



Practical Ways to Survive and Thrive on \$40,000 or Less Per Year



This is not just another financial guide.

This eBook is written for people who work tirelessly in the fast-paced restaurant industry.

Whether you're managing the drive-thru with finesse, working in an office, or building your side hustle, your contribution matters. **And so does your financial wellness.** Your life isn't just about clocking in and out. It's about balancing budgets, making ends meet, and crafting a future that's fulfilling and financially secure.

So, consider this eBook written by the experts at Sonata Bank your friendly companion in your pursuit of financial wellness. We are here to help you navigate the world of smart budgeting, explore practical ways to save, and share insights that empower you to achieve your financial goals. Financial wellness is not just about numbers; it's about peace of mind, resilience, and creating a pathway to the dreams you hold dear.

While we celebrate the work you do, we also celebrate the brighter, more secure future that awaits you.



CHAPTER ONE

How Ernesto Saved Money on a \$40k Income



Meet Ernesto. Ernesto is working for a fast-casual restaurant and recently rose to the role of manager, which increased his yearly income. His hard work and loyal dedication paid off. Ernesto has big dreams, such as dreams of owning his own home in a neighborhood where his children can feel safe walking to their nearby school.

Ernesto is determined to achieve financial stability. But it was just a few months ago that Ernesto was earning less than \$40,000 per year. And it didn't help that the U.S. now faces inflation, higher energy prices, and rising food prices.

For Ernesto, every decision he makes about his money is focused on finding ways to save more of it and plan for his future. Ernesto is clever. He is good at going online to research cheaper ways to do things. For example, he found [iFixit.com](https://www.ifixit.com)* to get step-by-step instructions on how to repair anything broken and save money.

Ernesto saw his financial challenges as a puzzle he needed to solve.





THE REAL-LIFE TRUTH ABOUT BUDGETING

A goal without a plan is a wish.

When you create a budget, you need a **“SMART”** Plan. In other words, you need a plan that is Strategic, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

For some of you reading this, budgeting for transportation may not be “relevant.” Maybe you can walk or ride your bike to work. Maybe someone will give you a free ride. Maybe you rely on public transportation that is subsidized. In that case, you put the money you would fund for transportation towards another category.

Ernesto started by creating a budget to cover his most basic needs—housing, food and transportation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these three are the largest expenses every American faces. Ernesto managed to cover these expense categories while also budgeting money to save for his emergency fund. He does not yet have money for saving and investing beyond his emergency fund.





WHAT IS AN “EMERGENCY FUND”?

The experts say it's mission critical that you have at least three months of savings to cover yourself in the event of an illness or personal emergency (such as caring for a relative) where you are put in a situation where you cannot work.

And then there's the other type of “emergency fund” for later in life: your retirement fund. An estimated 60% of Americans do not have a retirement savings account. Once you have repaid any outstanding debt, your monthly savings should go towards a retirement fund that earns money for you. A SONATA BANK representative can help you set up a retirement fund.

The Reality

Only 28% of Americans have an emergency fund.

According to a May 2023 survey by NerdWallet.com, less than 45% of Americans could cover a \$1,000 emergency expense without paying for it with a credit card or loan.



Some financial planners recommend you break down your take-home pay with a budget that looks like this:

Housing: 25% to 30%

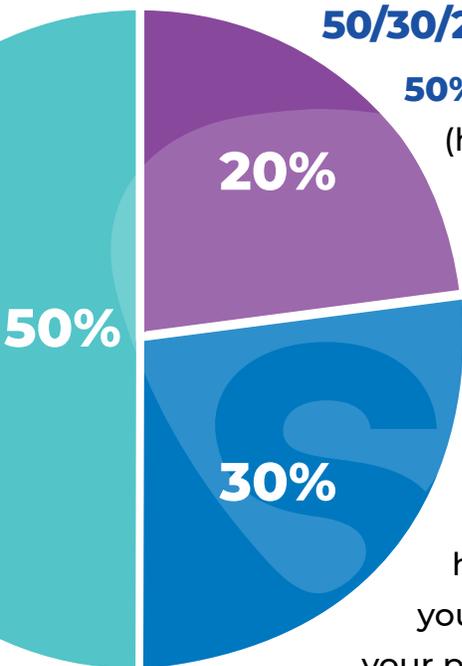
(whether you're renting or paying a mortgage, including insurance and utilities)

