

Think Like a Good Capitalist (and Become More Generous)

Capital goods, n. – goods that are used in producing other goods, rather than being bought by consumers.

Good capitalists realize the capital potential in everything. All of the things you own have – in some situation or for some person – the capacity to create tremendous value, from your cooking pots to your laptop case to your clothes.

But it may just be that the things you own aren't meant to be creating value for you.

Maybe that boat you bought isn't creating value for you because you don't make the proper time to go out to the lake. Maybe your camera isn't creating value for you because you never learned photography properly. Maybe your mountain cabin isn't creating value for you because you're allergic to mountains or something.

Good capitalists don't let good capital go to waste. Your camera, your boat, and your cabin are things that could be creating value for other people. So why keep them to yourself?

Maybe loaning out your boat would help a friend launch their sports fishing career. Maybe your cousin can take much better photos of your next event if they have your camera. Maybe you can give your employee a better honeymoon by giving them the keys to your cabin for a week. These people benefit tremendously from things that might just be a maintenance cost and a bore to you. Their happiness and wellbeing comes back to benefit you in better relationships, trust, opportunities, and all the windfall benefits that come from having more happy, stable, and productive people in the world.

In this way of thinking, sharing isn't just something nice to do. It just makes logical sense. If you care about more value existing in the world, you should (as a good capitalist) invest the things you have to their most valuable uses. Keeping them to yourself probably won't be the way to do that.

After this "capital goods" thinking about my consumer goods, I've become a lot more generous. It just doesn't make sense for me to hold on to a library of books at home when they could be loaned out to friends and colleagues. So I started a library at work. It doesn't make sense for me to let my guitar gather dust, so I have started to let coworkers jam with it during breaks at work.

Now, instead of hoarding, I invest. But my investing looks a whole lot like sharing.