# Just Married? Five Financial Tips for Newlyweds

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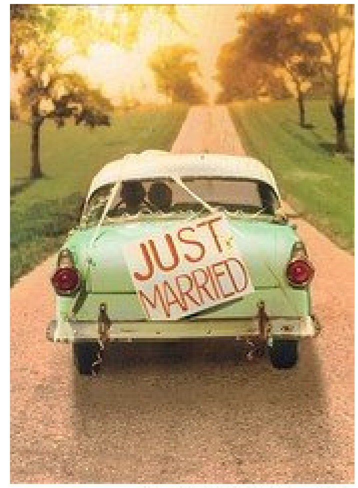

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It's not the easiest time to start a life together. There's the tumultuous economy, the unpredictable job market and the real estate bubble that looks like it's on the verge of bursting. And on top of that, everybody views money differently, so when two people come together in a marriage, it's no surprise there will be financial tensions. Here are some tips from financial planner Rona Birenbaum, founder of Caring for Clients, to guide young couples on what to focus on when merging their money matters for the first time.

**1. Get Naked**

Throw your inhibitions to the wind and reveal all to your partner. All meaning debts, assets and retirement expectations. Start your married life without financial secrets and lay out the full picture of where you both stand. Show each other your net worth savings -- what you've got and what you owe -- and request copies of individual credit reports to see your credit standings. If you have a goal of home ownership, you'll likely need mortgage financing and if you need to repair your credit rating, this can take time, so it's wise to start with open communication.

**2. Appoint the CFO**

Once you as a couple are at a point of full transparency, it's important to decide who will be the family Chief Financial Officer, somebody who will lead the financial activities. This involves paying bills, looking at how you're doing financially, reviewing investments, making sure your debts are paid down and your saving targets are met. Usually within a couple, someone will have a greater interest in the family finances or an aptitude for attention to detail. Remember, the CFO *leads* the household finances but decisions should be up to both partners.

**3. Set Goals Together**

Sit down and decide what you think is important. Typical goals are home ownership, starting a family and getting rid of debt. Often, goals are easier to achieve when debt is gone or diminished. Credit card debt and lines of credit should be tackled first.

**4. Put in Place Wills and Powers of Attorney**

Although you're starting out with great visions of your future together, it's best to be prepared. Review or put in place wills and powers of attorney. The importance of this -- especially for a young couple -- is less about money and more about who is in charge if something should happen to you or your spouse. You're designating who is legally allowed to act on your behalf. If you have a power of attorney, you're bypassing any conflict that could emerge from not having one, such as your parents and your spouse arguing about who should make your decisions. It's also wise to review beneficiary designations for life insurance and RRSPs.

**5. Make a Date**

It's important to regularly look at where you are and where you want to be. Perhaps the family CFO could drive a regular review time to sit down with his or her spouse once a quarter for an update. The CFO can lead but the other partner needs to feel a part of the action too and know what's going on. Make it pleasant with some wine and cheese. Make it a date.