Transportation: 10%

-- If you buy a vehicle, experts recommend you put 20% down on the car, have a four-year loan, and spend no more than 10% of your income on transportation (this includes your car payment, insurance, and fuel)

Food: 20%

Another framework financial planners suggest is to use the **50/30/20 Rule**, which looks like this:



50% of your after-tax income goes towards your needs (housing, groceries, transportation)

30% of your after-tax income goes towards your wants (meals, entertainment, travel)

20% of your after-tax income goes towards your savings and debt repayment (savings and loan payments over the minimum monthly payment)

If you earned \$15.75 per hour, your estimated take-home pay would be about \$1,976 per month. Assuming you're getting government subsidies to help you pay for your phone, utilities, healthcare, and groceries, let's break this down according to the 50/30/20 Rule:

MONTHLY TAKE-HOME PAY	\$1,976.00
• 50% Needs:	\$ 988.00
• 30% Wants:	\$ 592.80
• 20% Savings:	\$ 395.20



CHAPTER TWO

Saving on your food budget

Ernesto has done a great job of finding ways to simplify his finances on a tight budget. In the following chapters, we are sharing some of the money-saving “life hacks” Ernesto shared with us to write this eBook.

To get the most out of his grocery budget, Ernesto uses grocery coupon apps on his phone, such as these:

Coupons.com* - **Coupert.com*** - **Hcouponcodes.com***

SnipSnap* - **Flipp*** - **The Crazy Coupon Lady*** (*this includes all stores, not just grocers*)

Creating a menu, sticking to a budget, prepping food for the week with



his wife, and mostly eating at home, Ernesto has figured out more ways to save money on groceries. Here are some of his best tips:

■ *Know your rights. If a store has a sale flyer and they are out of stock on the item they’re promoting, you can ask them if they offer a “rain check.” Stores that offer rain checks will honor the sale price when they get the item back in stock.*

■ *Shop at ethnic grocery stores for grains and lentils in bulk. They are often much cheaper there.*

■ *Bigger is not always better. Shopping at Costco, which I did on a friend’s membership, never saved me money.*



PRACTICAL WAYS TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE ON \$40,000 OR LESS PER YEAR

■ *Join the “loyalty” program at your local grocery store. Sometimes their deals are worth it. Ask if you have “points” to apply towards your receipt.*

■ *If you have a meat processing plant in your town, they often have a retail store attached and you can often get your meat for half of what it costs in the grocery store.*

■ *The cheapest vegetables are potatoes, Brussels sprouts, onions, carrots, and cabbage.*

■ *Milk is often a “loss-leader” at the liquor store and is cheaper to purchase there.*

■ *Buy an entire chicken to roast instead of buying cut-up breasts or thighs. Rotisserie chickens are often the most cost effective.*

■ *Meats and specialty foods will be deeply discounted on the days following major U.S. holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s Eve, Super Bowl Sunday, Valentine’s Day, Easter, Memorial Day Weekend, Fourth of July, and Labor Day Weekend.*

■ *Pasta, rice, and grains are inexpensive, make dishes go further, and last long when stored.*

■ *Making a weekly soup is an inexpensive way to create a filling food that can also be frozen for future meals.*

■ *To make a ground beef dish go further, ground mushrooms will bulk up the ground beef sauce without a noticeable difference in the flavor.*

■ *Eggs are versatile and an inexpensive source of protein.*





CHAPTER 3

Saving on your entertainment budget

Like many Americans, Ernesto has “cut the cord,” and no longer pays for a costly cable TV bill. Instead, he opts for streaming entertainment via the internet on his phone, tablet, or TV.

