

MELISA SLOAN



**BIG
MOMENTS**

**EXPERT ADVICE FOR
CONQUERING THOSE
MOMENTS THAT
DEFINE US**

BIG MOMENTS

‘There is so much to love about Melisa Sloan’s latest book: *BIG MOMENTS*. I think every reader will relate to the life-changing moments she writes about, and most will be extremely grateful to have her wisdom and advice to help guide them through the critical moments that impact on our future. A detailed, thorough, fun and extremely practical read. Job well done, Melisa Sloan.’

**Andrew Griffiths, International Bestselling Author,
14 books sold in 65 countries**

‘Melisa has created a really useful resource that guides readers through life’s big decisions. With her friendly style, it feels like sitting down at the kitchen counter over a cup of tea for some sensible advice from a wise friend. Backed up by experts who tackle specialist areas, it both opened my eyes to issues I hadn’t thought about and reassured me they could be managed. I wish I’d had this book available when I was younger as it would have helped me tackle life’s big moments with confidence. I will be putting this into the hands of my young friends who are navigating leaving home, starting a career, heading overseas, getting hitched and starting a family.’

**Fiona McLay, Tech-enabled Lawyer Evangelist
and Founder of McLay Legal Consulting**

‘I devoured Melisa’s book in two days. Wow! I wish there was something like this available when I was a young(er) adult. I will buy copies for my (adult) kids, my nephews and my nieces. Life, as Melisa mentions, is chock full of curveballs and that of course is what makes life in the 21st century so interesting. Melisa’s book will help many not to get KO’d by these curveballs.’

John Chisholm, Founder of John Chisholm Consulting

‘I can’t speak more highly of Melisa’s book for helping young adults meet all the new challenges they face for the first time with confidence. This is the guidebook they need to help them every step of the way with a path forward. Melisa has written it very cleverly. She connects with her target audience through relatability, authenticity and without judgment. The other key part of the book that stands out is how she has tapped into so many experts across so many important areas of life’s progression. And those resources are all in the one book. I remember when I was growing up, it was almost a prerequisite that a Melways was a gift for most people turning 18 to throw in the back of the newly purchased car to accompany the fresh driver’s licence. It could be argued this book should be the new prerequisite gift from parents to their children as they become young adults. Instead of navigating the roads, this book will help you navigate all the big moments in life with all the expert advice in the one book.’

**Adam White, Sports Broadcaster and Media Training and
Media Management Consulting, Media Champions**

‘When the first of my children was born, my mother said to me, “It’s such a shame children don’t come with a handbook or manual. It would make raising them so much easier.” Several decades on, Melisa Sloan has penned an operating manual, not for babies but for the likes of my now-adult children as they navigate some more of life’s milestones or big moments. Melisa applies her pragmatic lawyerly mind to the big issues and transactions that can stop us in our tracks as adults of any age. I intend to gift this book to each of my three children as the guide I wish I’d had. It would have made adulting so much easier!’

**Anne-Marie David, Executive Director,
College of Law Queensland**

‘It’s funny how we all have to traverse these “big moments” in life but it tends to be only after the event that we share our learnings. In this great book, Melisa Sloan has gathered all the information we all wish we had in advance of those big moments so that we can prepare, plan or at least navigate those moments with a little more ease. This is a great, simple read for anyone wanting to be in charge of their own future.’

**Clarissa Rayward, Lawyer, Author, Founder and
Director of Brisbane Family Law**

‘Small matters often don’t feel like they matter – until the big moments when they really do. Many of us don’t pay enough attention to those small details, which makes Melisa Sloan’s one-stop guide an invaluable resource, filled with expert advice on how to make sure we get the most out of life and don’t get caught short when it really matters.’

**Brydon Coverdale, TV Presenter, Quiz Writer,
Chaser and Journalist**

BIG MOMENTS

**EXPERT ADVICE FOR CONQUERING THOSE
BIG MOMENTS THAT DEFINE US**

MELISA SLOAN



First published in 2023 by Melisa Sloan

© Melisa Sloan 2023

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review), no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission.

All inquiries should be made to the author.

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

ISBN: 978-1-923007-39-0

Book production and text design by Publish Central

Cover design by Julia Kuris

All icons from the Noun Project

The paper this book is printed on is environmentally friendly.

Disclaimer

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only, and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION

Sliding doors moments 1

Meet the experts 7

How to get the most out of this book 8

CHAPTER 1

I got the job! 9



Checking the employment contract 11

Seeking appropriate advice 15

Negotiating leave 17

Nerves are part of the package 17

Be honest and reliable 18

Don't be shy 19

Payslips 23

Problems in the workplace 23

Behaving appropriately 24

Ending the relationship 27

What if my employer goes broke? 30



CHAPTER 2

Managing your \$\$\$ 37

- Buying your first ride 39
- The biggest debt you will ever have 43
- Lending money to a mate 44
- Buy now pay later 46
- Relationship debt 47
- If it's yours, protect it 51

CHAPTER 3

I'm outta here 57



- Travelling 59
- When you travel you have to play by the rules 60
- Travel insurance 63
- If you get sick or injured overseas 76
- What to do if something happens to a travel companion overseas 79
- Travelling with a disability 83
- Travelling LGBTIQ+ 88
- Working overseas 95
- Travelling with a criminal record 101




CHAPTER 4

Starting a business 109

- Starting a side hustle 112
- The practical stuff 115
- Marketing the socks off your business 120
- Protecting your business 121
- Protecting your brand and ideas 124

CHAPTER 5

Buying your first pad 133

- 
- Home sweet home 135
 - So ... where? 139
 - What type of place? 140
 - Established vs off the plan 144
 - Additional property buying costs 148
 - Inspecting the property 148
 - Having the contract reviewed 150
 - Different ways to purchase property 152
 - Purchasing with someone else 154
 - Paying the deposit 155
 - Changed your mind after signing the contract? 156
 - First home owner concessions 158
 - Final inspection 161
 - Moving day 162



CHAPTER 6

I do! 169

- Getting hitched 171
 - Always read the fine print 171
- Wedding insurance? Yes! Wedding insurance! 173
 - The honeymoon 173
 - Let's elope 174
- Don't forget to update your important documents 176
 - Changing your identity 177
 - We need to talk ... 177

CHAPTER 7

Embracing your identity 185

Officially changing your name 187

Officially changing your sex 191

Keeping everything up to date 195



CHAPTER 8

Growing your fam 201

Making sure they are taken care of 205

Letters of Love 210



CHAPTER 9

After you're gone 215

The important stuff that you don't want to think about 217

Taking care of your personal assets 219

Taking care of your children 227

Taking care of your digital assets 234

Taking care of your business assets 239

Taking care of your trust assets 241

Taking care of your super 241

What if I can no longer make my own decisions? 242



CHAPTER 10

Insurance: boring but vital 251

An essential tool 253

Where should I hold my insurance? 259

When might I not be covered? 261



CHAPTER 11

It wasn't meant to end this way 265

The D word 267

Let's talk de facto 277

If you don't have an agreement in place 279

Update those documents now 279



CHAPTER 12

Life goes full circle 283

The time has come 286

The process of putting your parent into a residential aged-care facility 292

The not-so-fun bit 296

The important documents your parent needs to have in place 300

Capture the memories and legacy 302

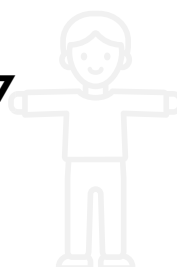


CHAPTER 13

Looking after yourself 307

For many of us it is hard to switch off 309

By the numbers 313



CHAPTER 14

What's your end game? 317

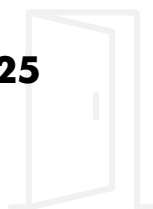


CONCLUSION

Where to from here? 325

The experts 330

A big thank you 331

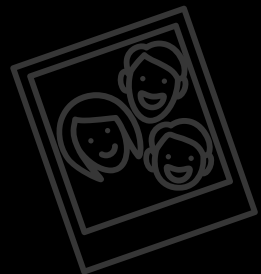
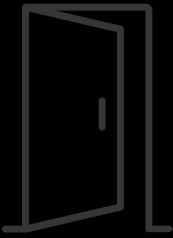
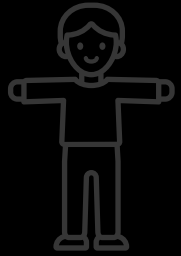






INTRODUCTION

SLIDING DOORS MOMENTS





THE 'BIG MOMENTS' AHEAD ...

