

With most household budgets now stretched very thin, building financial security has never been more important. According to Amir Rodnia, finance expert and author of *Freedom Gameplan*, being financially secure really means having less stress around money.

"At its core, financial security is feeling able to meet your life's ongoing commitments without having to stress about where the next pay cheque will come from," he explains.

"It certainly looks different for everyone. For some, it may be having three months of wages sitting in savings. For others, it may be having enough passive income that you're never forced to work in a job you hate, miss family moments you love, and sell your time for money."

BUDGET WITHOUT THE BUZZKILL

One of the biggest barriers preventing people from creating a realistic budget is a fear that they'll be restricted or miss out on the things they enjoy. But Amir says there's a way of flipping traditional budgets around to ensure you still have money left over to play with.

"Instead of setting a tight budget and depriving yourself of what modern life has to offer, start by paying yourself first," he says.

"Create an automated system of saving where a portion of your pay is set aside before you even see it. You can then spend the rest with freedom and without feeling guilty."

He adds: "A budget can feel like punishment, whereas paying yourself first is very rewarding. You'll be amazed by how quickly you adjust to living off what's left, without compromising your lifestyle too much."



DEBT DETOX

Amir says it's important to know the difference between good debt and bad debt. He says good debt is the accumulation of "quality investments", versus bad debt, which people acquire through "consumption and self-indulgence".

"Prioritise bad debts with the highest interest rate. It may feel tempting to pay off the smallest debts first, but becoming financially free is not about what feels good in the moment," he says.

"Becoming free is all about stacking the numbers in your favour. Keep chipping away at your debts, starting with the most expensive ones. Also, consider prioritising non-deductible debt over tax-deductible debt."

SPENDING HABITS WORTH BREAKING

Amir says it's the little things that can make a big difference when it comes to saving money and establishing financial security.

"I have a simple habit that has served me well for years: I sleep on any unplanned purchases for 24 hours, before I proceed. This simple habit has saved me from many poor financial decisions and unnecessary purchases," he says.

He also suggests cutting back on those "small, unnecessary ongoing expenses" that accumulate over time, branding them "more detrimental than one big purchase".

"The prime suspects here are subscriptions.

Do you really need all five subscriptions to streaming services at once? Frequent take-out meals and coffees can also add up to more than you might expect," he says.

He adds: "Again, I'm not an advocate for depriving yourself of life's pleasures, but as with most things, a balanced approach makes good sense."

DOLLARS AND SENSE

When it comes to setting financial goals, Amir says it's pays to be "SMART". "Make sure goals are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. This maximises your chances of achieving them," he advises.