

More Bang for Your Buck; or, Better Ways to Buy Your Happiness

Money has little effect on happiness. Ancient Greeks like Epicurus said it, and modern empirical psychology confirms it. Why do we have so much trouble accepting this? In part, because our *immediate* reaction to money is highly favorable – and that sticks in our minds. Before long, however, hedonic adaptation kicks in. We start to take our good fortune for granted... and then we largely forget that our fortune is good.

But there's probably another important reason why we have so much trouble accepting the weak effect of money on happiness. Namely: *There are so many ways to buy happiness with money!* The fact that "Money *doesn't* buy happiness" clashes with the equally obvious fact that "Money *can* buy happiness." The simplest reconciliation, of course, is that most people spend their money poorly. And in my experience, this reconciliation is entirely correct. Most people stubbornly spend lots of money on hedonic dead-ends, while ignoring omnipresent opportunities to turn cash into smiles.

So what are these alleged "omnipresent opportunities"? Here are my top picks.

1. Buy your way out of unpleasant chores by hiring other people to do them for you. Start with cleaning, laundry, yardwork, auto repair, childcare, and tax preparation.
2. Buy your way out of unpleasant chores by buying *different* products. Most obviously, switch to disposable plates, cups, and utensils. It's very cheap, and saves lots of time. If this gives you environmental guilt, compensate with some Effective Altruism.
3. The leading source of happiness is pleasant social interaction. Use money to get more of it – and make your interaction more pleasant. If you have to spend hours preparing for and cleaning up for any gathering, you probably won't enjoy it much. So cut down on both preparation and clean-up using #1 and #2.
4. Don't buy products to impress strangers or casual acquaintances. They're barely paying any attention to you anyway. Indeed, even your close friends probably don't pay that much attention to the details of your possessions. So if you and your immediate family won't durably enjoy an expensive product (such as... granite countertops), save your money.
5. Entertainment spending is one of the best ways to convert money into happiness. That's why they call it "entertainment."
6. If you live with other people, soundproof your house – especially if you have kids. Other people's music, t.v., and phone conversations (not to mention children's crying) don't just

get on your nerves; they create needless conflict. But you don't have to choose between isolation and serenity. Solid wood doors aren't exactly cheap, but they're affordable.

7. Put less effort into finding a job that pays better than your current job. Put more effort into finding a job that is more enjoyable than your current job. First and foremost: Look for jobs with lots of pleasant social interaction.

Overarching doubt: Won't these attitudes alienate more conventional people? My answer: Only mildly, as long as you're friendly. *So be friendly!* And don't forget that these attitudes also *attract* people who are eager to actually enjoy life.

Finally: You can and should use your money to build and maintain your Beautiful Bubble!