phoned my bank (Suncorp). My husband and I have had our home loan with them for close to 10 years. I told them I was currently paying 5.02 per cent and would like them to reduce the rate.

The woman I spoke to said the bank would review it, and after a few minutes on hold she came back and said my new rate was 4.02 per cent. I must admit I had a little cry — not sure why . . . proud . . . angry . . . happy! I will be phoning them every six months from now on. (I have also bought three more copies of your book and given them to my nieces.)

Barefoot responds: Let me channel my inner Oprah: You go, girl!

Even better, like "O" I can give you the equivalent of a free car.

If you've got a $300,000 mortgage, with 15 years left on the clock, that five-minute telephone call has saved you $27,618. A few taps on the MoneySmart mortgage switch calculator suggests that if you maintain the same minimum repayments, you'll save $36,908 over the life of your loan and be debt-free 15 months earlier.

The Barefoot Investor: The Only Money Guide You'll Ever Need (Wiley) RRP $29.95

Election time turns tax into political spin

Noel Whittaker

IT'S obvious the next Federal election will be fought on tax. That's good news. While politicians have fiddled with our tax system for years, there's been no meaningful reform since John Howard introduced the GST 18 years ago.

But any debate on tax must be based on facts, not rhetoric.

Unfortunately, that's hard to achieve and many of the contributions to the debate are unhelpful. It appears to me that Labor, in particular, wants to divide Australians into villains and victims. Just last week I heard deputy Opposition leader Tanya Plibersek vowing to make sure "the rich pay their fair share of tax". The words "rich" and "fair share" are highly subjective, so let's look at some facts.

A person earning $40,000 a year pays $5347 a year tax, including the Medicare levy — 13.4 per cent of their taxable income. A person earning $95,000 a year pays $24,682 tax — 26 per cent of their taxable income. A person on $400,000 a year pays a whopping $161,232 in tax — 40.3 per cent of their taxable income.

According to latest Tax Office statistics, just 2.9 per cent of taxpayers earn more than $180,000 a year, and they contributed 29.8 per cent of the total income tax collected. There were 16.6 per cent in the second-lowest tax bracket and they contributed 39 per cent of total income tax. So, 19.5 per cent of taxpayers are contributing almost 70 per cent of our total income tax. I would say those top-bracket earners are punching way above their weight.

Now, what about some other alleged victims of the tax system — women?

Women retire with much less superannuation than men, and their average pay is much less than men.

But working women tell me one of their biggest challenges is childcare, which can cost more than $100 a day a child. Consequently, many women are choosing to structure their employment to maximise the opportunities to care for their family at the expense of a higher income.

And leaving the workforce to have and raise children can have a big impact on their final superannuation balance. These issues will not be affected by tax policy. To make changes here, other policies would be required.

But facts don't get in the way of spin. Last week Ben Oquist of the Australia Institute said: "Negative gearing discriminates against women". His rationale was that the majority of investors who use negative gearing are men.

Of course, that's correct: most investors in residential property are couples, and for tax purposes the asset is normally put in the name of the highest income earner, who is often the bloke.

And what is Bill Shorten's solution to solve the situational problems many women face? It is to take the GST off tampons on the grounds that the tax discriminates against women.

Well, Bill, there is GST on toilet paper and we all need that. It's a very slippery slope.

In any event, if we can believe my local pharmacist, removal of the GST would save the average woman just $18 a year.

Another issue in the coming election will be catch-up concessional super contributions. These allow people who have been out of the workforce — usually women caring for children — to make extra contributions when they rejoin. It's sensible and workable, yet Labor is opposing it.

Work that out.

Noel Whittaker is the author of *Making Money Made Simple* and other books on personal finance. His advice is general in nature and readers should seek their own professional advice before making any financial decisions.

ASK THE EXPERT

Send your questions to Noel Whittaker noelwhit@gmail.com or tweet @NoelWhittaker

Q I am 83 and my wife 78. We own our home and get a pension of $250 each fortnight based on our assets of $670,000. Last year our taxable income was $25,000 (tax-free) and we got franking credit refunds of $6800. What would be our position if one of us died under the existing rules and under the new rules proposed by Labor.

A In each case the survivor would lose any pension, as the assets cut-off point for a part singles pension is $556,500. Under the existing system, the survivor would retain the franking credits of $6800, but under Labor they would lose them and the pension. Your best bet is to get estate planning advice and arrange your wills so enough of your investment portfolio is bequeathed to others to ensure the survivor stays under the assets test.

When a look in the mirror reflects bad news

WORKPLACE MATTERS
Gary Martin

HAVE you ever worked for a manager who at best is insensitive, disrespectful and a tad egotistical, and at worst highly volatile, abusive and ridiculously self-absorbed?

Chances are you have a narcissist on your hands, or at least a boss who displays some narcissistic tendencies.

According to experts, narcissists have an overinflated view of themselves, little regard for others and a deep-rooted need for others to admire them.

Below the surface, however, they have a highly fragile self-esteem and cannot handle even a mere hint of criticism. Unfortunately, experts agree that narcissists are over-represented in leadership roles when compared to the general population. It's probably because they can talk themselves up big time during a recruitment process and are often mistakenly viewed as charismatic and confident leaders who will be able to improve business performance.

But there is considerable downside to having unchecked narcissists in an organisation.

The work environment becomes toxic, it destroys the team culture, stress levels across the workplace soar, productively plummets and staff turnover increases.

Of all the managerial types around, the narcissist-style manager is one of the most offensive types to be found in a workplace.

Every boss will at times exhibit behaviours that might seem inappropriate. After all, management roles are stressful and stress can cause people to react in undesirable ways, especially when the pressure kicks in. But an occasional digression from effective management practice does not make you a narcissist.

The narcissist manager, on the other hand, floats through several personality types in perpetuity.

Tell-tale signs are a boss who is highly insensitive to team members, takes disproportionate credit for work achievements, and makes it clear they are superior to others in the workplace.

Add to that the narcissist tendencies of an unflinching capacity to charm those they deem to be important, a complete lack of empathy and a preference to arouse negative feelings in the workplace, and you have a major problem.

If you are working with a narcissist boss there are a number of strategies you can employ to survive what most find to be an intolerable situation:

AVOID being fooled that the narcissist boss has your interests at heart, no matter what has been said to the contrary.

IF you need to challenge the narcissist boss, frame your comments around what will look good for your boss' image or career.

WHILE it may seem disingenuous behaviour on your own part, your narcissist boss will always respond better to you if you can "stroke their ego".

But take note.

If your mental health suffers as a result of the environment you find yourself working in, develop an action plan that includes either speaking up about your boss' narcissistic behaviour to someone more senior in the organisation, or arranging to be moved to a position beyond the narcissist's immediate sphere of influence.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive at the Australian Institute of Management WA