# **The Money Game: A Teen’s Guide to Financial Freedom**

The Money Game: A Teen’s Guide to Financial FreedomLevel Up Your Money Game - First Paycheck to Financial BossBag Builder Tips #7: Building wealth is a three-part game.Money earned from any source—be it a first job, a side hustle, or a burgeoning business—serves as a powerful lesson in how the world works. Every dollar you earn teaches you to spot opportunities, negotiate confidently, and bounce back when challenges arise. The sooner you grasp these principles, the faster you’ll seize control of your financial destiny. As Proverbs 14:23 reminds us, “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.” This simple truth underscores that wealth isn’t built by dreaming—it’s built by taking action.Picture this: It’s a typical Monday morning. Your friends are complaining about being broke, scrolling through social media looking at things they can’t afford, and dreaming about “someday” when they’ll have money. But not you. Not anymore. Because you’re about to learn the cheat codes to the money game that most adults don’t even know. Excited? I certainly hope so.I get it - money talk usually sounds about as exciting as watching paint dry. But what if I told you that managing your money is actually more like playing the most epic video game ever. A game where you level up in real life, where the power-ups are actual dollars in your account, and where the final boss is financial freedom.Why This Chapter Will Change Your LifeThink of this chapter as your ultimate strategy guide. We’re going to cover:How to turn your first job from a basic tutorial into a power-leveling opportunityThe secret techniques to unlocking multiple income streamsThe boss-level strategies for building your own business empireThe hidden mechanics of making money while you sleepThe rare achievements that will set you apart from 99% of your peersRemember that quote we started with? “Building wealth is a three-part game.” Well, wealth isn’t built by accident—it’s a three-part game. First, you’ve got to earn it. Then, you have to protect it. But the real magic? Learning how to grow it. Earning, keeping, and multiplying—that’s the blueprint. Master that, and you’re not just making money… you’re building a legacy.How to Use This ChapterThis isn’t your ordinary finance book lol. Each section is designed like a game level, complete with:Clear objectivesPower-up opportunitiesBoss fight strategiesBonus roundsAchievement unlocksReal-world side questsAs you progress, you’ll collect “Money Master Points” (MMPs) by completing challenges and exercises. By the end of this chapter, you’ll have enough MMPs to establish your first serious income stream.Before We Begin: The Mindset ResetYour journey isn’t just about making money; it’s about transforming your mindset so that money becomes a tool for building your future, not merely a means to satisfy immediate wants. Here’s something wild to think about: Every billionaire in history started exactly where you are right now. The difference? They learned to play the money game early and played it smart. As Proverbs 14:23 tells us, “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.” In gamer terms? Stop watching walkthrough videos and start playing the game yourself.Let’s shatter some myths right now:Myth #1: “You need money to make money” Reality: You need strategy and action.Myth #2: “I’m too young to start” Reality: Your age is your biggest advantage.Myth #3: “It’s all about luck” Reality: It’s about systems and persistence.Level 1: Your First Job - From Newbie to ProRemember your first time playing a new game? That mixture of excitement and nervousness? Landing your first job feels exactly like that. But don’t worry - I’m about to give you the ultimate walkthrough.Understanding the Job MarketBefore you start applying everywhere like a button-masher, let’s talk strategy. The job market is like an open-world map with different territories:Entry-Level Territories:Retail Realm - Pros: Flexible hours, employee discounts, people skills - Cons: Weekend work, standing all day - Perfect for: Social butterflies who love fashion or techFood Service Federation - Pros: Tips, fast-paced environment, teamwork - Cons: Rush hours, customer service challenges - Perfect for: Quick learners who thrive under pressureRecreation Region - Pros: Fun environment, active work, youth colleagues - Cons: Seasonal work, weather dependent - Perfect for: Energetic people who hate desk workReal Story: My friend’s son started at a Mall food court, thinking it was just about serving fries. Two years later, he was promoted to assistant manager, running social media for three locations, and making triple her starting pay. The lesson here, every job has hidden power-ups if you know where to look.Craft Your Character Sheet (AKA Your Résumé)Your resume is like your character stats sheet - it needs to highlight your best attributes. Here’s how to max out your stats:Name and Contact Info (Your player tag)Education (Your training grounds)Experience (Your completed quests)Skills (Your special abilities)Keep it clean and focusedHighlight your achievementsCustomize it for each job (yes, really)Show your personality while staying professionalPower-Up Opportunities:School Projects - Group leadership roles - Successful presentations - Creative solutionsVolunteer Work - Community service - Church activities - Environmental projectsExtra-Curricular Activities - Sports teams (Leadership, teamwork) - School clubs (Organization, initiative) - Personal projects (Creativity, dedication)The Interview Boss BattleThe job interview is your first major boss battle. Here’s your strategy guide which can be used at any level:Pre-Battle Prep: - Research the company like you’re studying for a game speedrun - Show up early (seriously, no one ever got minus points for being early) - Dress like you already work there - Come loaded with questions that show you’re ready to play - Browse their website - Check their social media - Read recent news - Talk to current employees if possiblePractice Common Questions - “Why do you want to work here?” - “Tell me about yourself” - “How do you handle challenges?” - “What are your strengths/weaknesses?”Gear Up (Dress Code) - Research company culture - Choose neat, clean clothing - Aim slightly more formal than daily wear - Check grooming detailsBattle Tactics: - Arrive 15 minutes early - Bring extra resumes - Maintain eye contact - Use the STAR method for answers: - Situation - Task - Action - ResultDylan enjoys playing video games in his spare time. He shared during his first interview at the tech store, he treated it like he was explaining game strategies to a friend - passionate but professional. The manager later said his enthusiasm was what got him hired.First Paycheck Power-UpsCongratulations! You’ve landed your first job. But don’t celebrate by blowing that first paycheck like most of us have done. When you know better, you do better. Let’s talk about leveling up your money management skills.Understanding Your Paycheck: (In case this was not covered at schools)Gross Pay vs. Net Pay - Your gross pay is the total amount you earn before deductions. Your net pay is what you actually take home. - Common deductions: - Taxes: Federal (government) and state (local) taxes are taken out automatically. These fund public services like roads, schools, and government programs. - Social Security &amp; Medicare (future benefits): These deductions help fund retirement and healthcare for older generations—and eventually, for you too!Your First Job: More Than Just a PaycheckYour first job is not simply a way to make money—it’s a critical introduction to how money works in the real world. Every paycheck is a lesson in budgeting, planning, and financial management.Managing Your First PaycheckOnce you see the numbers, it’s time to manage your money wisely: - Save First: Aim to set aside 10–20% of each paycheck to build your savings. - Invest in Yourself: Allocate funds for courses, books, or skill-building activities that will further your personal and professional growth. - Cover Essentials: Budget for necessary expenses like transportation, food, and communications. - Give Back: Whether through tithing, donations, or simply helping a friend, remember that giving can be a powerful financial principle. - Spend Smart: Avoid impulse purchases and practice delayed gratification.Paycheck Management Strategy: How to Manage Your Paycheck WiselyBudgeting Like a ProHow to waste $4000 a year: Spend $10.95 a day on things you don’t need. To find extra money in your budget, look for patterns like this. A few changes to your spending habits can make a BIG impact on your bottom line.Budgeting is the cornerstone of financial success. It’s the process of understanding where your money is coming from, where it’s going, and how to manage it effectively. This chapter will guide you through the basics of budgeting, introduce you to some popular techniques like the 50/30/20 rule, and provide practical exercises to help you create and stick to a budget that works for you, dive into the psychology of spending and saving, and create a clear path toward setting financial goals.Creating a Budget: At its core, a budget is a plan for your money. - Identifying all sources of income, even small side hustles whether it’s from a part-time job, allowance, or side hustles. - Categorizing expenses to understand where your money goes food, transportation, phone bills and entertainment, etc. - Prioritizing essentials while saving for future goals even if it’s $10-20 a month. - Allocating funds for emergencies, leisure, and self-improvement even if it’s $5. - Creating a budget that supports your goals and community values.Stick to a BudgetCreating a budget is only the first step—sticking to it is where the real work happens. Here’s how to stay on track: - Set Clear Goals: Understand your spending habits. What are you budgeting for? Saving for college? Buying a car? Having a goal makes sticking to your budget easier. - Automate Savings: If possible, set up automatic transfers to your savings account so you’re not tempted to spend that money. Categorize your expenses into groups like food, transportation, entertainment, and savings. - Track Your Spending: My sons and I use Mint or YNAB apps (You Need a Budget) to monitor where our money goes. - Budget Your Income: Follow the 50/30/20 rule: It is a personal favorite and one of the most popular and beginner-friendly budgeting methods. It divides your income into three categories: - 50% for needs: Calculate how much you can spend on essentials. - 30% for wants: Determine your fun spending limit. - 20% for savings and investments. Pay Yourself FirstAnother Budgeting Technique is the 80/20 Rule: This method focuses on saving 20% of your income and using the remaining 80% for all other expenses. This is great for