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## Pay Dirt: The wisdom of ... Scrooge?

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### **PAY DIRT KARA MCguire**

Poor Ebenezer Scrooge. The main character in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" is notorious for his miserly ways. But what about his stunning transformation from penny-pincher to philanthropist?

"We forget there's a Scrooge at the end of the book," said Rick Kahler, a Rapid City, S.D., certified financial planner and co-author of "The Financial Wisdom of Ebenezer Scrooge: Five Principles to Transform Your Relationship with Money." Kahler spoke last week at a Financial Planning Association of Minnesota meeting about how, like Scrooge, it's possible to change the role of money in your life by visiting your financial ghosts -- past, present and future.

A believer in Dickens' message of redemption, I'm optimistic that our nation's present ghost -- picking up the pieces of our economy shattered by greed, overconsumption and lax regulation -- is frightening enough that we'll shift from spendthrifts to savers to avoid a tragic future.

But Kahler's not so sure. "We are very quick to want to know who to blame. Like Bob Cratchit, we stay in this victim mode rather than take responsibility for the part that we had in creating [the credit crisis]." Instead of pointing fingers, wallowing in self-pity or getting mad, Kahler suggests we ask ourselves, "What can I do to affect my own bailout plan? What can I do to change my behavior so I don't repeat this?"

The answer: Embark on a Scrooge-like journey (without having to venture into subzero temperatures in our pajamas with a ghost).

Kahler's short volume, co-written by financial therapist Ted Klontz and his psychologist son Brad Klontz, takes the reader through five stages of financial transformation using the behavior of Scrooge and his employee Cratchit as the vehicle.

But if you don't want to run out and buy the book, here's an exercise Kahler suggests to exorcise your financial ghosts.

**1. Identify your "money scripts,"** or beliefs you have about money that influence how you earn it, save it and spend it. Money scripts can be as seemingly insignificant as "never buy cereal without a coupon" to "money is power."

For example, some of Scrooge's money scripts could be: "You can never have enough money" and "Giving to the poor encourages laziness." To identify your money scripts, write down all of the money beliefs you can think of, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Stuck? Kahler handed financial advisers a sheet with incomplete phrases such as "Wealthy people got that way by ... ," "Financially, I deserve ... ," and "Parents

owe their children ... ," and asked them to fill in the blanks.

**2. Once you have your list**, circle the 10 scripts that represent your most deep-seated beliefs about money.

**3. Ask trusted friends** to come up with alternative money scripts for those 10 money truths. If your money script is "If you work hard, you're going to make money," a friend can suggest that it's possible to work hard and not make a penny, or to become rich without lifting a finger. Pointing out alternative ways of thinking can broaden your notions of acceptable money beliefs and behaviors and give you an idea of the changes to attempt in the New Year.

Without this introspection, Kahler fears that when the economy and the markets settle down, consumers will revert to old habits.

"As a nation, we've been living a lifestyle that's a lie. What's clear is that we don't understand how to live on what we make. We don't even understand that concept. I tell my kids ... out of every dollar you make, take 10 cents to pay your taxes, take 20 cents and put it into an investment account, take 10 cents and give it back to your community, and blow the 60 cents. We've got it pretty much backwards as a society."

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