BUDGET

In the words of one of America’s founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, ‘If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.’ So set yourself up for success by drawing up a budget of all your holiday spending.

‘If you’re really disciplined, you’ll have already set up a savings account which you’ve been contributing towards throughout the year,’ says private wealth strategist Izak Strauss.

‘Drawing up a budget is the first step,’ says master coach Shoni Khangala. ‘However, being disciplined enough to stick to that budget is even more important.’

HAVE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

If you’re serious about cutting down on expenditure, you’ll need to adjust your mindset accordingly. ‘Discipline is crucial,’ says Khangala. ‘You need to be able to endure going without most of the things that everybody else is crazy about enjoying or acquiring over the festive season.’
**3 LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES**

Try to remember how low you felt the last time you ended up in debt in January. ‘A third of the people who go insolvent during the first three months of the year will have been tipped over the edge by excessive end-of-year spending,’ says Strauss.

If you have last year’s December expenditure on file, analyse it to find out where you went wrong. ‘Learn from your previous financial mistakes and strive to continuously make improvements,’ urges Khangala.

**4 DEVELOP A LEAN SPENDING STRATEGY**

Once you know you’ve pinpointed your particular weaknesses, develop a strategy to tackle them. If it’s overspending on gifts, why not suggest to your family that you have a ‘Secret Santa’ this year, with everyone only required to buy one present for R200 or less? Or decide collectively that you’re only going to buy gifts for children, and not adults. Shopping on the internet is a great way to reduce the temptation to splurge when you’re in a mall. ‘You can easily compare prices online,’ says Strauss. And there are some great deals (try www.groupon.co.za, www.onedayonly.co.za, www.dealafri.ca.co.za and www.dealzone.co.za).

‘Try to buy gifts throughout the year, especially during sales,’ suggests certified financial planner James Leisegang. Visit stores like Jet that offer good value at great prices, and look out for coupons for discounts on selected offers at other stores.

**5 STICK TO YOUR GUNS!**

By setting out to spend less over the holidays, you may experience resistance from friends and family. Prepare for this by letting them know well in advance what your festive-season plans are. Often it’s a question of expectations – your family might not be used to only having meals at home instead of going out to restaurants, or getting modest gifts instead of extravagant ones.

Leisegang sums up the reason for the season when he says, ‘No toy or gadget can sustainably compare with the ongoing joy of family relationships and friendships. This Christmas, let’s seek to have quality experiences and quality family time.’