people who prefer fewer categories or are just starting out.Reward Yourself: Celebrate small wins. If you save $100, treat yourself to something small but meaningful to celebrate this milestone.Remember, no single budgeting technique is perfect for everyone. The best method is the one you can stick to and that helps you achieve your financial goals. By exploring these techniques, you’ll not only find a budgeting method that works for you but also gain a deeper understanding of how to manage your money effectively.My Strategy: I keep three bank accounts: one for everyday spending, one for saving, and one I treat like it doesn’t exist. You can set this up too—no matter how much you make. That “secret” account? It could be your down payment for your first car, your emergency stash, or the start of something big.Financial Tip: As soon as you start earning a paycheck, set aside a portion—ideally 10–20%—for savings and don’t touch it. Automating your savings helps develop good financial habits from the very beginning.Work Benefits: Even in entry-level jobs, you might get perks like employee discounts, tuition assistance, or even stock options (if you’re lucky). Don’t overlook these—they can be worth more than cash!Level 2: Monetizing Your Skills &amp; Passions and Building Multiple Income StreamsNow, welcome to the exciting world of side hustles! Not feeling the 9-to-5 grind? A side hustle lets you earn on your own terms by turning your skills into cash. Bottom Line: If you have a talent, someone will pay for it.Let me tell you about a real one. Just a few years ago, this woman I met was facing eviction—notice taped to her door, stress at an all-time high, and no clear way out. But what she did have was determination. She made a decision that day: no more waiting for someone to save her. She got creative, picked up a side hustle, then another, and another. She sold products online, started a small after school care business, and flipped items for profit. Each hustle became a stepping stone. Fast forward to 2025—this same woman is now earning over a million dollars a year. Let that sink in. From almost losing everything to building an empire. Don’t underestimate the power of a side hustle. When done with strategy and consistency, that “extra income” can become your main source—and your path to financial freedom.Here are some popular Side Hustle Ideas for TeensTutoring: Good at math, English, or science? Tutoring is a billion dollar industry. Parents will gladly pay for help with their kids’ schoolwork.Creative Services - Digital Art ($20-50/piece) - Logo Design ($30-100/project) - Video Editing ($25-75/hour) - Music Production ($50-200/track)Service-Based Business - Social media management ($300-1000/month per client) - Web design ($500-2000/project) - Content creation ($200-800/project) - Event photography ($200-500/event)Physical Services - Pet Care ($15-25/hour) - Braiding hair - Yard Work ($20-40/hour) - Car Detailing ($50-150/car) - Personal Shopping ($20-30/hour)Freelancing: Websites like Fiverr and Upwork let you sell your services.Reselling: Find limited-edition sneakers, thrift store gems, or collectible items and flip them for a profit.Content Creation: Social media is a business! If you can create valuable or entertaining content, you can monetize it through sponsorships, affiliate marketing, or ad revenue.Secure the Bag Tip: Start small. Pick one hustle and commit to making your first $100. Once you hit that, scale up.Identifying Your Special Abilities: To Find Your Passion and GiftEveryone has a gift! Everyone has a skill someone else is willing to pay for. For me, it’s teaching math and financial literacy—turning numbers into knowledge that changes lives. Let’s find yours: - What do friends always ask for your help with? - What could you talk about for hours? - What do you do better than most people your age? - What problems do you enjoy solving? Think about what you enjoy doing and the skills you can offerTest the Market: - Start small by offering your services to friends, family, or through online communities. Early feedback will help you gauge demand and refine your offerings.Manage Your Time: - Balancing a side hustle with other commitments can be challenging. Schedule dedicated hours and track your workload to maintain quality and avoid burnout.Leverage Online Platforms: - Utilize gig marketplaces or social media to showcase your services, making it easy for potential clients or customers to find and pay you.Real Results: My nephew started walking dogs after school. Built it into a pet-sitting business. Now make $2000/month managing a team of five other teen dog walkers. He is only 17.The Digital Money MakingThe internet isn’t just for watching videos and posting pics - The internet is like an infinite dungeon with treasure around every corner. It’s a gold mine if you know where to look.Here’s how to mine it:Content Creation Paths:YouTube Strategy Guide - Gaming content - Tutorial videos - Lifestyle vlogs - Educational contentInstagram/TikTok Tactics - Choose your niche - Consistent posting schedule - Engagement strategies - Monetization methodsDigital Product Development - Printables - Online courses - Digital art - TemplatesNaomi created a study planner template. Sold it on Etsy for $5. Made $3000 in passive income last year. Use your talents.Interactive. Take this Side Hustle Challenge: The 15-Minute Hustle Map: - List three skills you’re confident