Ernesto has gotten creative with researching and sourcing his best free entertainment options. He uses websites like cordcuttersnews.com* to find the best free and low-cost streaming sites and apps. Here are some of his favorites:

Ernesto’s favorite free TV streaming sites for TV shows and movies are:

Amazon Freevee*

(a free app –used to be IMDB TV)

Pluto TV*

Plex*

Tubi*

Vudu*

YouTube*

PBS*

Xumo*

Crackle*

Video-on-Demand Streaming Platforms Available for FREE with Your FREE Public Library Card

Kanopy and Hoopla*

(These are both commercial-free. Hoopla also includes audiobooks, comics, eBooks and music as part of its expansive platform)

Ernesto’s favorite free TV streaming sites for sports are:

DofuStream*

(a website that offers live streaming of sports such as NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL and more)

Streamhub.me*

(live sports streams with no ads)





CHAPTER 4

Where to get help when your bills are more than you can handle

Ernesto is now earning enough extra income with his promotion and side projects, so his family no longer qualifies for state and federal assistance with his bills. To qualify for federal assistance, a family of three would have to be at 130% of the poverty line, which means they are earning \$2,072 per month. You will also have to demonstrate that your assets fall below \$2,750 per month (if your household does not have someone 60 years or older, or someone with a disability). If you have someone 60 or older, or someone with a disability living with you, your assets can equal \$4,250 or less.





PRACTICAL WAYS TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE ON \$40,000 OR LESS PER YEAR

However, if you find you are unable to pay your bills, please consider applying for these government assistance programs until you can “break outta the government-assistance matrix” through bettering your skills, education, and the ability to get higher paying jobs. These government programs include:

- **SNAP EBT cards*** help you pay for your groceries
- **Lifeline*** helps you get discounted telephone or internet service
- **Medicaid*** is available to help you with medical coverage, dental coverage, vision coverage, and prescriptions
- **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)*** helps eligible low-income households pay your heating and cooling energy costs
- **Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)*** helps you pay for water and wastewater bills
- **For help with Tennessee utility bills,** this website* will offer you options
- **For help with Kentucky utility bills,** use this website*
- **For help with Indiana electric bills,** use this website*





Some Additional Cost-Effective Health Insurance Options

If you are earning too much money to qualify for these state and federal programs, consider getting an Amazon Prime subscription. The monthly cost is \$15 per month, or \$139 a year, and this offers you the additional option of joining their new “One Medical” benefit. One Medical is a telehealth program for \$9 a month in addition to your \$15 per month for your Amazon Prime membership. Total cost per month: \$24.

If your employer offers you the new **SONATA BANK APP**, this app will include a telehealth service for medical care, behavioral health (therapy and counseling and prescriptions, as well as a simpler way to bank online (depositing checks, paying bills, transferring money to your friends and family) without creating any added fees for non-sufficient funds or a low monthly balance as some banks charge.





CHAPTER 5

Free education websites to learn new skills and RAISE your income

One way to increase your income is to add to your “talent stack,” or to “up skill.” By learning how to do various tasks such as computer coding, graphic design, typing, bookkeeping, or event planning, you can become a valuable asset to someone for a higher hourly rate.

Here are some FREE education websites for you to check out:

- **Alison.com*** has more than 4,000 FREE online courses, which they’ve grown over the past 15 years; many have certificates and diplomas
- **EdX.org*** offers FREE courses from top universities
- **Coursera.com*** offers more than 1,700 FREE online courses
- **KhanAcademy.org*** offers everything from math courses to personal finance courses, career planning, and more
- **ClassCentral.com*** has FREE courses from 1,000+ universities, 50 providers, and 600+ institutions like The Smithsonian
- **LinkedIn Learning*** (formerly Lynda.com) offers hundreds of FREE online courses



PRACTICAL WAYS TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE ON \$40,000 OR LESS PER YEAR

