



Fun on Empty: Making Memories on a Tight Budget

By Dale Jodoin
Columnist

Raising a family when money is tight can quietly break your spirit. Not all at once. It happens in small ways. You say no to dinner out. No to the movie. No to the weekend trip. No to the new restaurant everyone is talking about. After a while, you start feeling like the bad guy in your own house. Then friends talk about going away with their family, or trying some place where the menu looks like a car payment. You smile and say, "I have to work." That sounds better than saying, "I can't afford to take my family." That part hurts. Nobody wants to say it out loud. But here's the truth. A tight budget does not mean your family has to live a small life.

Across Canada, more families are feeling the squeeze. People are working long hours and still going to food banks. Seniors are counting every dollar. Parents are choosing between gas and groceries. It's not rare anymore. It's everyday life for a lot of people. And yet, something else is happening too. People are learning how to live differently. Not louder. Not flashier. Just smarter.

Take a picnic. It sounds simple. Maybe even a bit boring. But it works. Stop at a grocery store. Grab buns, some deli meat, maybe a bit of fruit. Skip the expensive drinks and mix your own. Pack it into a bag or a cooler. Bring a blanket, or whatever you have, and head out. I remember watching a dad once, sitting on a park bench, quietly counting change before walking back to his kids with a couple of drinks. The kids didn't notice. They were too busy laughing, chasing a ball, falling over themselves in the grass. To them, it was a great day.

Give it ten minutes once you're there. The air feels different. The pressure eases. It's not about what you spent. It's about being present.

In a place like Oshawa, there are more options than people think. Parks, open fields, trails. They're there for everyone. You just have to use them. The same goes for sports. You don't need a ticket to enjoy a game. Local leagues are everywhere. Baseball, soccer, cricket, and more rugby. Just show up. Stand near the fence or sit on the grass. Watch. Cheer a little.

Lacrosse is another one people forget about. Fast, tough, and exciting. Many local games are open to the public. The same goes for school sports. Places like Ontario Tech University and Durham College often have games and events, especially in the summer. Bring your own food. A couple of sandwiches. Some drinks. You sit there together, and for a while, nothing else matters.

Transit can open things up too. Not everyone drives, and gas adds up fast. A simple bus ride can take you somewhere new. A different park. A lake. A spot you forgot about. If there's water nearby, even better. Bring a towel. Let the kids swim if it's safe. Sit back and take it in. Those are the moments that stay.

And don't overlook what's already around you. A pickup soccer game. Kids playing baseball. A cricket match in a field. You don't need to join. Just being there can make you feel part of something again.

Local newspapers and city websites are worth checking too. They list events most people skip past. Small festivals. Community days. Local gatherings. Many are free or low cost. You just have to look.

Here's something that matters more than most people realize. Kids don't measure their childhood by how much money you spent. They measure it by time. By attention. By whether you showed up. You can spend a lot and still miss that. Or you can spend almost nothing and get it right.

That doesn't mean things are easy. They're not. Working hard and feeling stuck is frustrating. Prices go up. Pay doesn't always follow. It wears people down. But inside that, there's still a way forward. For seniors, it might mean asking for a discount and not feeling bad about it. For families, it might mean choosing fast food over a sit down place because tipping just isn't possible. For others, it might mean skipping one thing so you can enjoy something else.

You start to see your city differently. Not as a place full of things you can't afford, but as a place full of things you can still enjoy. And that changes things. Money can be short. The fridge can be thin. The bills can sit on the table like they own the place. But your kids don't need rich parents to have good memories.

They need time. They need laughter. They need a parent who still tries, even when things are hard.

A sandwich in the park can matter. A bus ride to the lake can matter. Watching a free game can matter. Taking pictures on your phone can matter. Because one day, your kids may not remember what you couldn't buy. They'll remember that you showed up.

And that is how a family finds a way to have fun on empty.

Here's the Feedback You've Been Asking For

By Nick Kossovan

There's a common refrain among job seekers: "I want feedback!" Whether it's third-round ghosting, automated rejections, or total silence, job seekers wonder what they're doing wrong and crave answers to improve their chances of getting hired.