Our lives are made up of many Big Moments, and it is those Big Moments that define us. Some of those moments are full of infinite joy – landing your dream job, marrying the love of your life, having your first child, buying your first pad, starting a business, travelling to places on your bucket list, and sharing all of these moments with people you love.

Along the way there are also not-so-good moments – breaking up with your love, losing your job, getting into a financial pickle, travel ending badly, and your parents encountering declining health and needing care.

We often find ourselves in an unfamiliar and confusing place as we reach these milestones. We then have two options: to reach out for the right advice from someone who has skill and expertise and has travelled the road previously, or to go it alone. These crossroads are defining moments, as the decision *not* to seek the right advice may impact the rest of our life – significantly.

Let's say you are driving one sunny afternoon and come across your dream home for sale – today. You have a look and it's beautiful. Just what you want. But you need to sign a contract then and there. The agent tells you all is well with the contract and the property, and you believe him. As it's your first home you don't really know about the need for a subject to finance clause, or a pest and building clause, let alone having a lawyer review the contract to make sure all is in order. You're just excited to have found your dream place – and the agent sure seems nice. So you sign.

These crossroads are
defining moments,
as the decision *not*
to seek the right
advice may impact
the rest of our life –
significantly.

Imagine a week later you find your bank refuses to provide finance because the property is in an area targeted for compulsory acquisition to build a new freeway. There's also a major structural problem with the house, together with a major pest issue. The house is unliveable. You are in seriously deep strife with no way out, because you signed the contract *before* finding out more about the property. Your impulsive decision will have an extremely stressful, expensive and detrimental impact on your life.

In a sliding doors moment, let's backtrack and see what happens if you take a different path.

You see the property, take a look and fall in love with it. The agent tells you the property must sell today, but you politely tell him you need to consult your lawyer first. You call your lawyer and provide her with the property details. She calls back half an hour later and tells you about the issue regarding the possible compulsory acquisition, and you make the informed decision to walk away from the property. Your lawyer would also have advised you to put a subject to finance clause and pest and building inspection clause in the contract – if you had signed it. You would have had three different legitimate reasons to walk away, and that little act of getting advice would have changed the trajectory of your life forever.

The thing is, each of these Big Moments is unique to us. It's the first time we have experienced them, and it feels like sometimes we need to dig for the '101 manual' or the Dummies Guide to Life to work out how to navigate them.

That's why I am here to help. Drawing on my own experiences and those of my diverse and extensive network, I aim to help you celebrate the best days of your life in the most joyful way you can, and also stand by your side as you navigate the curveballs that life

will throw you, supporting you, lifting you up and encouraging you to believe that you have got this.

But I do not profess to know everything, and that's why I have invited some really fantastic people who know way more than me about certain topics to share their thoughts and provide you with some awesome key takeaways throughout this book. I learnt a thing or two from those who contributed, and I am sure you will too!

As this book covers so many really important topics, I simply couldn't fit in absolutely everything about every topic, however what I have done is included some really fantastic resources at the end of each chapter. That way, if you would like more information on a topic, you have it at your fingertips.

We all have different life journeys. Some readers will not have businesses, or not have children, or not have any inclination to travel, so the chapters on these topics may not be of much interest to you, and that's okay because this book is designed to be a really handy resource for you to tap into as the need arises. Although I am a lawyer, this book contains general advice only; as I am sure you would appreciate, I cannot give legal advice pertaining to all my lovely readers in this book. Like all legal matters, you should obtain legal advice specific to your own relevant circumstances from a lawyer with expertise in that area of law.

I want your life journey to be a smooth one (with the right element of fun and excitement thrown in, if that's your thing) that you enjoy, and one in which you don't make the big cringy mistakes that will impact your life, so that's why I wrote this book – for you.

So, are you ready? Are you all set to conquer those Big Moments that define you, to embrace the opportunities that come your way, to face your fears, to derive lessons from the difficult moments, to

embrace the things you love, to be brave, to live the experiences you desire and to follow your dreams?

Come along for the ride – I will show you the way.

MEET THE EXPERTS

Well, firstly – me! But I want to be totally transparent with you – I don't know everything (ROFL). I subscribe to the school of thought that there is so much to learn, and so I surround myself with people who know so much more than me and who can help me understand those elements where my knowledge is lacking. So, throughout this book I have reached out to some lovely friends, who so generously shared their thoughts, knowledge and expertise and provide some wonderful insights.

So please allow me the honour of introducing you to these amazing people.

Australia's Top Small Business Guru	Andrew Griffiths
Breast Cancer Specialist	Dr Chantel Thornton
The Happy Family Lawyer	Clarissa Rayward
Travel Agent Extraordinaire	Darren Kelk
Award Winning Mortgage Broker	Deb Smith
Inspirational Lawyer and Entrepreneur	Demetrio Zema
Author and Advertising Lover	Ella Ward
Channel Seven Finance Editor	Gemma Acton
Recruitment Specialist	Grant Aitken
Intellectual Property Expert	Helen Kay
CEO BlueCross	Ingrid Harvey
Inspirational Speaker	James Wood
The Marathon Wonder Woman	Jane Kilkenny

Melbourne Property Advocate
Employment Law Top Gun
Aged Care Family Chief

Lisa Stafford
Paul Horvath
Tracy Sheen

Further information on these wonderful contributors can be found on the experts page at the back of the book.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

This book is broken down into the Big Moments that occur in life. Some of them you may not have experienced yet, some of them you may never experience. So essentially this means there may be some chapters that don't really resonate with you just yet, and that's okay. You can give them a miss for now. Or you might be a person who loves information, so you may still want to read those chapters that are not relevant just yet, because they may be relevant to a friend, family member or colleague, and you know the saying – knowledge is power.

Big Moments is intended to be your go-to resource for when that particular momentous moment happens in your life. You can drag it out of the bookshelf and dig into the relevant chapter and hopefully it provides you with some really helpful guidance.

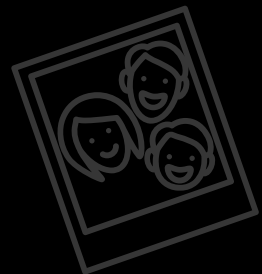
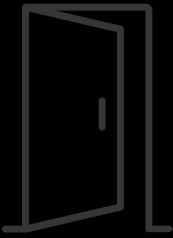
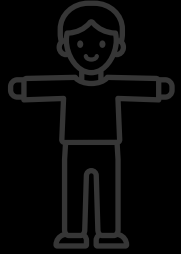
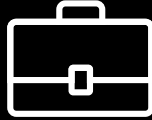
Really, you are in the driver's seat – use this book as a resource in the best way that suits you.

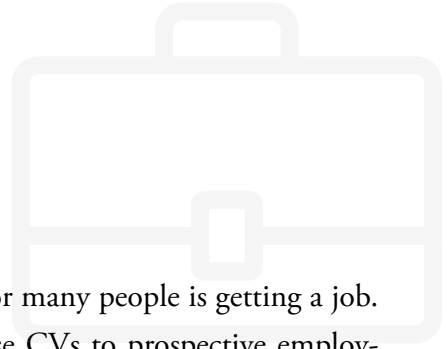
I do ask you to be mindful that while the contents of this book have been checked many times and the information is current at the time of writing, such information is always evolving and being updated, so you really need to check for current info as some of the details, particularly travel alerts, can change on a daily basis.



