

8 Frugal Living Skills I Wish My Parents Would Have Taught Me

By Mikey Rox on 9 December 2016



We had it great when we were kids. Zero responsibility, zero bills, zero debt — and then we grew up. Our parents tried to teach us everything they knew, but nobody's perfect, and some things we had to learn the hard way. Like how credit cards will ruin your financial life for years if you start whipping them out at 18 years old like you actually have money to pay the bill. My mistake! Take a look at these other frugal living skills I wish my parents had taught me and see if you can relate.

1. How to Live the "Vacation" Life

I know what this sounds like, but it's not what you think. Living the vacation life isn't about lying around on the beach every day (at least not in this sense), but rather living like you're on vacation by getting by with only the essentials.

Rebecca Gitana, author of the minimalist blog Lifestyle Remix, explains.

"When we travel, we only pack the things we love," she says. "The result is the feeling of lightness and endless possibility. Take that same concept into how you 'pack your home' — only keeping things suitable for your next great adventure."

While I'm fairly good at purging my belongings when I no longer have use for them, I do still retain some of my hoarding roots (especially when it comes to clothing), a trait likely inherited from my parents who really enjoy their "stuff." It's a habit that can be broken, however, if you can see the value all around — literally and figuratively.

2. It's Okay to Buy Generic

We never, ever bought anything generic in my house growing up, and I shop similarly today. I justify my brand-name-only purchases with the philosophy that these brands are popular and famous because their products are superior. In some cases that's true, but not always. Which is why I use my judgment when deciding what to buy generic and what to splurge on. I buy store-brand pantry staples, for instance, like flour, sugar, and spices, as well as meat and other proteins. As much as I can, I try to use coupons on brand names to hopefully bring the cost down to where the generic brand would be. Makes me feel better, at least.

3. Why Multi-Purpose Purchases Are Important

We had plenty of space in my home growing up, with an attic and a basement, so there wasn't a real need for furniture and other items that pulled double duty. I had to learn how to make the most of very small amounts of space when I moved out on my own, especially when I moved to New York City. After living in urban areas for nearly a decade, I've conditioned myself to shop for those two- or three-pronged products, like pullout sofas, storage benches, and appliances that can perform several functions.

4. There's No Shame in Using Coupons

Until very recently, my parents didn't use coupons when shopping for groceries, and I tried to get away with coupon-free shopping when I first struck out on my own. Admittedly, I didn't get very far. Like my parents, lots of folks don't use coupons for many reasons — they don't feel like hunting them down and clipping them, for instance, or they think that somehow using them makes you look like a cheapskate. Nonsense. Take it from me — the coupon king — that saving your hard-earned money on necessities like food so you have enough to pay for necessities like shelter and heat isn't being a cheapskate; it's being smart. So to hell with what other people think about how you spend your money.

5. How to Determine What You Need Versus What You Want

Yes, I'm a personal finance expert, but I'm also an avid consumer and major supporter of capitalism, which means that I can sometimes succumb to impulse buys because I think I have to have something. But when I started spending my own money on all the things I thought I'd just die without (that my parents previously bought for me), I had to step back and re-evaluate the situation. As such, I've gotten pretty good over the past 17 years that I've been financially independent, like choosing gas for my vehicle over a new pair of Nikes.

6. To Proceed With Extreme Caution With Credit Cards

Like many families, mine didn't talk about finances. My parents went to work, made the money, and we magically had everything we needed. I honestly have no idea how many credit cards they had, how much debt they were in, if they had any money in their savings accounts — so on and so forth. And I'm probably correct in assuming that you grew up similarly. Which is in part why as I became an adult, I had

no idea how to manage my own money — especially when it came to credit cards. Long story short, I maxed mine out within six months of receiving them, and it took me yeeeeeears to pay them off. Now I use credit the proper way — as an extension of the money I already have, not a put-it-off-until-you-have-it loan from the Money Gods. (See also: 5 Habits of Responsible Credit Card Users)

7. How Vocational Skills Will Save You a Ton of Money

In all fairness, my dad tried to teach me how to fix various issues on my car as a teenager, but I just wasn't interested. As a result, now I have to pay the friendly mechanics at my neighborhood auto shop more often than I'd like. But it's not just auto skills I wish I had learned. I could've benefitted from a wealth of vocational skills, from home improvement projects to yard maintenance to electronics repair, that would have saved me a ton of money thus far and perhaps made me some if I were enterprising enough to monetize my skills.

8. How to Comparison Shop

I'll give my parents a break on this one, because when I was a kid, it wasn't an easy task to comparison shop. In fact, I think we've all learned how to do this together over the past decade or so since the Internet has made it easier. Either way, I'm a pro at it now. My new goal is to teach myself how to do it more efficiently instead of spending hours investigating the best price. How about you?

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