

As a bankruptcy attorney, I speak with people in financial distress every day. Everyone's story is different, but there are a few themes that unite those wandering into my office seeking help with their debt problems. Do any or all of these apply to you? If so, it's time to face reality and address your financial troubles. Bankruptcy may provide the answer.

1. Are You Unable to Pay Bills on Time?

Are one or more of your bills late each month? Do you struggle to make the mortgage payment before the end of the 15 day grace period? Are you tired of racking up late fees on top of your mountain of debt?

Late fees do not benefit you. They do not reduce the amount owed, they do not help you get ahead. Take a look at why you are regularly paying late fees - is it a budgeting issue? Or is there a larger cash flow issue? If you find that there's just not enough money to go 'round, it's time to reach out and talk to someone who can help you sort through that mess.

2. Are You Unable to Make Minimum Payments?

Are you only able to squeak by making the minimum payments on your credit cards. Does that box on the statement saying it will take you 15 years to pay off the balance make you lose sleep at night?

Not that long ago, creditors started printing tables on credit card statements to let borrowers know just how long it would take to pay off their existing debt if they only make minimum payments and how long it would take to pay off their existing debt if they pay a sum above the minimum payment each month. Now, you should remember that these estimates only work if you stop using the cards.

3. Do You Have No Savings or Negative Savings?

How many times have you overdrawn your accounts in the past three months? Do you struggle to save even \$100.00? Is your bank charging you fees because you can't meet the minimum balance requirements?

Several times a week, when I ask prospective clients to state the balances of their accounts, I get a chuckle and a response that there is little to no money in savings. Does this sound like you? Would eliminating your existing debt obligations allow you to free up resources to make timely car, rent, or mortgage payments? Maybe even save a little extra money each month in the event of an unexpected expense? Bankruptcy may provide the answer.

4. Do You Do the Monthly Account Shuffle?

Do you have to borrow from Peter to pay Paul each month? Do you transfer money from account to account and cross your fingers that your car payment won't bounce? Have you borrowed money from friends and family to try and make ends meet? This could be a sign of financial instability. Take a look at why you are doing the monthly account shuffle, where is your shortfall? What is your budget, are you sticking to it? Or is there not enough money to make ends meet. If your problem lies in being unable to pay your bills as they come due, maybe its time to take a hard look at how to tackle that mountain of debt or tackle that hill of debt before it becomes a mountain.

5. Do You Have Creditors Calling Day and Night?

First, the bills are late, then you find you can't pay them at all. Then the phone starts ringing, everyone wants to know where is their money and when are they going to get their money. You stop answering the phone or maybe set a special ring tone on your cell phone for the frequently calling creditors so you know not to pick it up. Bankruptcy may provide relief

Now, bankruptcy is not always the answer, but it provides debt and stress relief to many finding themselves plagued with these issues each year.