CHAPTER 1

I GOT THE JOB!





Let's start at the beginning.

One of the first Big Moments for many people is getting a job. Your hard work submitting all those CVs to prospective employers has paid off and you have secured your dream role. Congrats! What an exciting time in your life, particularly if it's your first full-time job or a role you are taking to progress your career. It's a good feeling to get your foot in the door and start another stage in your life journey.

But what now? Just like the property purchase example, if you rush into this without understanding the details, you can end up in a terrible situation that's difficult to get out of. So let's see how you can avoid that, beginning with the legal stuff because I'm a lawyer: your employment contract.

CHECKING THE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

Once you have received your job offer, your prospective employer will also provide you with an employment contract, which is basically a document containing all the important legal bits relating to your employment. You must read this document to make sure you fully understand the provisions of your employment, and that it contains all aspects discussed between you and your prospective employer in your interviews or any subsequent communications.

Let's dive in and have a look at things you should be checking in your contract.

The employment term

Some jobs are for a fixed term (for example, two years), which means you will probably need to reapply for your job at the conclusion of your fixed term and you may also have to renegotiate your remuneration and other conditions.

Or if you are being employed in an ongoing role (which is more common), this means that, when you start, the role has no fixed end date. This is often appealing for people as it can provide you with greater job security.

Given the varying nature of fixed-term and ongoing employment, it is imperative that you fully understand what is being offered to you and that this is correctly stipulated in your employment contract.

Remuneration and superannuation

Depending on your profession and the agreement you enter with your new employer, your remuneration will usually be covered by an award containing minimum pay rates and conditions of employment. You should check that details of the relevant award for you are correctly listed in your contract. Details of where to find information pertaining to your relevant award are listed in the resources section at the end of this chapter.

If you are being employed on an agreed salary, ensure your employment contract correctly lists your remuneration, and whether it is a salary package or a base salary plus superannuation.

At the time of writing (late 2023), employers must pay superannuation at a rate of 11 per cent of your salary. If you are being paid via a salary package the superannuation payable by your employer will be deducted from your package, so it is important you understand the distinction between the two so you know how much you will actually receive in your bank account each pay period.

Probation period

Your employment contract will probably contain a probation period – in most cases this is for a period of three months or six months. This is the period in which both you and your employer can trial whether the employment relationship is the right fit and beneficial for both parties. During your probation period either party may terminate the employment relationship without providing a reason for doing so. Your employment contract will stipulate any notice required to be given by either party to terminate the contract within your probation period.

Role and hours of work

The actual title of your role, together with the job description and your hours of work, should be clearly specified in your employment contract. If there are any ambiguities between what is listed in the job description and what was discussed with your new employer, it is important to have a chat with them prior to signing your employment contract and commencing the role to clarify the items in the job description, so you are both on the same page and to ensure you clearly understand your employer's expectations.

Leave entitlements

The National Employment Standards provide the minimum annual leave and personal leave you are entitled to. Full-time and part-time employees are entitled to four weeks of annual leave each year, prorated based on their ordinary hours of work. Full-time employees are also entitled to 10 days personal leave a year, with part-time employees entitled to an equivalent pro rata amount.

Shift workers are often entitled to greater amounts of leave depending on their industry, with many entitled to five weeks of

annual leave, which can mean more holidays, something many of us look forward to.

Some employers may be particularly generous and offer additional leave in excess of the minimum entitlement required as part of your employment conditions. This is more common in competitive employment markets where employees will be attempting to attract the best talent to their firm.

Notice period

Your employment contract will stipulate the notice period that must be provided by either party should one party wish to terminate the employment contract. Reference should also be given to any minimum legal notice requirements (which may differ), together with any notice requirements in accordance with any award that may apply to your role. Legislated minimum notice periods must be adhered to, however the award that you are employed under or your employment contract may set out longer minimum notice periods.

Restraint of trade

Some employment contracts may contain a restraint of trade provision. This clause favours your employer and is intended to restrict you for a specified period upon leaving your employment. Restrictions can include not working in the same role, industry or area, or opening a competing business within a radius of your employer's business.

For example, if you were a landscape gardener working in a specific geographic area, your employer may seek to have a restraint of trade clause inserted into your employment contract stating that you could not establish a business within a five-kilometre

radius of your employer's business for one year from the date you terminate your employment.

If your employment contract contains a restraint of trade you do not fully understand, it's important that you seek the appropriate legal advice from an employment lawyer so you fully appreciate the implications of this clause. This is particularly important should you have aspirations of one day owning your own business, as you may be restricted in doing so in some respects by the restraint of trade in your current employment contract.

SEEKING APPROPRIATE ADVICE

Employment contracts are legal documents and often contain legal jargon that can be difficult to understand. If you are the recipient of a formal, detailed employment contract and are struggling to understand it, reach out to an employment lawyer, who will be able to clearly explain your employment contract to you. You should never sign anything you do not fully understand as it could have unfavourable consequences for you in the future, so invest some time seeking appropriate advice to enable you to fully understand what you are signing.

If you are not happy with the employment contract and your prospective employer is not willing to amend it, this is an opportune time for you to determine if this job is right for you. Most employers will be reasonable about amending an employment contract unless the requested change is onerous or not suited to the operation of their business. You should never feel forced to accept an employment contract, and if you do, you should probably walk away as there is clearly a better job out there for you.

If you are not happy with the employment contract and your prospective employer is not willing to amend it, this is an opportune time for you to determine if this job is right for you.

NEGOTIATING LEAVE

If you have some important plans or holidays booked, whether they be planned one month or four months into your new role, let your prospective employer know, either in the interview or prior to accepting the job offer. A few of my team members advised me about planned holidays or events for which they would require leave during their initial interviews and I was so thankful they did, as it was all transparent and I knew if I was to hire them that these requests were part of the package.

By putting your employer on notice that you already have these plans, they can agree to this prior to you commencing your role rather than you waiting until you have started and then subsequently requesting leave, only to find out that it's not feasible for the firm. Bite the bullet and start off on the right foot. If you have holiday plans, be brave and ask for the leave before you start – the worst thing they can say is no.

NERVES ARE PART OF THE PACKAGE

Starting your career will be an exciting time in your life. You may have finished tertiary education, where you spent considerable time learning about the important facets of your chosen career. Or you may be embarking on a trade that will make you very popular with your friends, who invariably will be seeking your help throughout their lives with their reno project or when something breaks down or needs to be fixed – we all need and love our tradie mates.

Many of you would have had part-time or casual employment while at school or university, with varying levels of responsibilities. Such employment always looks good on a CV when applying for

your first real career job and may give you an advantage in a tight market.

It's normal to feel nervous in a new role. It's normal to have imposter syndrome and feel you are way out of your comfort zone – because you probably are! Many of us have been there before you, and I can say you will be okay, so let those nerves settle and embrace this new chapter of your life and the opportunities that come your way.

A reasonable employer doesn't expect you to know everything on your first day, let alone your first week. Most organisations will have an induction program with training on their systems and processes, and they may even buddy you up with a colleague initially who you can seek advice and guidance from. It's normal for everything to feel unfamiliar, and for you to feel like you are the new kid on the block, because, well, you are. And that's okay. If anything, it gives you the opportunity to ask as many questions as your enquiring mind seeks answers to. The sooner you learn the company's culture, systems and processes the easier it will be.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you're having difficulties and you continue sinking further into a hole every day from the outset but you do not ask for help, your colleagues may assume all is well and continue to give you additional tasks, which will just worsen your predicament and stress levels. Honesty is the best policy, so asking for help or guidance will deliver a much better long-term result.

