



TRUE WEALTH

Living a Life We Love is Real Affluence

by Judith Fertig

Traditional economics has us thinking in opposites—in terms of assets and liabilities. We consider the value of the material things we've accumulated: We add up our assets, which may include stocks, bonds, real estate, bank accounts and retirement savings. Then we subtract what we owe: Our liabilities may include a home mortgage, credit card debt, insurance premiums and student and vehicle loans. The balance is deemed our net worth. Figured this way, our net worth changes every minute and can sometimes shift dramatically.

There is a better way to assess our wealth, because we are overlooking, dismissing or squandering valuable resources and benefits such as time, personal health, spiritual well-being, social connections or community in order to buy temporal things that will only depreciate over time.

Golden, Colorado, author David Wann explores this theme in his book *Simple Prosperity: Finding Real Wealth in a Sustainable Lifestyle*. He remarks, "The U.S. may be on top when it comes to spending, but we also lead the world in debt per capita, children in poverty,

percent of people in prison, obesity and infant mortality." In fact, the U.S. has recently been ranked 42nd among countries in longevity—right below Guam and just above Albania.

"So where is all the spending really getting us?" he asks. "We need to be getting more value out of each dollar, each hour, each spoonful of food, each square foot of house and each gallon of gas. The secret of success at the local, national and global scale is not really a secret; it's in plain sight, and it's called moderation."

Choose Lasting Wealth

"Imagine an economy in which life is valued more than money and power resides with ordinary people that care about one another, their community and their natural environment," says David Korten, Ph.D., the co-founder of Positive Futures Network and author of *Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth*.

"When we choose real wealth," says Korten, of Bainbridge Island, Washington, "we can have exciting hobbies and adventures; work that challenges and stimulates us; and spiritual connection

with a universe that's infinitely larger than a stock portfolio. Instead of more stuff in our already-stuffed lives, we can have fewer things, but better things of higher quality—fewer visits to the doctor and more visits to museums and friends' houses."

Step One: Taking Inventory of Our Stuff

Suze Orman, owner of the Suze Orman Financial Group, in Emeryville, California, and the bestselling author of *The Courage to Be Rich: Creating a Life of Material and Spiritual Abundance*, ponders whether having stuff is worth it and suggests we take an inventory of what we own. "Think about the value of each object—what it cost you when you bought it, what it's worth in dollars today, and what it's worth in an Earthly, material representation of who you are now," she says.

Orman suggests that we go through every closet and cupboard and recycle or throw away items that no longer serve us well, and then reconnect with items we cannot part with, such as family mementos. "Think of these items so precious to you and how little, in fact, they cost you," she says. In this way we define for ourselves the true meaning of worth, and it's never about the stuff. Once we have a handle on what we own, it's time to turn to what we want and how we can get there.

Step Two: Re-Evaluating Life Goals

Just as we would do a personal financial assessment before we make plans to achieve financial goals, a life audit helps us determine our priorities for living happily and productively. Ximena Vengoechea, a design researcher for Twitter, Inc., in San Francisco, recently did this using 100 sticky notes during one dedicated afternoon. She wrote a single wish, one thing she'd like to do, on each note.

During this "spring cleaning for the soul," as she calls it, Vengoechea reaffirmed her thirst for learning and adventure. Taking it a step further, she analyzed how she spent her time and how often she saw the people most important to her, mapping the data as pie charts. She discovered that most of her time was

spent in work-related activities and not enough in adventure or seeing the people she loved. Drawing it up in the visual medium of charts helped her identify her life goals and see the changes she needed to make. Doubtless, we can all find better ways to utilize our assets.

Our Time

Arianna Huffington, of New York City, founder of *The Huffington Post*, knows firsthand about having so many demands on our time that days feel rushed, which can increase our stress and negatively impact our productivity. She says, "On the flip side, the feeling of having enough time, or even surplus time, is called 'time affluence'. Although it may be hard to believe, it's actually possible to achieve." Huffington recommends simple steps like getting enough sleep and putting time limits on work and online activities.

Belinda Munoz, a social change activist in San Francisco who blogs at TheHalfwayPoint.net, observes, "Time is neutral. We either use it wisely or waste it, so the onus is on us to make it an asset." Munoz can both let go of stress and be more productive when she blocks out day parts. "When I focus, I shut out interruptions, stop feeling rushed and get my work done with ease," she says.

Our Health

One high-impact way to support personal health is to value food more, maintains Wann. "We need to spend more of our household budget for food, not less," he says. "By rearranging both our household and national expenditures, we should give a higher priority to fresh, healthy food and a lower priority to electronic gadgets, shopping, cars, lawns and even vacations. Our overall expenses don't have to go up, they just need to be realigned with our changing values. By choosing higher quality food and supporting better ways of growing it, we also begin to reshape the American culture," he says.

Our Community

The community, rather than the stock market, is the better source of real wealth—both personal and global—maintains Korten. "Your community



economy is part of the glue that binds people together. It's the key to physical and mental health and happiness." Giving less control over our financial well-being to Wall Street and more to Main Street will help us think in terms of livelihoods, instead of mere jobs. For Korten, this equates to not only how we make money to live, but also how we live—valuing our homes, communities and natural environment.

Priceless social capital comes from investing our time and money in local communities. Korten observes how, when freely and wisely spent, these efforts can lower crime rates, make schools more productive and help economies function better. Korten cites Oakland, California's Well-Being in Business Lab, which works with the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, to provide local communities with a research-based model for prosperity. In socially abundant communities and nations, individuals don't have to earn as much money

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~David Howitt

to be comfortable, because their quality of life is partly provided by the strength of social bonds.

Heeding the Call to Change

Finding and doing what "lights us up" will bring us abundance, claims David Howitt in *Heed Your Call*. The Portland, Oregon, Meriwether Group entrepreneur who consults for consumer companies, maintains that finding our heroic purpose (that heart-centered thing we feel we were meant to do) is the first step toward true wealth. Howitt says the secret is in one small word—and. Instead of choosing either/or, our world expands with "and". He urges us to integrate the intuitive and analytic parts of ourselves: "poet and professional, prophet and profit, soul and success."

It's not just about philanthropy, but truly making your community and your world a better place through your work, he observes. "You're doing good in the world, and when you live that way, money follows you."

Judith Fertig blogs about living well at AlfrescoFoodAndLifestyle.blogspot.com from Overland Park, KS.

CONDUCTING A LIFE AUDIT

by Ximena Vengoechea

Here's one approach to doing a life audit in order to both discern more keenly what's important and figure out how to allocate resources better to make those things happen.

- STEP 1:** Take a few hours and 100 sticky notes. Write a wish—something you'd like to do or have happen in your life—on each one. Arrange them on a flat surface.
- STEP 2:** See what patterns evolve. Rearrange the notes by themes or categories, such as family, physical health, adventure, profession, giving back and skills. Those that contain the most notes indicate the realm of your most powerful wishes.
- STEP 3:** Evaluate your time. Take stock of a typical day, week and month to analyze how you are spending it.
- STEP 4:** Prioritize. Some wishes need to be fulfilled every day or soon, while long-term wishes aim for "someday".
- STEP 5:** Make a plan. Just as with a smart financial strategy, which typically involves investing money over time, you can now allocate your time to make your wish list happen.

For more details, visit Tinyurl.com/ExampleOfLifeAudit