERO

Linda's first target was a small store-card balance.

When the final payment cleared, she opened the account twice just to make sure the zero was still there.

Tom walked into the room.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing. Look.”

He looked.

“Zero.”

“I see that.”

“Isn't it beautiful?”

Tom agreed that, as numbers went, it was unusually attractive.

They had been paying $92 a month toward that card, including their extra payment. That $92 did not become restaurant money. It moved to Target #2.

Their lifestyle didn't change.

Their next payment did.

That was the moment Linda finally understood momentum.

STEP 9 — MY FINISH LINE

Imagine opening your accounts and seeing:

$0

$0

$0

No more payoff order.

No more Target #1.

No more rolling payments forward.

YOU DID IT.

The money you've been sending to creditors every month is finally yours again.

But before it quietly disappears back into everyday spending, give it a new job.

LOOK WHAT YOU JUST FREED UP

My Former Monthly Debt Payment: $_______________

Think about that number.

You've already learned how to live without that money.

Month after month, you sent it toward your debt.

Now imagine what that same money could begin doing for you.

You might use it to:

- Build emergency savings.
- Prepare for expenses you know will eventually come.
- Increase retirement savings.
- Begin investing toward long-term goals when appropriate.
- Save for something important to you.
- Give.
- Live.

You don't have to decide everything today. Just decide what comes next.

MY FIRST GOAL AFTER DEBT

I want to: ____

I’ll redirect this amount each month: $_______________

MY DEBT-FREE DATE

Remember when that was just a date you were hoping to reach?

YOU REACHED IT.

You didn’t need to understand everything about money.

You didn’t need a complicated budgeting system.

You needed to know:

WHERE YOU WERE.

WHAT TO DO NEXT.

WHERE YOU WERE GOING.

And then you kept going.

WELCOME TO $0.

WHERE ARE OUR FAMILIES NOW?

Not everyone reaches $0 on the same schedule. That is not the point.

Bob and Karen may still have debt, but it is dramatically smaller than the $31,842 they finally faced at the kitchen table. More importantly, they are no longer adding to it month after month.

Denise has had good months, expensive months and one memorable refrigerator month. She has also watched balances disappear.

Mike and Ashley have learned that ending a month without adding new debt can be a victory in itself. Their children are still growing out of shoes at an unreasonable rate.

Linda and Tom have rolled their first freed-up payment into the next debt. Retirement feels a little less crowded by old balances.

Carol has a date on her refrigerator and a plan for the money that will eventually become hers again.

Your story will not look exactly like theirs.

It shouldn't.

The numbers are yours. The circumstances are yours. The pace is yours.

The nine steps are simply here to help you keep moving.

YOUR ONE-YEAR ASSESSMENT

One year ago I owed: $________________

Today I owe: $________________

Debt I eliminated: $________________

New debt I added during the year: $________________

My original estimated Debt-Free Date: __________________

My estimated Debt-Free Date today: __________________

WHAT SURPRISED ME MOST

____

____

____

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT MYSELF

____

____

____

WHAT WORKED

____

____

____

WHAT I WANT TO CHANGE

____

____

____

MY NEXT EXTRA NUMBER

$______________ per month

MY NEXT TARGET

____

ONE YEAR FROM NOW, I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY:

____

____

____

____

A moving Debt-Free Date is information, not a grade.

Keep going.

IMPORTANT

This guide is for general educational and organizational purposes. It is not individualized financial, legal, tax, investment, credit-repair, or debt-settlement advice. Interest calculations, lender practices, fees, promotional rates and individual circumstances can affect actual payoff dates and costs. Continue making required payments and verify information with your creditors. If you're unable to meet your obligations or need advice specific to your circumstances, consider speaking with an appropriately qualified financial professional or reputable nonprofit credit counselor.