BE HONEST AND RELIABLE

This honesty extends to what you include on your CV. Frequently employers, including myself, are presented with CVs that stretch the truth in what an applicant's skillset is. Employers spend

considerable money and time recruiting and inducting employees, and it is extremely frustrating when it transpires that your skillset does not match what you list on your CV. If you don't have the skills the employer requires but are really keen to acquire them, let your prospective employer know either within your application or at your interview. Passion can play an important role when determining the best applicant, and you never know where it will get you.

Invariably you will make mistakes during your employment; we all do – it's part of life. It's important that when you make a mistake you own it. Apologise for the error, figure out what went wrong and put in place a plan to make sure it never happens again. If you adopt this approach, it will hold you in good stead and your employer will respect you for owning the mistake. It is a much better option than hiding the mistake in the hope that no-one will find out, as it is likely you will be caught out in the end and your behaviour in covering up the mistake will not be highly regarded.

Many of you will work in a large business, where over time you can feel you are part of the furniture and go unnoticed. One way you can get noticed is to be reliable and dependable and possess excellent knowledge and skills in your area of expertise, so colleagues are drawn to you to seek out your talents. This will surely be noted by superiors and could lead to career progression. Being proactive and a strong team player are also attributes employers favour.

DON'T BE SHY

If you are inclined to sit quietly in team meetings there will be others who are happy to take the shine away from you. This does not mean you need to be constantly commenting on things throughout

the meeting (there is always that one person who likes to do that); rather, if you have something you think can add value to the topic at hand, put it forward.

In my firm we have regular team meetings, and some of the best ideas come from my team. I may be heading in a particular direction with a concept and they bring an idea to the table which ultimately triumphs over the concept I had and changes the trajectory of where we were heading. Employers value your input. It shows you are invested in the company and your role, so don't be shy – have your say and put your thoughts forward. All employers have an expectation that you will perform the role for which you were hired. But if you do things without being asked, always offer to help others (so long as it's not to the detriment of your own work) and do more than what your role requires, your employer will notice.

Expert advice for landing your dream job

Grant Aitken has had an extensive career in recruitment and has generously agreed to share his insights into how to put your best foot ahead of the competition to land your dream job.

Research companies:

- **What organisation/s are you passionate about?** What is it about those organisations that interests you? It may be their products, environmental focus, or it may be an organisation that is growing and you want to be part of the team.
- **Team fit and culture** should always be high up on your list when deciding who you would like to work with.
- Think about what **unique skillset or experience** you can offer to the organisation.

How to approach companies:

If a company is advertising – then let's nail it!

- **Take time with your application – don't rush it.** What are the key requirements listed in the advertisement? Do you have those skills and experience? If you do, make sure it clearly stands out in your resumé.
- **Once you have submitted your application, what's next?** You will hopefully be on the long list after around 14 days. What's a long list? These are the candidates the company will usually screen over the phone prior to inviting them in for an interview. Make sure you are ready to take the call. If you're not, let it go through to voicemail so you can call back when you are in a private, quiet space.

If a company isn't advertising, how can I get in front of them?

- **Follow their LinkedIn page and socials.** Most companies will also advertise vacancies on LinkedIn. This also enables you to be across any key announcements, news articles, company information and – most importantly – job vacancies!
- **Connections.** Do you or someone you know have any LinkedIn or other connections that may already be working at that organisation? If so, perfect – start there. Organise a coffee catch-up to learn more about the organisation, ask questions and – most importantly – start to build connections.

The interview process – how to stand out from the crowd:

- Do your research on the company and those interviewing you.
- Be early and prepared. Have a hard copy of your resumé on hand with a folder and pen.

- Don't be afraid to take notes in an interview. It shows you are listening and engaged, and you can review your notes later.
- You must have questions! Even if it is only one or two questions. I do however recommend having five to ten questions written down before you head into the interview. Be careful you are not asking questions that have already been answered during the interview.
- Don't be pushy.
- Never talk negatively about a previous manager or organisation you have worked for.
- Don't talk about salary unless they bring it up!
- At the end of the interview, you can ask what the process involves in terms of the number of interviews, any additional testing, and when you will know if you have been successful.

After the interview:

- **Send a thank you email to the company contact.** You may mention again why you are interested in the role.
- **It is okay to withdraw your application** if you don't think the position is right for you after the interview. Make sure you contact the company to let them know.
- Most of all, be **politely persistent!**

Good luck! These tips will give you the best possible opportunity of standing out from the crowd.

PAYSLIPS

I feel I had to sneak this one in because I'm intrigued by the number of people I hear say they don't receive a payslip from their employer. Your employer is legally required to give you a payslip – whether in hard copy or electronic form – within one working day of the day you get paid. If your employer doesn't provide you with a payslip, ask for one – you are entitled to it. How else are you meant to keep tabs on your annual leave entitlements so you can plan your next holiday?

PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE

Often your employer will be focused on running the business and may not be aware of any issues or problems you are experiencing. It's not that they don't care, it's just they have so many tasks they need to attend to daily, and being aware of every little detail of all members of their team is a big stretch. If you have a problem – whether it's a matter affecting your performance or your ability to undertake the role – reach out to your employer or your direct manager and have a chat with them.

It's in their best interests that you are at your best, so if there is a matter impacting you or your ability to undertake your role, let them know. If it's something work-related or a problem with a colleague, a good employer will work through this with you so you feel supported and the matter impacting your work is resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible.

If there is a problem at home impacting your work it's also a good idea to let your manager or employer know, as they may notice your work performance is a little off. They will most likely be sympathetic and accommodating and provide you with the support you need if they know what's going on.

One of the most common workplace problems is not being paid at or above the minimum amount in accordance with the relevant award for your role. It's a good idea to check your current award, and you can also head to the pay and conditions tool on the Fair Work website to check the rate you should be paid. If there is a discrepancy between the rate you are receiving and the rate you *should be* receiving in accordance with the award, have a chat with your employer. It might be a genuine mistake on their behalf, and they can promptly arrange backpay for the amounts you are entitled to.

Most employers do the right thing, but like everything in life sometimes bad eggs creep into the mix. If you find yourself with a bad egg who is not willing to pay your minimum entitlements, reach out to the Fair Work Ombudsman, who will be able to assist. Their details are listed in the resources section at the end of this chapter.

BEHAVING APPROPRIATELY

Places of employment are professional environments and accordingly there are processes and procedures and company policies that must be adhered to, including those relating to harassment and discrimination. Failing to abide by these can leave you in a delicate position and potentially being shown the door.

For example, work Christmas functions are a wonderful opportunity to let your hair down, to celebrate a long, successful year with your colleagues and have an enjoyable time. However, Fair Work Commission and Federal Court cases have determined that employees still have obligations and are expected to adhere to company policies and standards when attending these functions. Yep. That may have caught you a little by surprise.

Most employers do
the right thing, but
like everything in life
sometimes bad eggs
creep into the mix.

At an evening social function held by a previous company I worked for a team member of seniority became incredibly intoxicated over the course of the evening, which resulted in him harassing a colleague in a derogatory manner. His immediate superior did little to deter the employee's behaviour and did not step in to assist the aggrieved party in the manner that was expected of him in accordance with company policy. Both the team member and his superior were found to have breached company policy and their employment was terminated, effective immediately. A drunken night out with colleagues can end careers – is it really worth it?

With this in mind, when attending company functions, even if out of hours, it is imperative that you have at the forefront of your mind your obligations as an employee to adhere to your organisation's policies. If you're the type of person who is inclined to want to hug everyone after a few drinks – and let's face it, we all have a friend like that – it may be best to back off on your alcoholic drinks at company functions so your behaviour is not misinterpreted and does not have a detrimental impact on your employment and career.

