

Irresolution, Harry Chapin's Lyrics, And the Intentional Use of Money

From bartering to Bitcoin, man has attempted since time immemorial to place the right value on goods and services.

It's not an exact science.

John Travolta's line (as "Vincent"), while dining at a '50s themed restaurant in the 1994 movie *Pulp Fiction*: "I gotta know what a five-dollar shake tastes like!" He's brought along his individual bias about the value of anything.

Like a mirage in the desert, **our perception of reality is often skewed**. We simply don't have a standard yardstick to view our money other than via the subjective prism of our own desires, wants, needs and experiences.

Throw the stock market on top of all that and you end up with a witch's brew of precious little logic, a pinch of emotion, a smidge of reality, and a whole heap of accumulated assets and possessions.

We valiantly attempt to protect what we have. We avoid the big mistake, the get-rich quick schemes, and betting the ranch.

Alas – faulty perception may prove harmful.

It can cause us to build a one-sided story based on our current set of biases and our ignorance of what is truly happening in the world. A myopic viewpoint – incomplete, ill-informed and distorted – may lull us into believing we are well informed.

This is very dangerous when concerning money

and investing. Recognizing this, we seek out awareness and comprehension. Once we understand, we see things more clearly. All the stuff that occupied our brain while struggling for clarity now dissipates. Our attention now focuses on what we are newly aware of.

Recalling, there was a time back in 1995 when Bill Gates finally realized that "search" on the Internet was going to transform how people go about finding information. But his awareness was late in arriving, as many at Microsoft had been pushing him to develop a Microsoft Internet browser. Finally, Microsoft Explorer was born.

It sparked a fierce competition with the already established Netscape Internet browser, and barely won that battle over the next few years.

Microsoft could have had a disastrous "Kodak Moment" if it had waited any longer.

Bill Gates acted decisively as soon as he understood what the future of Internet search entailed.

How about when we take action around our money? Taking action without direction, with a low level of confidence, and in a confused state of mind can be disastrous. There are so many charlatans, con men and agents-of-doom on high alert out there, eagerly trolling for people who are running amok in an anxious, confused and frustrated state of mind.

My purpose in mentioning this is to emphasize how important it is to perceive things accurately and act upon one's understanding with confidence

and clarity. Unfortunately, far too often, the intangible world of money interacting with life's turbulent inner thoughts can cause anxiety, inaction, or wrong action. Indeed, such daily oscillations can become so severe for some people that they begin to consider irrational, drastic measures — in rare cases, even death as a way out.

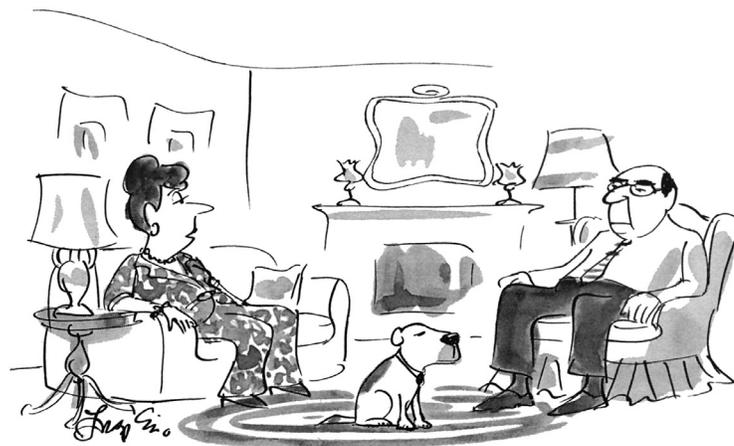
With money, awareness of its role in our lives comes first. Not will power, not positive mental attitude, not positive affirmation. These may be ways to strengthen our actions, but first we must be aware of our own personal view of our money.

What role does money really play in our lives? Does it play a supporting role, or lead the way? Does it hinder us from truly experiencing a deep personal life, or does it serve to enhance it? Do we take a disciplined strategic course with our money, with a visionary eye to the future? Or are we penny wise and pound foolish, walking over dollars to pick up pennies?

These are tough questions to posit. They raise quantitative and qualitative challenges, both factual and emotional. Indeed, there is time for frugality, and time for easy living. Rather than frugality and easy living being on-off switches, they are actually more of a sliding scale, as life rolls and roils us along.

Making a decision to arrange for a wedding celebration can be a \$5,000 to \$500,000 proposition. Whichever it is, it's two people getting married in front of a small or large gathering of family and friends with a ceremony followed by pictures and a reception.

My experience has been that it's not the amount of money that really makes the difference. It is the people who attend, the environment, the warmth of the reception and the coming together of two families. It is the poignant, outrageous, desperate or funny speeches. It is the great orchestra or funky DJ. Yes, money can make an impact. But the crucial difference between a so-so and great



"If you ask me, all three of us are in different states of awareness."

event centers on the happy people who help make it so special.

Sometimes great experiences are cultural.

Oh sure, being in beautiful and sunny Hawaii with plumeria-scented tradewinds in a warm tropical venue with phenomenal food, drink and entertainment is certainly enjoyable. Conversely, getting rain-soaked while slogging through an Alaskan bog or tromping through deep icy snow over an Alaskan mountaintop in sub-zero weather — or simply pitching a tent with one's kids in the backyard — can produce singularly wonderful memories. (Indeed, I know!)

