



HOW TO HANDLE THE THREAT OF A DEBT COLLECTOR ON YOUR TAIL AS THE COST OF LIVING INCREASES

Calling in your debts

MONEY

ANTHONY KEANE

Bills are getting tougher to pay as the surging cost of living combines with painful interest rate rises, and some Australians will inevitably find themselves dealing with debt collectors.

Insolvency specialists say it is far better to speak up early if you have problems paying bills, as many organisations have teams to help with hardship support before an issue escalates.

But if a debt collector does approach you, it's wise to know some strategies to deal with it.

Oracle Insolvency Services partner Yulia Petrenko says being chased by debt collectors can be stressful, and people should know they have legal rights and protections.

"Debt collection is not how it is portrayed in some movies," she says.

"It is a tightly regulated industry. It is illegal for a debt collector to threaten or use physical force against you and your family, or damage your property. This behaviour should immediately be reported to the police.

"They are not allowed to verbally abuse and deceive you or unreasonably harass or hassle you."

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission guidelines say debt collectors must respect your right to privacy but they can contact you to ask for payment, offer to settle or make payment plans, question why you haven't met agreed payments, review payment plans and inform you what happens if you don't pay.

They can also repossess goods that you owe money on "as long as they've been through the correct process".

Petrenko says debt collectors can visit your home or work if they cannot make payment arrangements by letter, email or phone.

"There are strict rules about the time they can visit your home or work and they must leave

immediately if you ask them to do so," she says.

"They also are not allowed to discuss your financial situation with another person without your permission so if they show up to your workplace they cannot tell your boss why they are there."

Petrenko says if dealing with a debt collector:

- Ask for proof that the debt is yours.
- Thoroughly check all documents.
- Negotiate a realistic payment plan.
- Do not ignore the debt collector.
- Keep a record of all interactions.

"If you disagree with the amount demanded ... you have the right to dispute the debt but it is important to seek professional help immediately," she says.

"Our advice is to negotiate with your creditors before it's too late. It is difficult to make a hardship application after debt collectors have become involved, so it is vital you don't bury your head in the sand when financial trouble starts."

Jodie Bedoya, director of debt collection training company eMatrix,

Know your rights

What debt collectors can NOT do ...

By law, debt collectors must not:

- **Trespass** on your property.
- **Use** overbearing tactics or abusive language.
- **Harass** or contact you at unreasonable times or more than is needed.
- **Mislead** or deceive you.
- **Take** unfair advantage of you because of illness, disability, age, illiteracy, or lack of understanding of the law.
- **Discuss** your debt with someone else without your permission.

Source: MoneySmart, ACCC

says many organisations have specialist hardship teams trained to help you before a small bill escalates.

"Don't be embarrassed either – they do it all day and their role is not to judge," she says.

Bedoya says debt collectors may be able to offer you a reduced lump-sum payment to settle a debt.

"You can negotiate, so ask," she says. "A collector's job is to understand your capacity to pay – so be ready to answer some questions around what is happening for you that you can't pay.

"If it is all too much – have someone call for you and give them authority to talk on your behalf, that's OK too."

Bedoya says people should not overcommit to unrealistic repayments "because the follow up calls or SMSs will stress you out more when you miss payments".

"Try to keep your calm – firing up on staff won't get you a better outcome, it will just cause you more stress," she says.

"Remember too, on the other side, they have a hard job, so talking to someone and helping them out might just make their day."

Leave your armchair and front up for women's sport

SUPPORTERS

SELINA STEELE

Newly minted Commonwealth Games rugby gold medallist Charlotte Caslick says it's not a question of "if" or "when" women's sports are worth investing in but "how" and "where".

Women's sports are riding a wave of popularity that promises to be as lasting as it is long overdue but Caslick warns that to maintain the momentum, it is time for women "to show up" and literally get their bums on stadium seats.

Caslick, 27, says there has never been a better time for women's sport as showcased by the glut this month ranging from AFLW, NRLW, WBBL, FIBA World Cup and her own code's rugby World Cup in South Africa.

"The next frontier is getting female supporters to the games. Women's sport is going in the right direction and it's great that expansion and parity is part of the national conversation for most female sporting codes. But we also need women, and men, there at the games in real life, we need them to show up and buy tickets and buy merchandise ... because we won't get equality unless people turn up.

"It's time to get out of the armchairs and show up."

Presenters at tomorrow's Ministry of Sport Women in Sport Summit on the Gold Coast will report that across viewership and revenue metrics, women's sport has experienced significant growth in the past few years and resulted in deepening engagement.

The likes of streaming service Kayo has responded to this and is shaping up for a record number of women's sports' hours in September through to October.

Kayo Sports marketing director



CHARLOTTE CASLICK

Kim McConnie, who is presenting at the conference, says: "Kayo Sports is passionate about giving women's sports a platform to grow and prosper. Over the coming months there is an incredible equinox of women's sport as we deliver the biggest seasons of AFLW, NRLW, WBBL along with Netball Internationals and much more."

More than 1.3 million Australians have subscribed to Kayo.

Brands who sponsor and support women's sports are thought to be more trustworthy by sports fans and viewed as industry leaders, according

to Foxtel Media and Gemba's Shifting the Goal Posts report. It found the most popular reasons for women's sports engagement were:

- The rapidly improving quality of competition;
- Female athletes acting as strong role models and;
- The desire to support women's sports and create more opportunities for future generations.

The report found that 6.6 million Australians are currently engaged with women's sports. Gemba's head of insights, Andrew Goodieson, says: "We hope this research will show that there is a strong business case for immediate involvement."