During my university days I was employed by a large hospitality company. The venue where I was employed had an informal AFL tipping competition for staff and customers, which added a little fun to a bleak Melbourne winter. It was before online tipping competitions existed (yes, I'm that old), so each participant had their own footy tipping card which had to be filled in each week and handed to the responsible staff member to be placed in a box in the strongroom safe prior to the commencement of each round.

It was getting to the pointy end of the season, and one weekend it all unravelled. After the weekend, a duty manager was spotted on security cameras entering the strongroom and amending his tips, and what a surprise – he got all his tips correct that week.

Senior management was quickly made aware of this wrongdoing and his employment was terminated. It was deemed he had been in a position of trust, that trust had been breached, and he could no longer manage the venue with the respect and trust of management and his colleagues, and, most seriously, he had breached the company's policies and code of conduct.

It is important to remember your employer's policies and codes of conduct, as if they are not adhered to there can be serious consequences, including termination of your employment. If you love your career and your job, that can be devastating, particularly if it was one moment of madness that caused it all to happen.

ENDING THE RELATIONSHIP

There will eventually come a time when either you or your employer wishes to end the employment relationship, for whatever reason. In such instances, the party ending the employment relationship must adhere to the minimum notice period when informing the other party. The required notice period depends on the amount of time you have been employed in your role, as shown in the following table.

Minimum notice period for ending employment	
Period of continuous employment	Minimum notice period
<i>1 year or less</i>	<i>1 week</i>
<i>1 to 3 years</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>
<i>3 to 5 years</i>	<i>3 weeks</i>
<i>More than 5 years</i>	<i>4 weeks</i>

It's important to note that an employment contract, enterprise agreement or award can set out longer minimum notice periods and consequently these minimum notice periods must be adhered to.

If you are the party giving notice it is imperative to serve your employer with the correct notice period.

If your employer ends your employment, they are required to give you a valid reason for doing so, unless it is during your probation period. It may be that the needs or direction of the business have changed, or your employer may be experiencing a difficult economic period and the financial implications are that they need to make your role redundant. Alternatively, your employer may terminate your employment contract on the basis of poor performance, misconduct or your capacity and ability to undertake the role.

In most cases, if your employment is terminated you should be given the opportunity to respond to the reasons for your dismissal, and your employer is required to follow a fair process to ensure your termination is handled in the correct manner.

Employment law is a broad area, so it's impossible for me to cover all components of termination of employment in this chapter – I could write a whole book on it! Suffice to say that the requirements depend on whether the business is a small business or otherwise and the individual circumstances pertaining to your termination of employment.

The Fair Work Commission and Fair Work Ombudsman regulate commonwealth workplace laws relating to the termination of employment. Both organisations provide a wealth of information on their websites, so if your employment has been terminated and you want to make sure you are treated fairly, head to the resources section at the end of this chapter for details on these organisations.

If you think the ending was unfair

If you think your employer terminated your employment in a manner that was harsh, unjust or unreasonable, or it was not a case of genuine redundancy, you may be entitled to bring an unfair dismissal claim.

If you think your employer terminated your employment in a manner that was harsh, unjust or unreasonable, or it was not a case of genuine redundancy, you may be entitled to bring an unfair dismissal claim.

You can only make an application for unfair dismissal if you have completed a minimum employment period of six months and your employer has 15 or more employees, or 12 months if your employer is a small business with fewer than 15 staff. In addition, if your annual salary is more than \$162,000, you must be covered by an award or an enterprise agreement to bring an unfair dismissal claim against your employer.

To apply for unfair dismissal, you must lodge your application with the Fair Work Commission within 21 days of the date of your dismissal. A conciliation conference between you and your employer will normally take place around five weeks from the date you lodge your application. The Fair Work Commission advises that usually three out of four matters proceeding to conciliation are settled during the conciliation conference.

Further information on the unfair dismissal process can be found on the Fair Work Commission website and at the links provided in the resources section of this chapter.

You may represent yourself throughout this process, however depending on the complexity of your matter it can be wise to seek the guidance of an employment lawyer, who will be able to give you the relevant information and advice pertaining to your matter and represent you if required.

WHAT IF MY EMPLOYER GOES BROKE?

Sometimes, despite everybody's best intentions, businesses go broke. It's not a nice feeling for all involved, and as well as the loss of your job you would most likely also be concerned about the loss of any entitlements still owed to you. In cases where an administrator has been appointed, there is often not much money left in the kitty to

cover the mountain of debts your employer has left, including your outstanding entitlements.

However, all is not lost. You may have options under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee, which is in effect a safety net scheme designed to assist employees who have lost their jobs due to the liquidation or bankruptcy of their employer, and who have unpaid entitlements owed to them which are unable to be paid to them by their employer.

Entitlements that can be paid to you by the Fair Entitlements Guarantee include:

- wages
- annual leave
- long-service leave
- payments in lieu of service
- redundancy.

There are thresholds in respect to the maximum amount you might receive for each entitlement. Further information regarding these amounts can be found at the link to the Australian Government's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations website at the end of this chapter.

Claims for assistance under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee can be made online and must be made within 12 months of the end date of your employment, or within 12 months of the date your employer entered into liquidation or bankruptcy, whichever is the later.

The Fair Entitlements Guarantee does *not* cover unpaid superannuation contributions. The administrator or liquidator appointed by your employer will be required to pay your unpaid superannuation contributions if there are sufficient funds to do so. You should

contact your employer's administrator or liquidator to discuss your unpaid entitlements, and also understand your rights as an employee creditor.

Expert advice for navigating workplace issues

Paul Horvath is a highly regarded employment lawyer who has extensive experience assisting employees with employment and workplace law in Victoria. Paul shares some fantastic insights to help you navigate your employment.

Read your employment contract and any relevant company policies

It seems pretty obvious, but many employees do not read their employment contract closely – until they get to a position of dismissal. Knowing what your contract says helps you negotiate pay rises and improve your work conditions, and allows you to remind the employer of their obligations to you. For example, you might seek flexible working arrangements that enable you to start later so you can drop your children at school three days a week, or to work from home some days.

Ask if there is a modern award or enterprise agreement that applies to your employment

Many employees are covered by a modern award or enterprise agreement that sets minimum pay rates and other terms and conditions of employment. Knowing your rights and entitlements under an award or enterprise agreement can help you to ensure you are being paid properly, and to enforce any rights you have

in a reasonable way. A good employer will respect your rights and will accommodate you. There is also a tool on the Fair Work Ombudsman's website which helps you to ascertain which award may be applicable to your employment.

Ensure your employer provides you with the Fair Work Information Statement when you start, along with your employment contract

By law, an employer must provide you with the Fair Work Information Statement when you start. It is produced by the Fair Work Ombudsman and sets out important information about your pay and conditions. There is also a separate statement that employers have to provide to casual employees.

Casual employees have a right to request conversion to permanent employment after 12 months

If after 12 months' casual employment you have a regular pattern of work (or other relevant circumstances), you may be entitled to become a permanent employee. Some employees prefer to remain casual due to the higher pay rates. If you want to become permanent, however, personal (sick) leave, paid holiday leave and other benefits apply. Small business employers who have fewer than 15 employees are not obliged to offer conversion of their casual employees.

Know your rights with regards to unfair dismissal and redundancy

If you are terminated, you have a right to bring an unfair dismissal claim at the Fair Work Commission (provided you meet some conditions). The cost of doing this is around \$75, and even if you

lose, you do not have to pay the employer's legal costs – each party generally pays their own legal costs, if they have any. If you have been made redundant, you should check whether it was a case of genuine redundancy, and that you have been paid your minimum entitlements for redundancy under the National Employment Standards (for businesses of 15 or more employees).

