

Lessons from an English band can teach your clients why money rocks.

PINK FLOYD ON WEALTH

By Laurie A. Helgoe



YOU HEAR THAT CATCHY BASS GUITAR LINE, the ringing of coins, and you're turning up the sixth track of your *Pink Floyd Dark Side of the Moon* album. You sing along as the lyrics begin: "Money, get away."

That's how many of us felt about money back in the 1970s when the album was released. Money was a corrupting force, the "root of all evil," the explanation for the lifeless existence of the "establishment." We wanted more; we wanted meaning; and all we really needed was love.

Ironically, our middle-class comfort may have been the very factor that allowed us to romanticize poverty. Talk to those who have experienced real poverty, and they will tell you that money is much more than "a gas," a frivolous indulgence, or an obsession of the rich. A movie adaptation of a true story, *The Pursuit of Happyness* provides a sobering perspective on what it's really like to be "free" of money. As the struggling father clutches his son while trying to sleep in a subway station bathroom, we are faced with the reality that money is important.

I'll never forget a lunchtime conversation with other therapists that resonated with the mocking tone of the "Money" lyrics. We were talking about money-hungry celebrities and executives and feeling very superior until an intern bravely spoke up: "It's easy for you to talk about money as if it's a problem. In the community I grew up in, we feel proud when someone makes money; we show it off. When you're poor, money is everything!"

I don't want to be too hard on our younger

selves: We were concerned about the poor—the guy who worked hard but couldn't get a raise, children who didn't have enough. And we did shake up an overly comfortable establishment. But did we really get it? Did we think about whether our children were interested in sacrificing because it was the “hip” thing to do? Did we realize that the luxury of our money talk might have been promoted by a basic sense of security and a costly education?

As we traded in our bell-bottoms for suits, we learned that money is complicated. Here are some realities left out by the “money is the root of all evil” philosophy:

Hatred of money is as corrupting as the love of money. We talk more about how the hunger for money can promote corruption, but what happens when we place too little value on money? People who tell me they “hate money” are usually the ones who avoid looking at their bills, paying their debts and saving for what they need. They see money as an unnecessary evil, and as a result, they take services they fail to pay for, run up debt they don't know how to manage, and neglect themselves and loved ones by not saving for what they need.

[ROGER] WATERS RUNS DEEPER THAN THE LYRICS

“Money,” Roger Waters' mocking commentary on the corrupting influence of wealth, provides an eerie foreshadowing of what he would later describe as his own corruption. The popular single, along with the 23X platinum *Dark Side of the Moon* album, made Pink Floyd tons of money, and the band rapidly progressed from working intimate clubs to performing before tens of thousands of fans in football stadiums. In a 1987 interview, Waters described the band's attitude at these gigs: “And, of course, onstage and backstage all that's going on is, ‘Do you know how much we've grossed, boys, how many T-shirts we've sold?’ That's absolutely it. That's all it's about—money.”

Waters grew to hate the stadium gigs.

He recalls noticing a “crazed teenage fan” trying to climb up the storm netting separating the band from the “human cattle den” in front of them. Waters confesses: “Incensed by his misunderstanding and

my own connivance I spat my frustration in his face.” He describes returning to his hotel room later that night, “shocked” by his own behavior and faced with a choice: “To deny my addiction and embrace that ‘comfortably numb’ but ‘magic-less’ existence or accept the burden of insight, take the road less traveled and embark on the often painful journey to discover who I was and where I fit. The wall was the picture I drew for myself to help me make that choice.”

For Waters, that choice led him to create his musical and theatrical masterpiece, “The Wall,” which, by the way, he refused to perform in stadiums.

Problems come when we sacrifice riches for money. Roger Waters described his most satisfying time with Pink Floyd as back when their gigs “allowed an intimacy of connection that was magical.” As the band got richer, the magic was left behind and the experience lost its richness. This is a possible pitfall of coming into money. Rather than “having money,” money can start to “have you.” You find yourself forgetting what you used to love, hanging on another year or five at a job you hate, collecting money rather than experiences, and tuning into the market while tuning out people.

Money as a leading focus limits our lives, and we are no longer rich. But neglecting money also limits us. Many a starving artist has followed the dictum “do what you love,” and found that “the money will come,” but not yet—while the bills stay right on schedule. Both the anxiety of being broke and the hunger of greed detract from a rich life. The trick is staying somewhere in the middle: Respecting money and our financial responsibilities, but also honoring our need for love, leisure, challenge, adventure, creativity, personal meaning, fulfillment—and whatever else is on your “rich life” list.

Knock down your own walls. Open yourself to a truly rich life, and money will indeed be “a gas.”

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