Look, I like flying first class, being treated like a king with every want and need immediately fulfilled, but sometimes when I get the bill my first split-second thought is: Was that experience worth it? There have been times when the people around me, especially the ones I love and hold dear, make any occasion, no matter the cost, just plain worth it.

It keeps coming back to money.

Is money in support of my life and my experiences, or am I chasing after it, letting it lead me to places both tangible and intangible that I'd rather not even visit?

Do you take the time to smell the roses?

In the 1974 pop song, “Cat’s In the Cradle” by Harry Chapin, the songwriter tells the bitter-sweet tale of a busy father postponing time with his son into the future, only to realize many years later that his son now mirrors his dad and has no time for him.

*“And the cat’s in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon
‘When you coming home, son?’ ‘I don’t know when
But we’ll get together then, Dad
We’re gonna have a good time then.”*

That ironically was in the 1970s when life seemed to move at a more pedestrian pace.

It’s gotten much worse.

Today does your digital, fast-paced life allow for the stillness, the quiet time to reflect, to rejuvenate, to reassess and then to move forward with renewed vim and vigor? How addicted are you to your smart devices? How often do you visit with your family and friends? Do you remember that time many years ago when a good conversation took place over hours without the ever-interrupting pings, custom music ditties and vibrating digital friends?

We have the money to spend – or not to spend – on these devices that can insidiously monopolize our daily lives and metastasize into addictive monsters if we allow them. Thankfully, many of the younger generation see this very clearly. They trend toward taking their disposable income to buy experiences, not more technology.

Does your money support you or do you support your money?

Assessing how I spend my time is my measurement to gain clarity about how I’m handling

money. One may find clarity by writing, talking, reading, meditating, practicing yoga or whatever else that shifts one’s mind toward neutral to review the mental bidding. **Awareness and clarity about your money is critically important because it affords you the confidence necessary to move forward with an intentionality of thought and action.**

Clarity begins with awareness. It’s that proverbial light bulb that snaps on at the precise moment of acute consciousness.

What then follows is focusing on the illuminated insight and then intentionally deciding what to do next.

The intentional state of mind allows us to direct our freedom of time, money, relationship and purpose. Once we act intentionally, we generally commit resources, such as money and time. We make our commitment. We are now open to judgment, first by ourselves and then by others.

Most of the mistakes in thinking are inadequacies of perception rather than mistakes of logic.

- EDWARD DE BONO

The tricky part here is determining whether our money is leading the intentionality parade or supporting it. When it is leading, trouble generally ensues. Bad things happen.

It’s like following the GPS on your smart device to an unfamiliar location. We have all heard the horror stories about people driving into lakes or what not. I’ve certainly taken a wrong turn when my subconscious was screaming at me not to do so – yet I blindly followed my “smart” device. Classic error.

Money leads, we lose. Money follows, we have a chance for a good outcome.

All those gloom-and-doom market newsletter writers are a great example. Their long-format commentaries build up a seemingly credible case

for why this time it is different. Now the world is truly going to end for sure! Sell everything, buy gold and silver, then move to some remote rural shire with canned food and bottled water for three years, and include a gas generator, a hand-crank radio, pliers, flashlights, can openers, moist towelettes, matches, pet food and a healthy supply of weaponry and ammo to protect you and your family from the Armageddon that is nearly upon us.

Now, tell me you didn't have this nagging thought cross your brain in the fall of 2008 when it appeared the world's financial structure was surely collapsing!

Some ducked out of the stock market after the market's precipitous fall, not to return for many years until after the market had more than doubled.

We were all on high alert. Emotions were frayed or tearing. Some of us hid thousands of dollars of cash in safe places in our homes or other places – just in case. Most of us became momentarily irrational to some degree or another.

The money was leading the populace, at least mentally, for a good six months.

But the vast majority of us didn't act out dramatically. We didn't spend money crazily. We didn't sell into a down market. We hung in for a rough ride, rougher than Americans had experienced since the Great Depression.

Oh sure, 2008 was scary. Caught up in the headlines of subprime mortgages, the credit crisis and Government bailouts, some frantically sought quick clarity with a skewed mindset, acting presumably rationally to save their bacon.

The rest of us rode out the storm we believed would pass, (as we planned for such a possibility beforehand) ready to invest again when the time was right.

Look, life is not easy. We strive. We watch. We succeed. We suffer setbacks. We persevere. Through it all we try to keep our composure, keep what is clear in the front of our mind, and maintain a watchful eye for true danger.

We don't like the money tail wagging the dog of our consciousness.

Have our money stay in its rightful place as the servant to its master.

The winds of change are a constant. History has shown us time and time again that their intensity is fueled by human behavior and emotion. But while the wind's direction may momentarily alter, those who act intentionally — after carefully assessing and clarifying their position — can adjust their sails and eventually reach their destination.

Money is a thing, a tool, an inanimate object to store value. It's not the universal yardstick, the be-all-and-end-all, the sine qua non of human joy.

Enjoy your family and friends. Don't postpone happiness. Let your money support the experiences you want in whatever ways that serve who you are and what you want to be.

"The cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon

Little boy blue and the man in the moon..."

Embrace the present.

Enjoy your money. Enjoy your life.



Gary Klaben

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