It's important you start any employment off on the right foot by undertaking your due diligence, checking your employment contract and being aware of company policies and codes of conduct, so you know the expectations of your employer and are always mindful of these during the course of your employment. Equally as important is to know that it is not all a one-way street and you have rights and protections as an employee.

You will be spending an inordinate amount of time at work, so you need to enjoy what you do. Find something that keeps you stimulated and energised and gets you out of bed in the morning. If you are not passionate about what you do or don't enjoy your role, maybe it is time to move on and look elsewhere for a position more suited to you. Life is short, and you really want to make the most of every day by partaking in something that puts a smile on your dial and makes you look forward to each day.

The reason we all work is we need money. Life is difficult without it. But, just *getting* money is not the end of the story. If you want to make the most of the Big Moments in your life, you must also *manage* your money well. So, that's the topic of the next chapter.

USEFUL EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

Fair Work Commission

The Fair Work Commission is Australia's workplace tribunal, where you can make an application to have an unfair dismissal heard, and they can also assist in resolving issues that you may have at work.



www.fwc.gov.au

Fair Work Ombudsman

The Fair Work Ombudsman provides advice and assistance on pay rates and workplace rights and obligations.



www.fairwork.gov.au

Find an award

Find out whether you are being paid in accordance with the appropriate award for your industry here.



www.fwc.gov.au/agreements-awards/awards/find-award

Unfair dismissal

If you believe you have been unfairly dismissed by your employer the two websites listed below are a helpful resource.



www.fwc.gov.au/job-loss-or-dismissal/unfair-dismissal



www.fairwork.gov.au/ending-employment/unfair-dismissal

Fair Entitlements Guarantee

If your employer goes broke the Fair Entitlements Guarantee may be able to assist you with your unpaid entitlements.

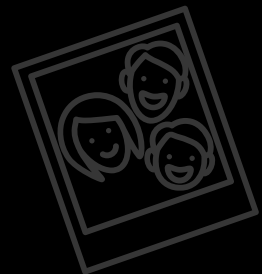
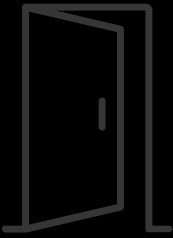
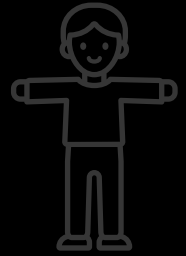


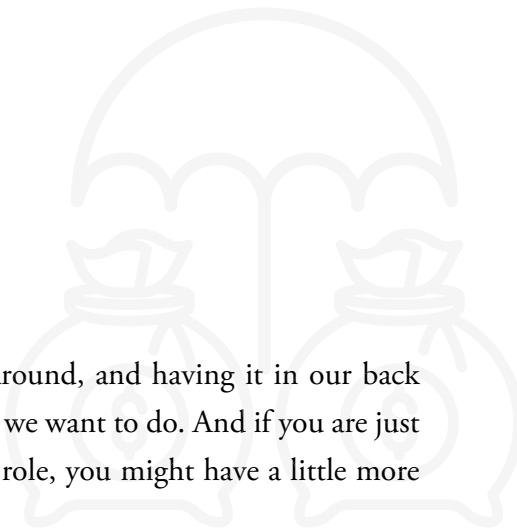
www.dewr.gov.au/fair-entitlements-guarantee



CHAPTER 2

MANAGING YOUR \$\$\$





Money. It makes the world go around, and having it in our back pocket allows us to do the things we want to do. And if you are just settling in to your first full-time role, you might have a little more of it in your back pocket.

Collectively, over the course of our life we make many big decisions about finances which impact our future. The financial decisions you make now will have an impact on the rest of your life. It is therefore imperative you make the right choices. This is not a chapter on how to invest your money or about the best high-interest bank account on the market. Rather, this chapter provides some insight about things to consider when making financial decisions, so you don't make the common financial mistakes so many people make and spend a large chunk of your life paying for them.

BUYING YOUR FIRST RIDE

Buying your first car is a pretty cool thing to do. I remember the first car that I took a loan out to buy, and I was terrified, but it was a fantastic learning curve and taught me the responsibility of meeting regular payments.

Car loans

If you have found your dream car, that's wonderful news. The seller will provide you with a sales contact for the purchase. Like all contracts, you probably won't want to but you must read this

document carefully, particularly the fine print that you virtually need a magnifying glass to read. Ensure all the particulars of the car are correctly recorded, together with the agreed price of the vehicle and any other associated costs, and check that there are no surprises the seller has not advised you of. If there's something you don't understand, ask for clarification. If there's something within the contract you don't like or agree with and it is significant, ask for it to be removed.

If you are obtaining finance to purchase your car and have yet to obtain formal loan approval, it is imperative that you purchase the car subject to finance approval. The seller will be able to include this in your contract prior to you signing. This means if for some reason your lender doesn't provide you with the finance to purchase the car, you will be able to terminate the contract. If you wing it and sign a sales contract not subject to finance and your finance application is declined, you could find yourself in a pickle and the seller could exercise their right that you proceed with the purchase of the car, regardless of your financial situation.

When obtaining finance to purchase a car it's also important to check the fine print of an advertised finance deal together with the loan documents, as what may seem like a good deal may actually not be the *real* deal. Often when you look at the fine print, a deal your lender has offered you can be vastly different to the one you have seen advertised, and as a result you may end up paying way more than you expected. Embedded in the fine print of loan agreements can be additional fees, including establishment fees, monthly fees and penalties you may incur for late or missed payments. Even the addition of an \$8 monthly administration fee adds up over the course of a five-year or seven-year loan. So it is important that you are fully across what the regular repayments will be, together with

If you are obtaining finance to purchase your car and have yet to obtain formal loan approval, it is imperative that you purchase the car subject to finance approval.

the total repayment cost of the loan. It is a good idea to know the comparison rate of the loan as this will help you identify the true cost of the loan and enable you to compare this rate with those provided by other financial institutions. The comparison rate includes the interest rate together with other fees and charges payable.

One thing to be aware of with car loans is they often contain a penalty or charge if you pay the loan off early. If you intend to do this, check the fine print to determine if it is actually financially beneficial to do so.

It pays to do your due diligence when purchasing a motor vehicle. Read the fine print on both the contract of sale and the loan documents if you have obtained finance. You may save yourself considerable money if there is something significant in the fine print that you were not aware of.

Insurance

Before you pick up your lovely new car, it's crucial to have it insured. Most insurers allow you to put in place a 'cover note', which will cover you the minute the car is in your name and will usually last for 15 to 30 days. But you must get your car fully insured as soon as you can, just in case the unexpected happens and it is in an accident or stolen.

Most insurance companies give you the option of insuring your motor vehicle at 'market value' or 'agreed value'. If you select market value, it is important that you are fully aware what your insurer deems to be the current market value of your car, as they may have one view of what the market value is which is not compatible with your view of what the market value is. If your ride is stolen or written off, it will be *their* market value that will take precedence.

If you do something illegal or dangerous behind the wheel, you may well find yourself paying for your actions for years to come. Let me introduce you to Jack. After a few drinks with his buddies one evening, Jack thought it would be a great opportunity to get behind the wheel of his sparkling new BMW and take it for a spin to see how fast it would go – in suburban Melbourne. Jack didn't get far. He came to a halt after he drove his BMW through the front of a takeaway shop. Police were quickly on the scene, conducted a breath test, and it was no surprise that Jack was well over the alcohol limit.

Jack thought he was lucky because he had insurance. Unfortunately for Jack, driving under the influence of alcohol invalidated his insurance. Not only was his car a write-off, Jack had to pay for the extensive damage he caused to the takeaway shop and he also still had to pay the remainder of his loan on the BMW, a car that was now worthless.

It was an expensive lesson for Jack, and it all occurred because of one reckless moment.

