



# Making the Most of What You Have

When your income drops suddenly, your first concern may be to pay your bills and meet your day-to-day expenses. Instead, look at your total financial picture and determine which assets you might use to meet your obligations.

You have value as a person. Your skills, knowledge, and abilities are resources. They can help you make changes and survive a period of unemployment.

## Determining Your Net Worth

A net worth statement is a financial balance sheet. It's a calculation of your assets (what you own) minus your liabilities (what you owe). Preparing a net worth statement will help you get a clearer understanding of your financial resources and make decisions about how best to manage them.

Use Worksheet 1, "Net Worth Statement" to determine your net worth. The asset column is divided into the following groups:

**Liquid Assets** — those things that either are or can be easily converted to cash. Keep in mind that cashing in certificates of deposit (CD's) before they mature may result in an interest penalty.

**Marketable Assets** — financial assets that can be cashed in or sold for their current market value. Prices will fluctuate with market conditions.

**Other Personal Assets** — real estate and personal property that can be sold but usually not as quickly as the assets above. Assets such as vehicles, furniture, and appliances usually depreciate in value, so they are worth less now than when you purchased them, even though they are still in good condition.

**Non-Marketable Assets** — assets that cannot be sold or are more difficult to turn into cash. Withdrawing money from your retirement plan, pension, or Individual Retirement Account (IRA) before age 59-1/2 usually involves a substantial penalty.

Calculating your assets

- Write down the current amount of cash on hand. Use the most recent statements for checking, savings, and money market account balances, and current certificate values.
- If you have government savings bonds, call a bank to find out what they are currently worth.
- Find out the cash surrender value of your whole or cash value life insurance policies by checking your policy or calling your agent.
- If you own stocks, bonds, or mutual funds, check a newspaper that publishes the information daily. They are available in most libraries.
- Use the current value of your house or other real estate — not what you paid for it. Your city or town assessor can tell you its full assessed value.
- Check a used vehicle guide (Blue Book) for the value of your cars and trucks.

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- To find out the value of your boat, camper, snowmobile, or any other recreational vehicle, talk to a dealer who sells used recreational vehicles.
- Make a conservative estimate of the value of household items and personal property, recording what you could get if you sold everything today.
- List the current value of your pension, IRA's, or other retirement plan, using the amount you would get if you were to cash them in today.
- Don't forget to add money others may owe you if you realistically expect to collect it.

#### Calculating your liabilities

- The balance of the mortgage loan on your house may be on your monthly statement. If not, ask the lender for the outstanding balance.
- Record the balance due on all credit cards, charge accounts, installment accounts, and other loans. Be sure to list the total balance due, not just the monthly payment.
- List any current unpaid bills, including what you owe the dentist, this month's utilities, telephone charges, etc.

After you have totaled both your assets and your liabilities, you are ready to subtract total assets from total liabilities. What's left is your net worth.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

Take a good look at what you have written down and answer the following questions.

- Where are most of your assets? Are they mostly in one item, your house or vehicle, for example?
- How much of your assets are liquid, or easy to turn into cash?
- How much do you have in bank accounts that can be used during your current financial emergency?
- How long will your savings last if you use them to pay current living expenses?
- What marketable assets could be sold or converted to cash to help pay current bills?

- How much equity do you have in your house? To calculate this, take your home's current market value and subtract the balance on your mortgage.
- Do you have any vehicles or other personal property that could be sold?
- Do you have cash value life insurance against which you could borrow?
- What financial assets do you have that you are not using?
- Are your liabilities much greater than your assets?
- Are you able to meet your current monthly bills and expenses on your reduced income?
- Are you behind in any of your payments?
- Is there a way to lower your interest payments by paying off any of your debts? Can you refinance any of your loans to lower the monthly payments?
- Are there any items you recently purchased on credit that could be surrendered or given back to the creditor to get out from under a debt?

### Other Important Assets

Don't forget that your family has other important assets that don't show up on the net worth statement. Assets such as education, experience, skills, and knowledge are hard to put a dollar value on, but don't overlook them as a resource to help meet expenses.

Use Worksheet 2, "Family Resources" to identify these important family resources. Talk to family members about ways to use these assets to help you through this period of reduced income as well as in the future. For more ideas, see EC 1396, *Bartering*.

## Liquidating Your Assets

Using your savings is one way to supplement your income during periods of unemployment. Be cautious, however, about using savings for things that aren't a high priority. Otherwise, you leave nothing for emergencies such as unanticipated repairs or medical bills. Setting spending priorities and decreasing expenses are essential steps in making the most of your assets.

Another source of funds to help carry you through a financial crisis is selling property that you may no longer need, could do without, or can't afford to keep. Survey your house, basement, garage, and attic for items that could be sold.

*Determining a selling price.* Do some research to find out what your items are worth. Visit resale shops and garage sales in the area to find out the going price for similar items.

*Finding a buyer.* You can't sell any of your possessions without finding someone willing to buy them. Think about ways you can inform prospective buyers of what you want to sell. Community bulletin boards in supermarkets, shopping malls, and laundromats are very popular for posting "For Sale" notices. Cards with small tear-off tabs listing your phone number and the item for sale make it easier for buyers to call you. Other inexpensive ways to advertise your sale items are radio call-in shows that allow for sale items and classified ads in newspapers or shoppers.

## Worksheet 1—Net Worth Statement

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Assets (What You Own)                      \$ Amount**

#### **Liquid Assets**

Cash on Hand \_\_\_\_\_  
 Checking Account \_\_\_\_\_  
 Savings Account \_\_\_\_\_  
 Money Market Account \_\_\_\_\_  
 Certificates of Deposit \_\_\_\_\_  
 Cash Value Life Insurance \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Marketable Assets**

Savings Bonds \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other Bonds \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mutual Funds \_\_\_\_\_  
 Stocks \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Other Personal Assets**

Market Value of House \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other Real Estate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Value of Vehicles \_\_\_\_\_  
 Value of Boats, RV'S \_\_\_\_\_  
 Furniture and Appliances \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Non-Marketable Assets**

IRA's \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pensions (current value) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Amount others owe you \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Total Assets**

### **Liabilities (What You Owe)                      \$ Amount**

Mortgage \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Equity Loan \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vehicle Loan(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other Installment Loans \_\_\_\_\_  
 Credit Card Balances \_\_\_\_\_  
 Charge Account Balances \_\_\_\_\_  
 Personal Loans \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current Unpaid Bills \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other Debts \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Total Liabilities**

**Assets - Liabilities = Net Worth**  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_ - \$ \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## Worksheet 2—Family Resources

Resource	Examples	What	Who
Skills	Skill in sewing baking, woodcarving		
Abilities Interests	Interest in gardening Ability to plan		
Job Training or Certification	Car repair, child care certification		
Attitudes	Willingness to accept change; flexibility		
Self- confidence	Willingness to take risk, try new things		
Creativity	New ideas, artistry		
Awareness	Sensitivity to needs of others		
Time			
Energy			
Other			

### References

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