

We solve three women's rocky economy dilemmas

It's rough out there—but you're not alone. Learn how to cope with whatever money mayhem comes your way.

1 "I lost it all—and I'm scared as hell."
Adriana Pena, 35, had been earning \$150,000 a year as vice president of operations for Cnet.com when she was—surprise!—laid off in September. She has cut her expenses by 40 percent and isn't saving anything. "I'm scared I'll deplete *all* of my savings," Pena says.

What to do if this is you: If, like Pena, you've lost your job in an unstable industry, cut your spending by 50 percent and look for a lower-paying position. "The market for high-paying Internet positions doesn't exist," says Faith Read Xenos, president of Singer Xenos Wealth Management.

2 "I can't even look—all my new choices are too confusing!"
Media executive Melissa Levy, 34, is asking, "Should I refinance?" The loans on her condo (at 7 percent) and Volkswagen (at 6 percent) now look lame. "Some mortgage rates are down to 6 percent; some cars are at 0 percent," says Levy.

What to do if this is you: Phone a money manager; most offer one hour of free advice. And those low rates? "Six percent is the lowest fixed rate," says Xenos. "Below that, they're adjustable and can skyrocket. Refinancing is smart only if you save 1.5 percentage points on a fixed loan."



1
The dot-commer



3
The attorney



2
The media executive

3 "I'm making more money—but will my good times last?"

Aviation attorney Elizabeth Lim, 31, has been working a ton since September. And her bonuses have doubled, so she's sitting pretty. "I treat myself to highlights, acrylic nails and a trainer," Lim says. "And I just bought a home."

What to do if this is you: If you've mastered an in-demand niche, negotiate a better compensation package, Xenos says. Still, she warns: "If you're making more money now, don't spend more—safely invest the surplus." —BRETT GRAFF



Wallet watch

MAKE YOUR STUDENT LOANS PAY YOU THIS TAX SEASON, SAYS BETH KOBLINER.

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