THE BIGGEST DEBT YOU WILL EVER HAVE

For most people, the biggest debt they will ever have is a home loan. Having a home loan is a momentous step in your life; almost overnight you go from having a nice bundle of savings to having a big asset with a huge chunk of debt attached to it. There is no doubt this is a Big Moment.

If there is ever a legal document you want to make sure is right, it's your home loan, as having a mortgage is an enormous commitment you are taking on for the next 20 to 30 years. Throughout this book I keep saying you need to carefully read the legal documents

provided to you whenever you enter into a contract, and this is particularly important with your home loan documents; study them, read them, read them again, get expert advice, and don't sign them until you fully understand what you are signing.

If you are unsure about some elements of the document, reach out to your mortgage broker or lender for clarification; they should be able to answer any questions. If you still feel overwhelmed and you need more advice, reach out to your property lawyer who is assisting you with the purchase – they will be able to explain the document in detail.

There are many mortgage products on the market, and it's important to find the right one to fit your circumstances. Our mortgage expert Deb Smith talks more about home loans in chapter 5, *Buying your first pad*, so head over to read more about the things you need to consider when obtaining a home loan.

LENDING MONEY TO A MATE

Australians have always been quick to lend each other a helping hand, particularly if it's a friend or family member going through a rough patch. While it is perfectly acceptable to help your friend, family member or others, you need to protect yourself if you are lending money.

A handshake or verbal agreement only goes so far. If you plan to lend more than your weekly budget, put a written agreement in place. If it's still a relatively small sum, a simple agreement may suffice provided you cover all relevant factors. If it's a large amount, seek appropriate legal advice and have a formal loan agreement drawn up.

Friendships can be lost and families torn apart when money is lent and not paid back, or not paid back in the manner expected.

There are many
mortgage products
on the market,
and it's important
to find the right
one to fit your
circumstances.

Years of friendship and harmony down the drain. Having an agreement in place removes the elephant in the room as all the details are in black and white for everyone to see.

BUY NOW PAY LATER

Buy Now Pay Later services are used by seven million Australians, and in the 2021–22 financial year these services had transactions of \$16 billion. That's an awful lot of shopping.

One of the attractions of Buy Now Pay Later options such as Afterpay and Zip is that they provide cheap and easy credit. There are no credit checks, so you do not have to provide details of your current income and expenses, and provided you make your repayments in the allocated time you are not charged interest. It's a mechanism for taking out small, short-term loans. For many people, particularly in tough economic times when money is a little tight, this works well.

One thing you do need to be aware of though: if you are intending to apply for a major loan, such as a home loan, lenders may look unfavourably on any Afterpay or other Buy Now Pay Later accounts and associated purchases. Why? They can deem that you are using these accounts because you cannot manage your cashflow, and this may have a detrimental impact on your loan application. If you are planning on taking the next step in your financial life in the near future and applying for a home loan, it could be well worth your while to steer clear of Buy Now Pay Later options.

In addition, the government has announced plans to regulate the Buy Now Pay Later industry, which will make it more difficult to obtain this form of credit in the future.

RELATIONSHIP DEBT

Relationship debt – sometimes called sexually transmitted debt – continues to be a problem for many people, one that makes me and many of my peers uncomfortable. This debt is often a result of financial abuse within a relationship. In 2020 more than 600,000 Australians experienced financial abuse, costing victims and the economy a staggering \$10.9 billion.

Relationship debt can have a significant impact on your life. It can be something as simple as putting a lease in your name when you and your partner move into a rental property. The problem is that although your partner may have verbally provided you with an undertaking to contribute an agreed proportion to the rental payments, the reality is the lease is in your name so the buck stops with you. If they go back on their commitment, there is very little you can do about it aside from asking them to leave. You will have to come up with the money for the monthly rental payments or the landlord will be within their rights to initiate proceedings to recover this money from you.

Relationship debt can extend to you being left with debts your partner accumulated during your relationship. It is important to understand that both parties are liable for any joint debt you have. If you have a joint credit card on which your partner accumulated significant debt and didn't make any payments, the lender can request that you make all outstanding payments even though you did not personally make the purchases.

If you are financing assets in your name, such as a car or a house, it's important to ensure your name is also listed as the registered owner of the asset. I am aware of an instance where a husband could not obtain finance for a motor vehicle, so he asked his wife to take out a loan in her name to finance the vehicle purchase. She obliged;

the finance was in her name while the motor vehicle was registered in the husband's name. Shortly after, he left the relationship took the vehicle with him, and she was left with a hefty debt for an asset she did not own.

I have had clients say they thought they were witnessing documents when they had in fact been deceived into signing guarantor documents, meaning that if the borrower didn't pay the debt back my client would be liable for the whole debt as guarantor. Fortunately, many lenders now require guarantors to obtain independent legal advice prior to signing guarantor documents, however this shows you need to fully understand what you are signing or you could be left with significant debt if things do not go as planned.

You should never sign anything you do not feel comfortable signing. If documents are placed in front of you by a partner, child, other family member or friend, enquire about what they are and ask for the appropriate time to review the documents and seek the appropriate legal advice if required. Signing a document you have no knowledge about and which you do not feel comfortable signing can have a detrimental impact on your future. In addition, it is a form of financial abuse that no-one should have to experience or tolerate.

If you are being asked to become responsible for someone else's debts or deceived or misled into taking on debt in your name, there are organisations you can reach out to for guidance and assistance. Some of these organisations are listed in the resources section at the end of this chapter.

One of biggest implications of being left with relationship debt is that it can significantly impact your credit record and your ability to borrow in the future, and your credit record is something you want to protect.

You should never
sign anything
you do not feel
comfortable
signing.

Relationship debt happens more often than it should, and often people are not fully aware of the implications until the relationship breaks down and they are left with significant debts and no assets. For this reason, be proactive about being completely across all your financial matters, and if you have shared finances with your partner there should be total transparency regarding any assets and debts you share.

You are probably sitting there thinking *I trust my partner*, and so you should. However, I'm a lawyer and I have seen people do desperate things in desperate times. There may be unauthorised mortgage drawdowns, where your partner is accessing money from your mortgage without your consent. Your partner may have a business in which they have made some bad financial decisions that they have not disclosed to you and which could impact your joint assets, perhaps even leaving you without a roof over your head. Or they could be misusing joint funds without you being aware.

A few years ago, I had a delightful client who had been married for 22 years, had a lovely home in a sought-after suburb and was financially secure – all appeared good in her world. Until one day she came home and discovered her husband had taken his worldly possessions. She had no inkling at all that this was coming. None. She was frantically worried about her husband to the point she rang the police for assistance, in total shock. It wasn't until an hour or so later when she walked into their closet and saw that all his clothes and personal belongings were gone that the penny dropped. He had left the relationship.

She could not locate him for a period, and in that time it became clear this had been a protracted and carefully planned action by her husband. Significant funds had been transferred out of their joint bank account and investments, and she later discovered a property had been purchased that she had no knowledge of.

IF IT'S YOURS, PROTECT IT

Life is a journey, and we can at times navigate it with rose-coloured glasses, particularly if we make decisions with our heart and not our head. I am not for one moment saying we shouldn't make decisions with our heart, not at all, but sometimes in life we need to be street smart, we need to protect what is ours and we need to make decisions with our head – sensible decisions that impact our sense of security and our wellbeing.

Ownership issues

One of my clients had a house he received in a divorce settlement. It was fully paid for, so really, he was set for life – he had a roof over his head and no debt. Shortly after the divorce, he commenced a de facto relationship with a new partner. They subsequently fell in love with another home, so my client sold his current property – which he fully owned – and purchased the new property.

He and his new partner both put their names as joint proprietors on the certificate of title of the new property, which meant that if he died the property automatically went to his partner and not his three children. Although he was relatively young, my client was diagnosed with a serious illness and – facing his mortality – came running to me for advice. He wanted the property to go to his kids.

