

THE MOST VITAL FORCE IN BUSINESS AND LIFE IS THE HONEST DESIRE TO SERVE BY IDENTIFYING THE WELL OF HUMAN NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS. GIVING WILL ALWAYS BE PREEMPTIVE TO RECEIVING. UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE MARKETPLACE DEMANDS AND FULFILLING THOSE DESIRES WHILST ADAPTING OUR STRATEGY IS A FULL-TIME ENDEAVOUR AND THE ONLY ROUTE TO SUSTAINABLE WEALTH.

The Pursuit of Fast Money

by Ben Benson

MOST RATIONAL PEOPLE prefer money to destitution. It's almost a Natural Law.

On a linear scale of one to ten—wealth at one pole, poverty on the other—few of us would consider choosing poverty as a personal goal. Unless self-denial can fetch us a worthier reward, “rational behavior” dictates that we do *everything* in our power to maximize our situation for ourselves, our families, our businesses and company shareholders.

No one can quibble with a “truth” as basic as this, and I will not attempt to disprove it either. Truths are, however, circular definitions or distinctions that explain everything about the real world. One tries to disprove them only at one's peril!

The “rational behavior” argument of wealth-acquisition is not quite circular. It stems from a linear- more than a circular-type logic, the same one that incites the mythical Daedalus to glue and thread together a set of wings and head for the sky.

Suppose the sky represents wealth, and assume it to be a noble aspiration on a linear scale. Now, imagine the great architect of Greek mythology, Daedalus, falling out of favor with King Minos, who promptly imprisons him with his son in a tall tower. Before he takes flight with Icarus on their new wings, he warns him to fly neither too high (for fear of the sun's heat), nor too low (the ocean spray may weigh down the wings and cause them to sag). As they pass Samos, Delos and Lebynthos, Icarus grows more confident. So much so, he decides to

abandon his father and soar higher and higher until he reached the firmament. The sun, quickly melts the wax on his wings. The feathers vanish and Icarus plunges to his watery grave.

Neither a desirable nor a particularly rational end, by any measure. But nevertheless an inevitable one.

Daedalus warned his son of his plight. Icarus knew the risks of flying to high. For evidence he could have always resort to trial by fire: the old “hand in the hearth” lesson to quickly prove that proximity to heat is a Natural Law and that the sun's rays mattered.

The pursuit of wealth

The superficial rationality of bygone days may make us feel better about ourselves today, given our improved meteorological knowledge, but you'd be surprised how many people stray down the same false path whenever they think about money or how to get it.

In a sense, they assume that the closer to the “sun” they reach the warmer they will feel. And the sooner the better—they need riches fast and by any means. To them wealth is merely a question of quantity. The ends, without a thought for the means.

Here are two observations about the economic reality these people sooner or later must face:

- (1) Wealth is not an end in itself.
- (2) The creation of Wealth is rarely a linear process.

The concept of the straight line - as implied in any linear process or motion - is a human invention; linearity has few parallels in the natural world we live in. Yet, rarely do we stop to think about how deceptive and ill-serving our “invention” can be as a model for any kind of behavior.

We imagine that, by going from point A to point B and so on until point Z at record speed, we are maximizing wealth and actualizing a dream. But all we do is think ourselves into a faulty belief. We may even gain in the short term. But it is a fatal error over the long term, because this belief is rooted in complacency about the marketplace and economy. Rather than achieve real wealth, we end up destroying a dream.

Linearity tells us little about the real world. The only information it contains relates, not to the furniture in the room but, to their serial arrangement. It will never inform us about the origin of the furniture, its colors and fabrics, its material, etc.

We manacle ourselves when we believe that linear business thinking can lead to anything but abstractions. So, let's get “linearity” out of our thinking as quickly as possible.

Speaking of belief

Icarus reminds me of Henry Ford's oft-quoted words: “If you think you can or think you cannot, you are correct.”

To industry gurus and self-improvement coaches, this thought encapsulates the creative power of the mind. If we believe we can succeed, we shall; thinking failure invites failure; success takes willpower, and so on. This is what we are told. Predictably, a similar opinion occurs in the literature on business motivation. “In our experience,” we are assured, “we've found the link between believing and succeeding incredibly powerful and real. Great leaders understand this.”¹

1 G. Michael Maddock and Raphael Louis Vitón, “Three Types of People to Fire Immediately. Want a more innovative company? Get rid of these folks. Today,” *Businessweek* (November 08, 2011, 2:28 PM EST). http://www.businessweek.com/management/three-types-of-people-to-fire-immediately-11082011.html?campaign_id=rss_topStories. Retrieved December 20, 2011.

I have no wish to dispute this “truth,” either. In fact, I fully share this view. There is, however, a downside to belief: it can easily lead us to act like victims instead of leaders; we “feel persecuted by other, processes, and inanimate objects with equal ease - [we] almost seem to enjoy it.” Therefore, we choose the wrong means for the end we most desire - wealth. Or, we abandon the effort altogether.

Business is the art of service

The most vital force in business and life is the honest desire to serve. Here, trial by fire is not the hearth, but identifying the well of human needs and aspirations. Understanding what the marketplace demands and fulfilling those desires whilst adapting our strategy and shaping them is a full-time endeavour.

Therefore, I have but one apt piece of advice on fast money and the quick buck: *That which comes fast is often lost even faster.* There is no such thing as fast money in business and life, only sustainability. And for the sun worshippers: *In business and life in general, fast is slow and slow is fast!*

Lest we forget the moral edge of the tale, Icarus flew too close to the sun because of his overconfidence and drowned. In real life he would have met the same fate; or perhaps frozen to death or even roasted...

The object of nonlinear “business sustainability” is to avoid any of those outcomes.

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