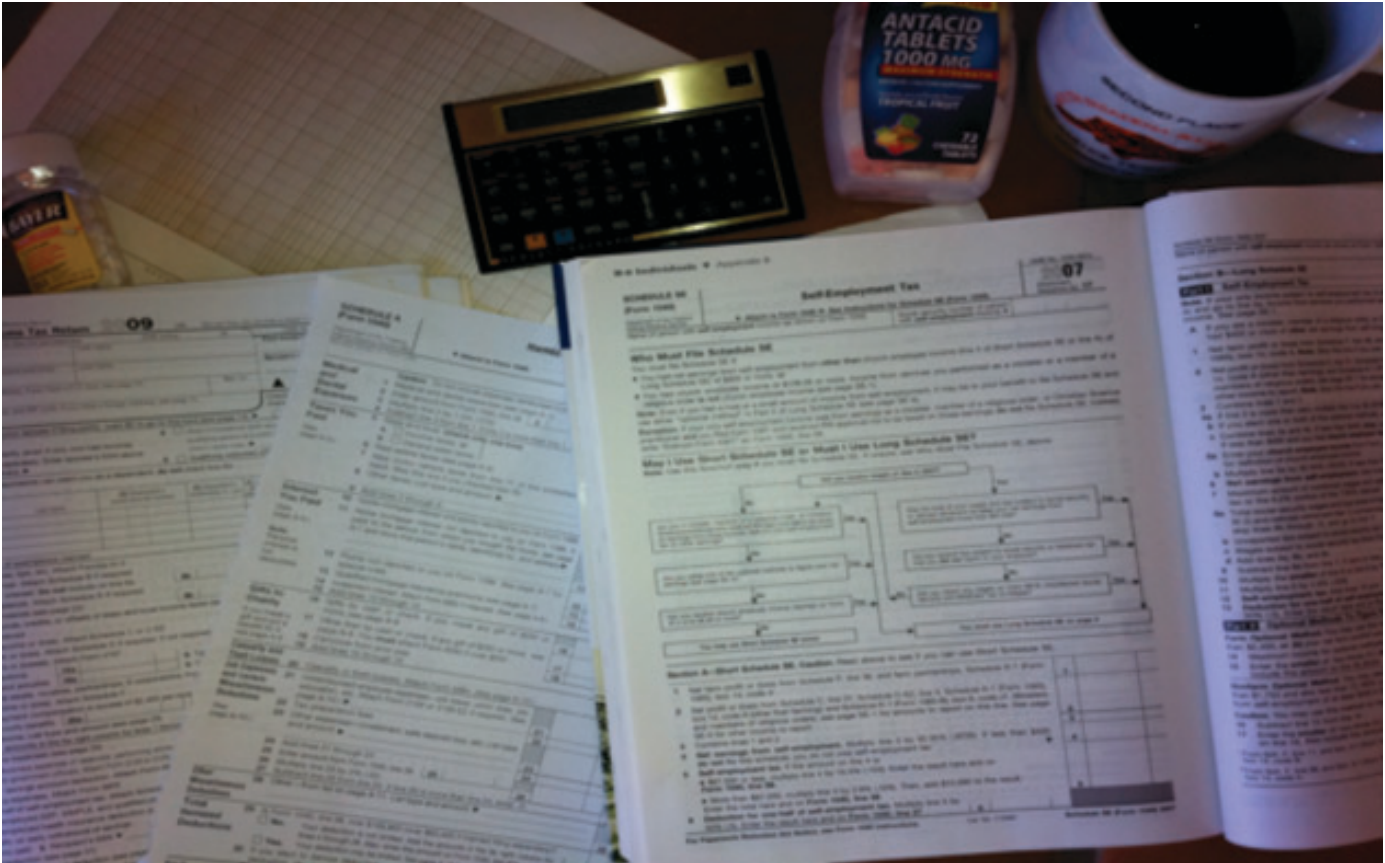


# Karen Telleen-Lawton: From Anxious to Adept — Financial Planning Tips, Part One

Taking control of your financial life begins with setting a budget and living within your means — simple, right?



Tax time is a good time to make financial resolutions — and stick to them. (Karen Telleen-Lawton / Noozhawk photo)

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | **UPDATED** | Published on 03.26.2012



In honor of the looming tax deadline, here's a limerick from a humor blogger named **Madeleine Begun Kane**, called "Dear IRS":

*Dear folks at the fed IRS,  
Your rules and your regs are a mess.*

*You're unfair to the poor.  
Middle class? Even more.  
So beware, 'cuz I know your address.*

In a P.S. note to the **FBI**, the IRS and **Homeland Security**, Kane notes that she's only kidding. (I believe her!)

Tax time may be a bigger resolution day than New Year's, with promises running roughly along the lines of: "This year I resolve to put aside money *every single* month in my ..." Roth IRA, company 401(k), savings account or whatever. But often we languish after a few paychecks, like a diet dangled precariously in front of an aromatic potluck spread.

Planning one's finances causes many people angst, but there's comfort in taking control of your financial life. The first step, whether you take it in your 20s or closer to retirement, is to *live within your means*.

This seems so obvious, but for many, it isn't. When you engage in instant gratification, you end up using credit cards to blur the gap between income and expenses, hiding the truth even from yourself.

Start now to live on a budget that maintains your outflows at a smaller level than your inflows. Simply recording expenses can go a long way.

The earlier you learn to stick to a budget, the more you can slack off when you're older. That's partly because you will have saved more of a cushion, but it's largely because you will have developed a healthy habit of consuming less.

I favor under-consumption as a way of life. That's not to say I never indulge in the American lifestyle, but I like to consider "making do" a virtue even when I can "afford" an item.

This sometimes didn't make me the most popular mom, but in the economic climate we've had since 2008, I think they finally appreciate the training. In fact, I may have gone too far — my son worked for minimum wage at a nonprofit for five years and still managed to save money. He Dumpster-dived with friends — only food still in its packaging, he told me, and close to its due date. Still, I don't recommend this.

In Santa Barbara, there are endless frugal ways to eat, entertain or be entertained, such as having friends in for dinner instead of eating out, discount movies, hiking, or frequenting the beach or park.

You can take an **Adult Ed** class just for enjoyment. Adult Ed's budget has suffered for years, but it's still a great deal. Try taking take the bus or **Amtrak** to San Diego or the Bay Area — the views are marvelous, and it's cheaper before even considering car wear and tear. For longer periods, consider **Peace Corps**, **Earthwatch** or teaching English abroad.

**Elisabeth Donati** is a financial literacy expert who founded an organization called "**Camp Millionaire.**" She analogizes eating and spending by asserting: "Thin people are people who are *willing* to be hungry". If you are willing *not* to have everything you think you want right now, you have taken the first step toward being financially adept instead of anxious.

*[Note: Karen Telleen-Lawton will speak on this topic ("From Anxious to Adept: Financial Planning Tips for Women") at the next meeting of the **Association for Women in Communications-Santa Barbara Chapter**, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 4 at the **Canary Hotel**, 31 W. Carrillo St. The event is open to the public. [Click here for registration information.](#)]*

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor ([www.DecisivePath.com](http://www.DecisivePath.com)) and a freelance writer ([www.CanyonVoices.com](http://www.CanyonVoices.com)).*