

Savings

We could order people to stop spending, as an Orwellian edict. This would be similar to the case of my third group of students, for whom the deadline was dictated by me. But are there cleverer ways to get people to monitor their own spending? A few years ago, for instance, I heard about the “ice glass” method for reducing credit card spending. It’s a home remedy for impulsive spending. You put your credit card into a glass of water and put the glass in the freezer. Then, when you impulsively decide to make a purchase, you must first wait for the ice to thaw before extracting the card. By then, your compulsion to purchase has subsided. (You can’t just put the card in the microwave, of course, because then you’d destroy the magnetic strip.)

But here’s another approach that is arguably better, and certainly more up-to-date. John Leland wrote a very interesting article in the *New York Times* in which he described a growing trend of self-shame: “When a woman who calls herself Tricia discovered last week that she owed \$22,302 on her credit cards, she could not wait to spread the news. Tricia, 29, does not talk to her family or friends about her finances, and says she is ashamed of her personal debt. Yet from the laundry room of her home in northern Michigan, Tricia does something that would have been unthinkable—and impossible—a generation ago: She goes online and posts intimate details of her financial life, including her net worth (now a negative \$38,691), the balance and finance charges on her credit cards, and the amount of debt she has paid down (\$15,312) since starting the blog about her debt last year.”

It is also clear that Tricia’s blog is part of a larger trend. Apparently, there are dozens of Web sites (maybe there are