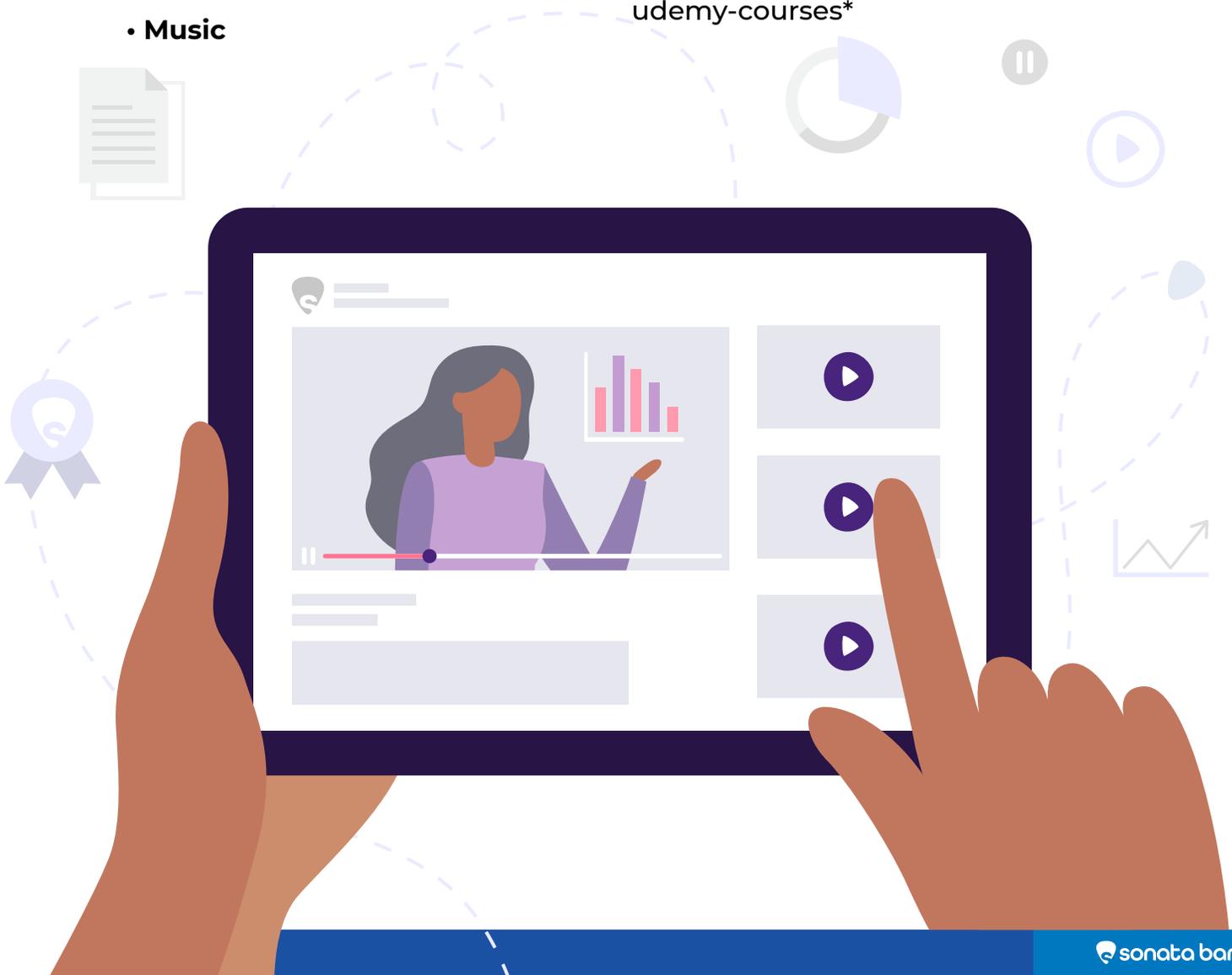
■ **Udemy.com*** is a website that teaches FREE courses in the following categories:

- **Business**
- **Design**
- **Development**
- **Finance & Accounting**
- **Health & Fitness**
- **IT & software**
- **Lifestyle**
- **Marketing**
- **Music**

- **Productivity**
- **Personal Development**
- **Photography & Video**
- **Teaching & Academics**

■ **There's a FREE newsletter (and website) called**

ebizfacts.com* that keeps track of Udemy's top FREE courses, and it's updated daily. Here is the link for you: https://ebizfacts.com/free-udemy-courses*





CHAPTER 6

The GIG economy and side hustles: Ways to earn extra cash

What if you could earn money from your phone while waiting for a ride somewhere? Or from your computer at home? Here are some vetted, legitimate, and unique side hustles that are helping people earn money and save and invest their way out of poverty.