in (for example, Braiding hair, nails, lashes, mowing lawn car detailing, baking, coding, writing…). - Next to each, jot down two ways you could monetize that skill. - Circle the idea that excites you the most—this is your MVP (Minimum Viable Product). - Take action this week—find one way to earn money outside of a traditional job.Level 3: Building Your EmpireEntrepreneurship: Owning Your Financial FutureSome of the wealthiest people in the world started young. Whether it was mowing lawns, selling lemonade, or designing apps, they saw a need and filled it. Believe it!!!How to Start a Small Business - Find a Problem to Solve: The best businesses solve real problems. What do people around you need? Sometimes it is the simplest business. Stop doubting yourself. - Start Small: You don’t need a big investment—just a solid idea and action. - Test the Market: Before going all in, see if people are willing to pay for what you’re offering. - Build Your Brand: Create an Instagram page, TikTok account, or website to showcase your business. - Keep Track of Your Money: Business income isn’t just profit—you have expenses, too. Use an app like QuickBooks or Wave to track what you make and spend.Remember, if you’re under 18, you may need a parent to help you set up a business bank account or register your business.Entrepreneurship Challenge: Entrepreneurship: Building Your Own GameSome of the highest-scoring players in the money game started by building their own empires. Whether it was Mr. Zuckerberg coding Facebook in his dorm room or that kid down the street in your neighborhood (or the classroom), who turned a lawn-mowing hustle into a full landscaping business, it all began with one thing: spotting a problem they could solve.I recently met a young man who reminded me of this. He’s sharp, driven—and already running his own lawn care business. When he talked about it, you could see the passion in his eyes. And when he looked down? It usually had something to do with his mower being down—not because he was tired of the work, but because he lives for it.With that kind of heart and hustle, I have no doubt his business will blow up after high school. He told me he’s already earning $3,000–$5,000 each summer—and get this: he’s investing it. This young man isn’t just cutting grass. He’s cutting a path straight to financial freedom. Kudos. Cas! I am so proud of you.Entrepreneurship Isn’t for Everyone—But Are You Up for the Challenge?Bag Builder Tip #8: Ideas Don’t Make You Rich—Execution Does. You might have a million-dollar idea, but it won’t earn a dime if it stays in your head. The real game-changer is action. Test your idea, talk to potential customers, make a basic logo, sell one product. Just start. Every big business began with a small, brave step.Now, your turn…Think of a business idea that solves a real problem. Write a one-page plan detailing what you’ll sell, who your customers are, and how you’ll reach them. Identify your target customers, your unique offering, and one actionable step to take this week. Then, take one step toward launching in a few months!Starting Your Business Quest:Pre-Launch Checklist: - Market Research - Identify target audience - Study competitors - Find your unique angle - Test market responseFind Your Mission: - What problems do people around you have? - What solutions can you offer? - What makes your solution special?Gather Your Resources: - What tools do you need? - How much gold (money) do you need to start? - Who can join your party (team)?Legal Setup: Business structure, Permits needed, Insurance needs…Build Your Base: - Create your brand (your game’s unique style) - Set up your online presence - Start small, but think bigMarketing Your BusinessEvery great product needs players to know about it. Here’s your marketing strategy guide:Social Media Domination:Platform Selection - Instagram: Visual products - TikTok: Youth market - YouTube: Tutorials/reviews - LinkedIn: Professional servicesContent Strategy - Daily posts - Weekly features - Monthly campaigns - Quarterly promotionsEngagement Tactics - Reply to comments - Run polls/surveys - Host live sessions - Create challengesSo many success stories: This young lady turned her makeup tutorials into a 50K following and now makes more than her parents - all from her bedroom studio.Level 4: Money Management Mastery: Building Your Business Support SystemEvery successful business needs a strong foundation. Let’s build yours:The Financial Command Center:Banking Setup - Business checking account - Savings account for taxes - Emergency fund account - Growth capital account (It’s where you put money intentionally to grow)Payment Systems - Card processors (2.9% average fee) - Digital wallets (ApplePay. PayPal, Venmo) - Invoicing softwareBonus Round: Action Items - Calculate your target earnings for the next month - Start one side hustle in the next 3-6 months - Open a savings account - Track your spending for 1 month - Set three financial goals: - Short-term (3 months) - Medium-term (1 year) - Long-term (5+ years)Your Journey Begins NowRemember, every financial empire started with a single dollar. Your age isn’t a limitation - it’s your secret weapon. You have time to experiment, learn, and grow. These strategies in this chapter aren’t just theory - they’re battle-tested by real teens who are building their futures right now.Here’s what nobody tells you: every dollar you earn is teaching you something. It’s