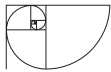


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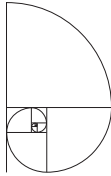
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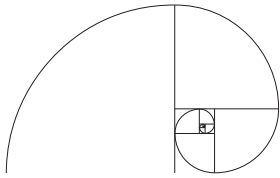
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Notes from Laurana

It's tricky living in a consumer world. Subjected to so many pressures and ulterior motives, it's up to each of us to think for ourselves. There's a lot to know, and it's not necessarily just how to budget and invest. The purpose of this book is to enable you to make choices from an insightful position rather than reacting in knee-jerk fashion to cultural expectations. *Conscious Spending, Conscious Life* provides perspectives that can help you avoid being swept along with the tide, so that you don't end up living a life you didn't really want.

Why and how...

I wrote this book because I couldn't find one that adequately conveyed what I was discussing with my students. For many years, I taught a college course about issues in consumer economics. There are plenty of books and articles providing good money management information, and they were useful references for some aspects of my course. However, when it came to the philosophical issues, I had to rely on a ragtag assortment of articles, Internet readings, and book chapters. As my course evolved, this became cumbersome for my students...and for me.

Eventually, I realized my best option was to write a course-book to cover the issues we discussed and to clarify their interconnections. That summer, I travelled to a lovely retreat centre in Ireland and settled in for 12 weeks of writing. Following the course structure I'd developed over several years, I wrote a student supplement for my class. They found it helpful to have a focused presentation of the issues, and my teaching was more rewarding because we were able to get to deeper thinking and discussion.

As other people read that course-book, I kept hearing that it should be available to a wider audience, since the issues of consumerism affect us all. With that prompting, I began another round of writing to expand the content, so it could stand on its own without me there to elaborate on points and answer questions.

As it stands now, this book is a combination of the philosophical and practical. I've done my best to succinctly address the breadth of information and ideas that are essential to the subject of conscious spending. To get there, I updated my research, thought about what I've learned from my students, and drew on my own life experiences. Then I imagined I was speaking with you about these many issues and considerations.

There is so much to say about conscious spending, and I had to draw the line somewhere so the book could actually be printed. I decided to deal with extra information by developing a companion blogsite. That is where you'll find my blog—which allows me to continue exploring thoughts—and a resources section containing expanded information in certain areas such as mortgages and life insurance. These topics are best understood as an overview until you actually need to buy the house or some life insurance. Only then do you need more detail, so you know what to look for and the questions to ask.

My intentions...

The consumer world has become highly complex, and it's easy to become overwhelmed and lost in details. My intention is to provide context, so you can see how things fit together. Context is like the background in a painting: it is the aspect that gives meaning to the individual objects featured in that painting. Without background, they are floating and aimless. The consumer culture is the painting we live in. If we do not have any context for what has gone before, we are also floating and aimless. That makes it much more difficult to make constructive choices.

I have also intentionally handled this subject in ways that provide perspective. Perspective is the capacity to view things in their true relationships or relative importance. Perspective allows you to get to the essentials. This is crucial in the consumer world, which is confusingly complex.

Because I'm a generalist at heart, I've covered a wide variety of topics and introduced you to the work of many others. I want you to be able to follow up on

topics that interest you, so I have included detailed endnotes and a bibliography. Many of my references are found on websites. To make connecting to them as convenient as possible, I've posted the endnotes, with hyperlinks, on my blogsite.

In the classroom, I taught with chalk in hand because a visual is often the best way to convey a concept. The illustrations in this book are tidier versions of my most useful blackboard drawings. I hope they have made things clearer.

I'm particularly interested in systems and how they work. I believe that when we understand a system, we are better able to navigate in it. I've shared my insights into aspects of the consumer world with the intention of empowering you to live well in it.

An uncommon guide...

This book is about questions more than answers. It is based on the premise that when we ask the right questions, we will be able to figure out what to do. This is one of the ways that it's an *uncommon* guide: it doesn't tell you what you *should* do. Instead, it provides insights and raises questions, which allow you to decide what you will choose to do for the life you want. This gives it a different tone from the many prescriptive self-help books. On my blogsite, I have posted a variety of questions that I've used with my students. You may find them a thought-provoking supplement to your reading.

Conscious Spending, Conscious Life is about financial sustainability rather than financial information or cleverness. Personal finance books usually speak in terms of managing your *money*. This book talks about managing *yourself*. Managing ourselves involves many things—monitoring our viewpoints and mindsets, cultivating resourcefulness, using time to maintain perspective, retaining our balance in changing circumstances, being aware of our ethics and holding ourselves to high standards, paying attention when we engage with the marketplace, and developing healthy skepticism and common sense. How we do these things has enormous impact on how we deal with money. That's why this book addresses much more than money.

