your monthly spending plan

AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH MONTH, sit down and fill out this handy form created with the help of certified financial planner Jill Gianola and financial columnist Jeff Opdyke.

step 1 First write down your projected income for the month: your salary, your spouse's salary, and any other income (gifts, freelance income, etc.) that you will receive. Enter the total in box A

INCOME	MONTHLY TOTAL
SALARY 1:	
SALARY 2:	
OTHER:	
TOTAL A:	

step 2 Next, fill in your fixed monthly expenses: rent or mortgage, insurance, child care, and food, for instance. Add items as necessary, such as tuition payments or recurring on-line subscriptions. And don't forget to add a savings component, since a fundamental way to build wealth is to pay yourself first each month. Enter the totals for the column in box B. To find out how much money you have left over for discretionary spending, subtract B from A. Put this amount in C.

FIXED EXPENSES	PROJECTED MONTHLY TOTAL
HOME mortgage, rent, insurance	
FOOD groceries, lunch	
TRANSPORTATION commuting, gas, tolls, car payments	
CHILD CARE sitter, day-care	
INSURANCE auto, life, health	
RETIREMENT SAVINGS	
UTILITIES electric, gas, water	
DEBT REPAYMENTS credit cards, student loan, car loan	
PHONE, CABLE, INTERNET	
ONGOING HEALTH CARE EXPENSES	
OTHER	
TOTAL B:	
TOTAL A-B=TOTAL C:	

step 3 Now take the amount in C and allocate the money across the discretionary categories. This is where planning comes in. Do you want to put this money toward a vacation or a new couch, a massage or a new pair of shoes, a new roof or patio furniture? Or would you like to be thrifty and add it to your savings account or, maybe, start an investment account or a 529 college savings plan for your child? Just be sure to stick to your plan.

DISCRETIONARY EXPENSES	PROJECTED MONTHLY TOTAL
CLOTHING	
SELF-CARE haircuts, exercise classes, manicures	
HEALTH CARE doctor visits, dentist, chiropractor	
VACATION/TRAVEL	
ENTERTAINMENT movies, shows, hobbies, sporting events	
HOME furniture, repairs, landscaping	
OTHER	
TOTAL: (cannot exceed Total C)	