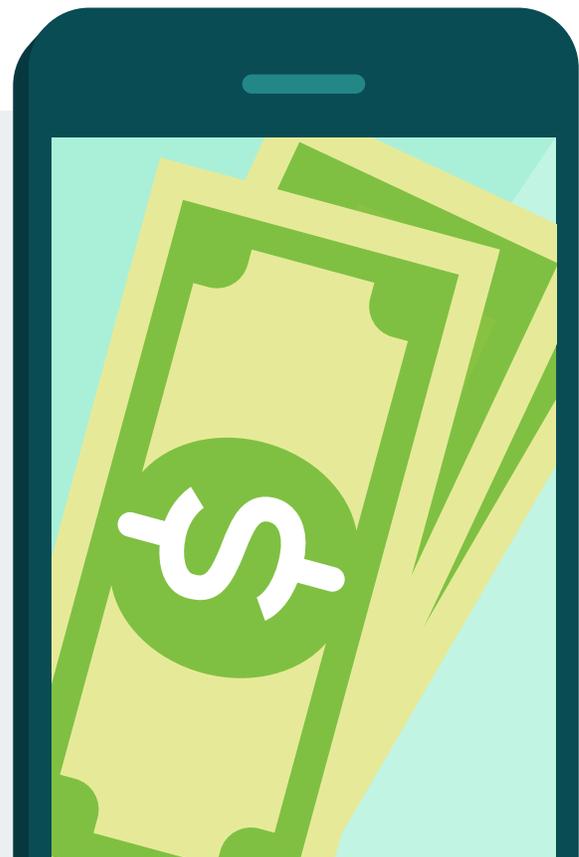
We hope some of these opportunities can help you reach your goals, too.

■ **TaskRabbit.com*** – From becoming someone’s virtual assistant

to picking up their groceries and running errands for them, this app matches people’s needs with the people who can handle their errands for them. Top earners have made up to \$2,000 per week through this app.

■ **Freecash*** – Earn up to \$1,000 per month doing tasks at your convenience.

■ **Rover.com*** – If you love animals, this website matches people who can care for animals (dogs and





PRACTICAL WAYS TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE ON \$40,000 OR LESS PER YEAR

cats) with pet owners who need someone to either walk their dog a few times a day or even live in their home while they travel to take care of their animals.

■ **Fiverr.com*** – From photography and web design to creating videos and logos, you can sign up to offer your talents on this website and you will be paid via Stripe.

■ **Branded Surveys*** – Take surveys from major companies like Walmart and Apple and you will get paid for your time. It's free to sign up and you get 100 bonus points as a new member.

■ **Swagbucks.com*** – You earn “SBs” every time you do a survey, which you can redeem for cash via Paypal or gift cards to retailers like Amazon.

■ **Survey Junkie*** – This is a site similar to Branded Surveys, where you can make extra cash online

taking surveys.

■ **Kashkick*** – Earn money for completing simple tasks on your phone like doing surveys or trying new products. You will get paid via Paypal.

■ **Inbox Dollars*** – You can earn as much as \$225 per month watching viral videos on YouTube.

■ **Sonata's App** – You can earn free cash rewards by watching short videos on financial literacy and answering one or two questions.





In closing

Remember, your financial wellness is a lifelong journey. Consider every step you take towards managing your finances according to your plan as a triumph.

Whether you're saving for that dream vacation, a new home, or creating a safety net for your unexpected expenses, finding peace of mind with your money choices will make your life easier.

SONATA BANK wishes you all the best on your continued journey toward financial wellness and prosperity. We are here for you every step of the way. Just let us know how we can help you.

**You will be linking to another website not owned or operated by Sonata Bank. Sonata Bank is not responsible for the availability or content of this website and does not represent either the linked website or you, should you enter into a transaction. The inclusion of any hyperlink does not imply any endorsement, investigation, verification or monitoring by Sonata Bank of any information in any hyperlinked site. We encourage you to review their privacy and security policies which may differ from Sonata Bank.*

Important Disclosures

Investing carries risks, including the potential loss of principal. This material is for informational purposes only and is not intended as personalized advice. Suitability of strategies varies per individual. Review your circumstances before investing.

For tax, legal, or detailed investment advice, consult a qualified professional. Sonata suggests speaking with a tax advisor, CPA, financial planner, or investment manager for specific guidance.