showing you how the world really works, how to spot opportunities, and most importantly, how to bounce back when life throws those inevitable curveballs your way. As Proverbs 14:23 puts it, “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.” Translation? Stop dreaming and start doing.Start small, but think big. Take action today, even if it’s just setting up your first savings account or brainstorming business ideas. Your future self will thank you for starting early.Remember: The money game isn’t about having the most gold pieces - it’s about using them wisely to build the life you want. Now get out there and start playing to win!Bringing It All TogetherEarning money for the first time is a pivotal moment in any teenager’s life. It’s your stepping stone into adulthood, giving you a taste of independence and responsibility. Whether you’re juggling a part-time job, launching a side hustle, or dreaming of turning your passion into a full-fledged business, the principles you’ve learned in this chapter apply everywhere: plan, prioritize, and invest in your future.By understanding the difference between gross and net pay, you’ll avoid sticker shock on payday. By creating and sticking to a budget, you’ll ensure that you live within your means while still saving and enjoying life. And by exploring ways to invest and expand your earning potential, you’ll set yourself up for future success—whether that means paying for college, traveling the world, or starting your own company down the road.Above all, remember that managing your paycheck wisely is about balance. It’s not about never having fun; it’s about making conscious choices that reflect your goals, values, and future plans. Money management is a skill, and like any skill, it takes practice, patience, and occasional trial and error. The more you learn and apply, the closer you’ll get to financial security and the freedom to pursue your dreams.Use the practical exercises in this chapter to reinforce your learning. Share what you’ve learned with friends and family. Ask questions. Seek out information. The journey to becoming financially savvy starts now, with your very first paycheck, and the habits you form will serve you well for a lifetime.Now it’s your turn. Take what you’ve learned and start building your financial empire. Remember, every master player started as a newbie. The difference? They took action.Game on!Chapter Review at a GlanceFirst Jobs: Teach discipline and financial basics.Excitement vs. Reality: Your first paycheck may be lower than expected due to taxes and deductions.Side Hustles: Turn skills into flexible income.Earning Options: Whether you work a part-time job, start a side hustle, or launch a business, each has unique benefits and challenges.From Gross to Net Pay: Understand each deduction on your pay stub, so you can budget effectively.Budgeting Basics: Use a simple system (like 50/30/20) to manage your money, separating needs, wants, and savings.Saving &amp; Investing: Small amounts grow over time, especially when you start early.Common Mistakes: Overspending, not saving, ignoring taxes, and being afraid to talk about money can hold you back.Practical Exercises: Creating a pay stub, building a budget, simulating investments, and exploring a side hustle help ground these principles in real life.Entrepreneurship: Solve problems, build legacy.Passive Income: Leverage time and creativityKey TakeawaysYour paycheck is a tool—use it intentionally.Taxes and savings aren’t enemies; they’re part of your financial foundation.Small choices today (like skipping a $5 latte) compound into big opportunities.Budgeting 101: Make Your Money Work for You50% Needs: For teens, this might be phone bills, car insurance, or saving for college.30% Wants: Concerts, games, clothes.20% Savings/Investing: Build a safety net or grow wealth.Learning to budget now = less stress in adulthood.Final ThoughtsEarning money is an essential step toward financial security and personal fulfillment. Whether you take on a first job, launch a side hustle, or establish a thriving business, remember that continuous learning, strategic planning, and disciplined money management are your greatest assets. By focusing on each stage of your earning journey with intention and clarity, you’ll be well-positioned to enjoy both immediate gains and long-term rewards.Financial Tips to TeensStart Small, But Start Now: Whether it’s saving $10 a week or trying out a tiny side hustle, the best time to begin is now. The earlier you start, the more you can leverage time to your advantage.Automation Is Your Friend: Whenever possible, automate your savings or bill payments. Having a portion of your paycheck automatically transferred into a savings account means you won’t forget or be tempted to spend it.Learn to Negotiate: Whether you’re selling your artwork or being interviewed for a job, don’t be afraid to discuss compensation respectfully. You’ll never get what you don’t ask for.Diversify Your Skills: Even if you love your job or hustle, keep learning new skills—coding, design, writing, public speaking. The more you have to offer, the easier it will be to earn.Track Every Dollar: Being aware of your spending habits is the first step to changing them if needed. Use apps or a simple spreadsheet to track income, expenses, and saving goals.Keep this knowledge close, and you’ll be well on your way to making the most out of every paycheck—now and in the future.