Two doses of reality:

1. Employers don't owe job seekers feedback.
2. No two recruiters or hiring managers assess candidates the same way. Feedback is highly subjective and seldom universally applicable.

Employers aren't career coaches, mentors, or educators. They're business entities with open positions designed to solve specific problems. Employers operate in a litigious society—a fact job seekers conveniently ignore. Providing candid feedback opens a door that corporate legal departments want triple-bolted. A disappointed candidate with a sense of entitlement is likely to misinterpret "culture fit," prompting them to file a frivolous lawsuit. From an employer's perspective, assisting a stranger with their job search is neither their obligation nor will it pay off in terms of time spent. Conversely, legal disputes can have devastating consequences. Employers who reject candidates without explanation aren't being disrespectful; they're engaging in risk management. As Lars Schmidt, the founder of Redefine Work, puts it: "Hiring is not a democratic process; it is a risk-mitigation exercise." Expecting a company to risk legal action just for your "professional development" isn't just naive; it's a glaring sign of the entitlement that's likely keeping you unemployed. Since recruiters and hiring managers rarely provide meaningful feedback, which, as aforementioned, is understandable, here's some candid, assumptive feedback to help you improve your chances of getting hired. Consider this a professional courtesy.

Your Digital Footprint is Controversial

Private and professional identities are no longer separate. Employers will review your LinkedIn profile and activity, and Google you to determine if you're interview-worthy. Getting into digital fistfights, posting impulsive rants, bemoaning that "nobody will hire me," and employers don't know how to hire guarantees you won't be invited to an interview.

You Didn't Show How You'll Make Money for the Employer

Employers don't care about your past responsibilities. If your resume and LinkedIn profile don't clearly show how you influenced your previous employer's profitability—by either making or saving money—and you don't communicate that in interviews, you haven't made a business case for why you should be hired.

You Didn't Proofread for Spelling, Grammar, and Typos

If you can't be bothered to proofread the one document meant to market your professional worth, why would an employer trust you with their business? A single typo signals a lack of attention to detail—one of the most critical soft skills in any role. Misusing "their" instead of "there" is enough reason for a hiring manager to reject you.

Your Use of AI Is Obvious

Employers are overwhelmed with "AI-slop." If your resume sounds like it was written by an uninspired robot, employers will notice. The issue isn't using AI itself; it's neglecting to edit the output. By all means, use AI to help draft your resume and cover letters, but ensure you edit, edit, edit until the result is not only accurate but also reflects your authentic voice.

You Aren't as Qualified as You Think

Self-awareness is a scarce trait. As a job seeker, you must acknowledge that there's always someone younger, more qualified, or hungrier than you. You might have "the skills," but how do they stack up against your competition? You aren't being judged in isolation; you're being compared to other candidates who are just as qualified—if not more so.

Your Verbal Communication Skills Are Below Average

"If you can't communicate, it's like winking at a girl in the dark—nothing happens. You can have all the brainpower in the world, but you have to be able to transmit it. And the transmission is communication." - Warren Buffett

I can't think of any job where verbal communication skills don't matter. If you can't articulate your thoughts clearly and concisely in an interview, good luck getting hired.

TIP: Use the Situation-Action-Result (SAR) framework instead of just listing facts. By giving your answers, a "beginning, middle, and end," you make them far more memorable.

You're Overqualified

Overqualification is a valid concern for employers. For one, you're a "flight risk." Hiring managers are right to assume that an overqualified candidate will quickly become bored, prove difficult to manage because they "know better," or quit the moment a better-paying offer arrives. From an employer's standpoint, an overqualified candidate isn't a safe long-term investment.

You Have No Professional Visibility

If you aren't visible in your industry, you lack what employers value most: credibility. We live in a world where success often depends on "who you know"; consequently, being unknown drastically limits your career. It's reasonable for employers to expect candidates with 10 to 25 years of experience to have cultivated both a visible personal brand and a professional network.

You're Not Likeable (the definitive feedback an employer can't give)

Hiring managers hire candidates they like; thus, the truism: likability outweighs skills and experience. If you're arrogant, cold, or socially awkward, your background is rendered null and void. Being the person the hiring manager actually likes is your greatest competitive advantage. Therefore, improving your likability is often the best job search strategy you can adopt.

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