At the back, I've included a section about learning the language of financial sustainability. It goes beyond the usual glossary: I've structured it for enrichment rather than simply repeating dictionary meanings. That's why it's subdivided into topic areas and has some additional comments with the definitions.

You'll also find a list of authors whose work has inspired me. Many are not in the bibliography, but all are found on my bookshelves. I thought they'd be useful for further exploration.

A highly noticeable, uncommon feature of this book is its wide margins. I insisted on this because I'm a fan of making notations in books. This is the kind of book that almost calls for it; you read something, it sparks a thought, and you don't want to lose the thread of the idea. It is so frustrating to be hampered by a narrow margin at those moments. I didn't want that to be your experience.

Finding your way...

Conscious Spending, Conscious Life encourages you to think about what works for you as you are making your life. In that spirit, I encourage you to engage with the content of this book in whatever ways work best for you.

Although we were all taught to read from front to back, you don't have to use that approach. You might want to start by reading the first section (Welcome to the Voyage) and the last (Living Consciously). They are like the bread that holds a sandwich together—the container for what is inside.

Or you may want to skip the bread and go directly to the meat of the matter. You could look at the Contents page and pick a chapter that seems relevant at the moment. You could pick one of the four main sections and read it entirely. You could look up a pertinent topic in the glossary.

Or you can go with your intuition, right brain, and serendipity. Open the book to a page and start reading there. It might be exactly what you need that day.

Starting conversations...

Consumer and money issues are relevant to all of us, yet they are rarely spoken about. Perhaps this is due to embarrassment over a lack of information or a feeling of not doing it well. In any case, it's time to change that.

This book can be a catalyst for starting conversations that will further our understanding of the issues and their implications. The “think-about” at the end of each chapter and the section near the end called “Strategies & Principles to Live By” are rich sources of things to talk about.

Because *Conscious Spending, Conscious Life* is about meeting the challenges of the consumer culture, these conversations pertain to our daily lives and can occur almost anywhere:

- Youth groups
- Continuing education classes
- Reading groups
- Post-secondary classrooms
- Post-secondary residences
- Premarital classes
- Dinner parties

The conversations do not need to occur in large or organized groups. They could be between

- couples who will soon begin living together,
- parents and their children who are on the verge of leaving home, or
- grandparents and their grandchildren who are graduating from school and entering adult life.

These discussions can be formal or informal. Often they will be prompted by something you read or hear in the news. It helps to consolidate your perspective by running it past someone else. In a group, more structure is needed to make good use of everyone's time. You will find a discussion guide in the resources

section of the blogsite. My suggestions may not be exactly what you want to do in your group, but will be a good starting place.

We are all teachers...

As much as possible, I engaged my students in discussion during class. It wasn't difficult because the topics were relevant, or soon would be. I found they readily responded to the invitation to share their perspectives and explore new ideas. Students came out of this experience feeling more confident of their ability to navigate life in the consumer culture, as illustrated by these comments from their course evaluations:

This course was a surprise to me. I learned a lot of things I didn't know I'd be learning and that was pretty cool. Most of it can actually be applied to my life; I'm sort of young and naïve and I learned a lot of things where before I was like 'What?'

Excellent. Makes you think and helps you make good life decisions.

At first I thought this class was going to be a drag, but quickly found it to be EXTREMELY helpful.

Very few post-secondary students have access to consumer economics courses. Parents and grandparents must, and can, provide this education for their children. Here's what I suggest:

- The basic step is to give them this book to read. I've often thought the perfect time is when a young person graduates from high school, heads off to college or university, or finds a job and moves away from home. They are at a teachable moment then—in transition and aware of the new responsibilities they are about to undertake.
- The next step is for the giver to read the book and start a conversation about a particular point from it—perhaps one they disagree with. Selecting

a point of disagreement is a good strategy because it gets away from sounding as if the parent is pushing predetermined viewpoints. Any of us who have raised teenagers know that this gets us nowhere.

- The third step is an idea from my friend and colleague, Patti. I think it's brilliant. She said that, before giving the book to her kids, she would read it and make notes in the margins. These comments would reflect her family's values and perspectives. Then she'd ask her husband to do the same, in a different colour ink. Individualizing the book this way will enrich it immensely, and I hope other people are inspired to also do that.

That brings me to the end of what I want to say about this book, except that I'm pleased to share it with you, and I trust you will find value in the time you spend with me on the subject of conscious spending. If you're inspired to share your thoughts and experiences with me, I'd be delighted to hear from you via my blogsite at www.TheUncommonGuides.com.