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Reshaping How We Live

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In the same way that the lipstick index was used as an economic indicator when women spent money on lipstick instead of higher-cost luxury goods, the following are examples of the many ways the recession is reshaping behaviour, and society.

SAVING UP FOR A DIVORCE

Financial issues have traditionally sent many couples along the path to the divorce court, but now they may actually be keeping them together.

With cash flow diminishing and house prices finally obeying the laws of gravity, the financial upheaval of the divorce process makes it a much less attractive option.

"I've definitely heard of more people sticking it out," said Akeela Davis, a financial planner specializing in divorce at TD Waterhouse in Vancouver. She models settlements for clients to help them decide if they can really afford two households in the long term. "Some end up with separate bedrooms and separate living areas that just happen to be under the same roof," she said.

But for those determined to see it through, she has some belt-tightening advice: Cut out the lawyers. Or at least limit their involvement.

"The most expensive divorces are the completely acrimonious ones, where emotions take over and every little thing goes through the lawyers," Ms. Davis said. She acknowledges that the grieving process will cause some people to act less rationally than they normally would, but suggests the cheaper option of a mediator when agreement is hard to come by.

"Talk together and work out as much as you can on your own. The more you agree on, the less time you spend fighting it out with lawyers."

Michael McKiernan, National Post

LOCKING IN A STABLE JOB

Back in the heady days of August 2007, before the words "subprime mortgage" had entered the lexicon, the chief of the Vancouver Police Department made a desperate plea for recruits. Blaming a hot job market for the inability to attract applicants, he said they needed 100 new bodies just to fill a

backlog of vacant positions.

Eighteen months later, those jobs are taken and the drive continues as the city prepares for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

"Now we can have an information session with virtually no advertisement and it's standing-room only," said spokesperson Sergeant Howard Chow.

In January, 2009, they received three times as many applications as in the same period a year earlier. A YouTube ad, a Facebook group and a mobile recruitment office all played their part in boosting interest,

but Sgt. Chow knows what really tipped the balance: "The economy is the key factor. In unstable times, people like the look of a secure, steady job," he said. "That's what we offer."

Michael McKiernan, National Post

HITTING THE BOOKS (AGAIN)

This is how quickly the changing economic climate has transformed the attractiveness of education, according to James Knight, CEO of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges.

"Picture Alberta six months ago: Anybody could go into a McDonald's and make 15 bucks an hour or go to the oilpatch and make 50 bucks an hour, so why would you go to college, or university for that matter?" he says. "Large numbers of young people were drawn into employment because the opportunities were abundant and the salaries were so rich. But that's not quite the case anymore."

Ontario colleges enjoyed a 10% jump in applications for programs starting in January --almost double last year's 5.1% annual increase over the year before. Toronto's George Brown College alone has 13.5% more students now than a year ago, with 10,000 applications waiting for September programs.

Nova Scotia Community College has seen the usual steady increase at its 13 campuses, but layoffs at the Magna International plant in Sydney have fuelled big enrolment jumps at that location, says Jamie Hilts, vice-president academic.

"What we're seeing is that people who are displaced now moving into things like welding and metal fabrication," he says. At the University of Toronto, applications to graduate programs are up almost 10% over this time last year, and other universities are bracing for the spike that typically accompanies an economic downturn.

"We're a counter-cyclical business in the graduate school market," says Kirk Hill, executive director of Simon Fraser University's business career management centre.

Shannon Proudfoot, Canwest News Service

LOOKING FOR AN OUT

Some legal experts suggest the number of people asking to be excused from jury duty could rise as the economy weakens.

"It's mostly those folks who are self-employed or don't have any bridging at their workplace to cover off their salaries," said Saskatchewan Justice Department spokesman Andrew Dinsmore, said the province is hearing more instances of people seeking to be excused for financial reasons.

University of Alberta Law professor Sanjeev Anand said even in good economic times people don't want to sit on juries because they are not adequately compensated. When times get tough, he said small business owners and employees are most affected.

He said in bad times small business owners are less likely to have an employee who can cover them off. And, while employees are legally protected from being fired for being away for jury duty, some may feel reluctant requesting time off work, he said.

Jurors in Saskatchewan are paid \$25 a day for civil trials and \$80 a day for criminal trials. In Ontario, jurors are paid nothing for the first 10 days of a trial and \$40 a day starting on Day

11. In B. C., jurors are paid \$20 a day for the first 10 days and \$60 a day from Day 11 to Day

49. Alberta pays jurors \$50 per day. "We can still find the right number of jurors," said Prof. Anand. "I think the question becomes: are the juries truly representative of the general population?"

Jordana Huber, Canwest News Service

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