

Advice from the Trenches: Community Chest

Dear C and Dr. B:

I was at work when my phone beeped with a message that a purchase had been made from my Amazon account with my credit card. I had a panic attack because I didn't make this buy! I started to call Amazon and was going to call the police too when it occurred to me to check with my wife first. "Honey, did you buy something this morning on my Amazon account?" So she had. The password and credit card were saved in her computer from the last time we bought something for our daughter online. Her explanation: "It was all pre-set and easier to hit click than to get out my credit card. I hope you don't mind, dear."

I didn't tell her, but I did mind. It felt kind of icky. She didn't even ask! What if I'd called the police and suspended my account?

Am I overreacting? I read your blog about men not letting their wives drive their cars and I admit I am guilty of that; but I feel this is something else. She has her own cards, but she just assumed she could use mine without asking. Should I talk to her? Or is it silly because she owns half of everything anyway?

Dr. B says:

Money is the number one thing couples fight about. This is why I always recommend separate bank accounts, so no partner has to micromanage the other.

Some advice - in marriages where only one person works, their income should be deposited into a bill paying account where bills come first then the rest is divided into separate his and her accounts. If both people work, and if one person earns far more than the other, they can pay the household bills from their account and let the other person keep their own for whatever they see fit. Arrangements like these should be established from the beginning of the marriage; winging it with finances will never work.

As far as this one incident, I'd let it go. However, change your passwords so that next time there will be no question about using your credit card. The "one click" option is too easy, and not worth a fight. I hope that you both already have finances split - if not, that is a conversation you should have sometime soon.

All you need is love - and a good accountant.

C says:

It has been a very long time since I shared finances with someone; my last experience was not good. And while I don't believe that everyone should suspect that their partner is some sort of sociopath who is leading a secret life behind their back, let me just say this: you never know.

In matters of money, one should always make certain that there are safe guards in place. I'm not sure if the following advice would work for a family with children - I'm sure that Dr. B's advice for finances between trusted partners is on point. But I have a few suggestions in case the yet-to-be-discovered sociopath in question happens to be your spouse.

- Do not have a joint account. Can you trust that the other person is not secretly a crackhead, gambler, cheater...or worse? How long have you been together? Truth: it can take over a decade to discover some people's secrets.
- Make sure that your signature is not on record anywhere that your spouse can find it. I have a friend who, upon getting divorced, discovered that her husband had forged her signature onto a number of "joint" credit card accounts. A year after the divorce, he declared bankruptcy after spending most of what he had on drugs. He made no attempt to warn her or get her name off the cards before doing so. She got stuck with \$45K worth of credit debt.
- Do not own things together. Do not buy a house together, or a car. And never allow one partner take care of all the bills while the other blithely assumes that all is well. Sometimes you don't realize there's a problem until the car is repossessed or your credit rating suddenly drops through the floor because your partner didn't pay the bill on an asset you own together.
- Just because your spouse promises to love and cherish you forever, do not assume they will continue to do so after conflicts have driven the both of you to the point of divorce. Have a trusted attorney; considering how high the divorce rate is, it is never a bad idea to get a prenup. People get ugly over divorces. Trust me. They do. Sometimes the person that you marry can do a 180 flip once the honeymoon is over.
- Finally: ALWAYS HAVE YOUR OWN MONEY. You never know when you will need an exit strategy. Sad...but true.

- Cathren Housley

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com