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MONEYWISE

## *Monetary harmony; Book starts newlyweds down the right financial aisle*

By Steve Rosen

It's a classic story line: A young couple fall in love, marry and pledge to care for each other "for richer or for poorer."

Then the financial conflicts begin. She's a saver. He's a spender. Small battles over credit cards, paying off student loans and buying the first house grow into larger ones until the marriage spins out of control.

Authors Sam Goller and Deborah Shouse apply that worst-case scenario to their new book, "Yes, You Can... Achieve Financial Harmony: A Newlywed's Guide to Understanding Money" (Stowers Innovations, \$19.95; [www.stowers-innovations.com](http://www.stowers-innovations.com)).

As a parent with three children still living under my roof, this book made me realize again the importance of making sure this next generation moves through life with a healthy financial perspective. It also reminded me of all the challenges that newlyweds face right off the bat - financial compatibility being near the top of the list.

Set to go on sale in March, "Yes, You Can" would be a perfect gift as your child turned young adult prepares to leave the roost and stroll down the aisle. The book offers bite-size bits of information that are both educational and entertaining. The book is part psychology and part money management - offering couples a blueprint on how to mesh not only their saving and checking accounts, but their financial values, too.

As the authors point out, merging minds and money can be a slippery process.

Goller and Shouse, who have contributed to other "Yes, You Can" financial books published by Kansas City-based Stowers Innovations, spent the past 18 months researching and writing this latest work. To gather information and anecdotes about marriage and finance, they surveyed customers of American Century Investments, the Kansas City fund company founded by James E. Stowers, and interviewed about 25 couples face to face.

They lay out their advice over 14 chapters that cover an array of financial issues that newlyweds face - budgeting, dealing with debt, investing, buying a home, raising a family and more. Quizzes, financial exercises, checklists and worksheets provide hands-on value to readers. And for perspective, the final chapter is devoted to how a successful marriage is more than just having a healthy portfolio

"We're hoping the book helps a lot of couples get off to a good start," Goller said.

Indeed, at the very least, the advice should give couples of all ages the tools to work through financial discord and make sound money decisions.

The most important lesson for couples is this: Communicate.

That means talking and listening to each other before you get married, and understanding your partner's views about money and their spending patterns, the authors write. Sure, there are many successful marriages where couples don't share financial priorities, problems and dreams. But that approach can also stir up a lot of unnecessary stress that can spill into other areas of the marriage.

How can couples begin to talk about money?

Keep it simple and not argumentative. Did you have money growing up? Did you work over the summer or not? Did your parents talk much about buying and spending? Did the folks own a business or work for others? The authors' objective is to put couples at ease over dollars and cents.

Once you've broken the ice, discuss what each of you values most and set priorities. It could be saving money for a down payment on the first house, or going back to school, or being out from under debts.

If your values don't match, don't despair. Talk about what you're willing to give up to meet financial goals, or find other ways to compromise.

After those exercises, couples can begin to work through the meat-and-potato issues such as budgeting, whether to establish joint or separate checking and savings accounts, paying off credit card balances in full each month, and writing a will.

To build savings and become more financially independent, young couples have many tools and strategies at their disposal. Make a vow to pay yourself first each payday. Take advantage of payroll deduction retirement savings plans. Put bonuses, tax refunds and raises into an emergency account. Link multiple banking accounts to reduce fees and paperwork.

While the advice doesn't go deep, it is broken down into easy-to-understand concepts that can provide financial neophytes with the confidence to move in the right direction. Doesn't that sound like a happier story line?