Three years into the relationship it was no longer a bed of roses, and he wanted to leave the property to his three children when he died. The problem was my client didn't own the property individually; it was a joint asset, so he couldn't make a provision for it in his will.

Protracted and costly negotiations took place with family lawyers, and although the result wasn't totally aligned to what my client had hoped for, the outcome was he had a significant asset he could leave his three children in his will. Sadly, the last portion of

his life was spent fighting for this rather than being able to commit fully to creating loving memories with his kids.

On another occasion I had a client attend my office with a request to transfer her property worth in the vicinity of one million dollars to her partner. I was taken aback, given that the relationship had been unstable for a considerable period. I also knew that it was my client's biggest asset, and that in transferring it to her partner she would be left with no guaranteed roof over her head. The alarm bells were going off – loudly.

I asked her why. Why did she want to transfer this property, which she fully owned with no debt, to her partner? Her answer: 'It's my way of showing him that I love him.'

Her partner already had his own house. Was he transferring his property to her as a declaration of his love? No. There were tears and hard conversations as I advised her I could not act for her in this capacity; I categorically refused to help her transfer her house to her opportunistic partner.

A couple of years later I ran into this client. She hugged me and thanked me so much for the advice I had provided and for my refusal to transfer her property. You can probably guess why ... she was no longer with that person.

Insurance

Protecting your assets also extends to having appropriate insurances – car insurance, boat insurance, caravan insurance and of course home and contents insurance. If you have an investment property, landlord insurance is also encouraged, to provide you with protection if anything goes south with your tenant. There is a wide range of insurance products on the market, and it's really important that you dig deep, read the fine print and find the best policy for you.

It's important to adequately insure your assets for the correct market value or replacement value. We have all been pained to hear stories about an auntie's boyfriend's sister's neighbour who lost their house in a devastating fire and is living in a caravan on the property because they were underinsured. Don't let it happen to you.

When you receive your annual home insurance premium, rather than just paying it, carefully review your policy to ascertain whether you are adequately covered. This is particularly significant in our current economic environment, with the increased cost of building supplies, which would invariably result in an increased cost to rebuild your home.

Insurance is such an important topic that I've dedicated a whole chapter to it, so for more on this go to chapter 10.

Expert advice for managing your finances

Gemma Acton has had an extensive career in the finance industry, from being an investment banker at Goldman Sachs to her current role as the Channel 7 Finance Editor. Gemma has kindly agreed to share her insights to help you set up your future for financial freedom.

I'm sure you've heard the phrase 'work smarter, not harder'. That applies multiple times over to your money. In other words, you can make your money hammer away for you, saving you time and granting you a superior quality of life. The earlier you can action this, the sooner you'll be on the path to the Holy Grail of financial freedom.

Even if you're reading this later in life, it's never too late to improve your financial set-up and steer your affairs onto a sounder path. Here are some tips to help you do so.

Prepare a budget

Be honest as you write it, and update it frequently. The concept of budgeting might conjure up images of complicated spreadsheets, but it can be as simple as scrawling notes in an old notepad. It's just a list of money coming in and money going out. While there might be periods when you have one-off large expenses, as a general ongoing rule, your income should exceed your expenses to stop you from running up debt. If it's the other way around, find ways to cut costs – or boost your income until you're back in the black.

Your expenses and income will change over time, so update your budget at least every quarter. There's no point writing a budget if you're underestimating your expenses or pretending to yourself big expenses that are happening fairly frequently are one-offs. Be honest.

Avoid unproductive debt

Debt gets a bad rap – some debt is good. If you're borrowing it to help ensure a bigger payback down the track – for example, to expand your business when demand is growing – this is called 'productive' debt. If you're just borrowing to live beyond your means – for example, eating out, buying fancy clothes, or renting a nicer property than you can reasonably afford on your current income level – you risk building a debt balance that will hang around your neck for months or years to come. If the interest levels are high – such as on a credit card – that balance will soar frighteningly quickly.

Always be on the hunt for the best deal

We can overestimate how much of an effort it is to shop around for a better deal. These days there are comparison sites available to help,

and generally whichever provider you switch to will do the majority of legwork regarding the actual sign-up. 'Setting and forgetting' on a poor deal on your energy bill, phone, internet, insurance or savings might cost you hundreds or thousands of dollars a year. For your mortgage, the difference between an average interest rate and the most competitive on a debt as enormous your home loan could cost you tens of thousands within a few years.

Keep a rainy-day fund

If you're on top of your budget, you should have a little left over every month. Stash this away in as high a growth savings account as you can find that suits your needs (check the fine print!). We're unfortunately much more likely to encounter a surprise expense (health issue, home maintenance problem, urgent travel) than we are to get a surprise bonus from work or win the lottery. If you have the security of money squirrelled away when an unexpected issue occurs it'll help you cope with the practical fallout from the crisis, leaving you time to deal with any emotional distress and saving you from having to take on unexpected 'unproductive' debt.

Get trusted advisers

As in any profession, there are charlatans in financial services. But there are also many sound advisers who will offer you tailored advice for a reasonable fee. Find a tax adviser, a financial adviser and – when the time comes – a mortgage broker to help you navigate these areas. Don't think, *this is all too complicated, I'll never understand it*. The right advisers will explain to you what you need to know in a clear fashion.

If you're still mystified after an explanation they could be trying to bamboozle you, which is a big red flag. Finance is detailed but

not complicated. Don't rely on so-called experts who use their experience to intimidate you. Part of the service you should get from your advisers is being helped to understand your options and why you are making certain decisions at certain points in life.

USEFUL MONEY MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

If you are experiencing financial abuse:



www.1800respect.org.au



www.ndh.org.au



www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au

If you are looking for advice on how to get your finances on track check out these informative books:

She's on the Money by Victoria Devine

The Barefoot Investor by Scott Pape

Also check out these podcasts:

She's on the Money, www.shesonthemoney.com.au/podcast

How Do They Afford That?, podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/how-do-they-afford-that/id1644255235

IF YOU'RE ABOUT TO TRAVEL THE WORLD, DO YOU HAVE THE INFORMATION YOU NEED FOR A TURBULENCE-FREE TRIP?

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO ENSURE YOU DON'T GET TAKEN FOR A RIDE WHEN YOU PURCHASE A CAR?

ARE YOU READY TO BUY YOUR FIRST PAD BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

ARE YOU HAVING TROUBLE WITH THIS WHOLE 'ADULTING' THING?

Life has many *Big Moments* that bring joy and excitement. We all look forward to travelling overseas, buying a home, building a family, getting our first 'real' job, meeting 'the one'. But all of these moments also come with risk if you are not properly prepared.

Big Moments will help you navigate the challenging crossroads of life and avoid the most common Big Moment mistakes. Melisa Sloan draws on her extensive expertise as a lawyer as well as calling on a fantastic group of experts to share their advice, covering important topics such as:

- landing your first real pay cheque
- getting to 'I do'
- embracing your identity
- the tiny human arrival
- starting a hustle
- caring for an ageing parent
- landing in splitsville

Life is full of curveballs – that's what makes it interesting. This book is a wise resource to help you live your best life, equipped with the confidence to make the right decisions at every Big Moment you encounter.



MELISA SLOAN is a lawyer, industry leader and board director who loves helping others. Her first book, *Legacy: Taking care of the most important people in your life* was a stellar success. She has featured in *The Australian*, *The Weekend Australian*, *The Canberra Times*, *Lawyers Weekly*, *Money* magazine and *Business Essentials Daily*, and appeared on ABC Radio National, 2ST, Sky News and more.

www.melisasloan.com.au

RRP \$34.95

ISBN 978-1-923007-39-0



9 781923 007390 >