

possibilities

unleash your imagination

Life, numbers, and the things that matter

In a world that seems to be growing more impersonal every day, it's common to make the argument that we are becoming little more than a number. I look at that argument and have to laugh. A number! That would be nice! The truth is, we are *awash* in numbers, and the tide appears to be rising.

It is truly a digital world. And one of the costs of this digital world is the memory space one must dedicate to numbers. Phone numbers used to be 6 digits, and most people had two – home and office. Now they are 9 digits, and thanks to fax machines, toll free services, and especially cell phones, it's common to have 5 or more different phone numbers. I must admit, more than once I have been caught fumbling for my *own* cell phone number.

Then there are the passwords, pin numbers and various secret codes needed to make our important information, and our money, safe from hackers and would be thieves of the electronic world. Many of course can be words – much easier to remember – but to make it more secure we are encouraged to use numbers, and to change them frequently.

A quick look through my wallet reveals another growing source of numerical madness. Plastic cards. Credit cards, bank cards, debit cards, membership cards, cards to collect points – all containing long sequences of numbers that identify us.

All of these offer web portals, with, you guessed it, passcodes required for entry.

Then there's money. Among the many numbers fighting for space in our already overcrowded memories are the financial numbers that we are supposed to pay attention to. Bank balances, payment dates and amounts, debt to equity ratios, retirement nest egg targets, net worth.

Gasping for air in a rising sea of numbers, we look for ways to simplify - to store in memory only what's important. And so we ask ourselves: What among these are important? We may conclude that surely the *financial* numbers are important. The balance in your bank must be more important than the number of the account.

Lee Eisenberg may have the answer. In his book, "The Number," Lee examines the idea that we all need to determine and then pursue the magical amount of money, *the* number, that will allow us to live without fear of running out of money, no matter how long we live, or what happens to us along the way. This is essentially the size of "nest egg" needed to call it quits on work. Perhaps, this is it. Our "defining" number. The one number that will determine how we live.

While not a new idea to me (I am after all a financial advisor – and this isn't entirely inconsistent with my own book, *One Step to Wealth*), I wondered as I read if perhaps he was on to

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possibilities

...Life, Numbers (cont)

something. This idea would be good for business of course. But more to the point of this dialogue, perhaps this is the answer to eliminating the clutter of numbers that cloud our lives. Perhaps there is only *one* important number after all.

Hmm. I think not.

I believe that life as a number, especially *one* number, remains for the moment at least, science fiction. In fact, our struggle with numbers is playing out very much like a good science fiction story would. We are increasingly absorbed in a swirl-

world of digital gadgets, numeric codes, and financial data; and then, just when it appears that we will be consumed in a sea of ones and zeros, we realize that we are in fact, human. We touch someone. Our emotions are sparked by a smile. Someone thanks us for some small act of generosity. Happiness washes over us. And we are reminded again of an important truth: All of the truly valuable things in life are without measure.

Bill

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Great Minds, Great Thoughts

“Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.”

Albert Einstein

“The vision of things to be done may come a long time before the way of doing them becomes clear, but woe to him who distrusts the vision.”

Jenkin Lloyd-Jones

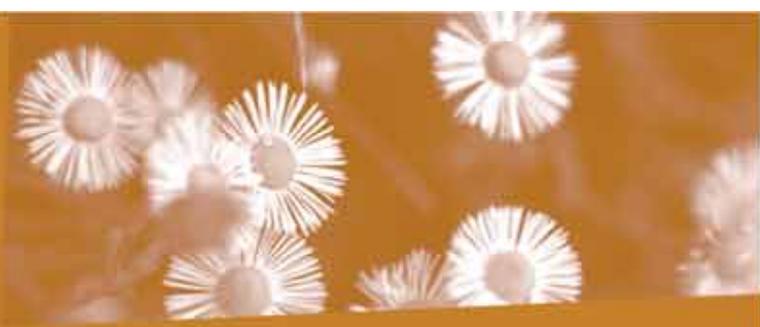
“A loving person lives in a loving world. A hostile person lives in a hostile world. Everyone you meet is your mirror.”

Ken Keyes, Jr.

“Here is the test to find whether your mission on Earth is finished: If you’re alive, it isn’t.”

Richard Bach





unleash your imagination

When an employee is disabled, what happens to medical and dental coverage?

Employers often make the mistake of not having a corporate policy in place, communicated in advance to the employees, that addresses employees' medical and dental benefits while they are disabled.

Most employees assume that if they are disabled and cannot come to work, their medical and dental plans will continue and will be paid for by the employer or insurance company. This is not necessarily true. The insurance company will not continue benefits unless they receive premiums from the plan sponsor on behalf of the disabled employee (health and dental premiums are not waived in the event of a disability).

The employer has to decide how long to continue paying the premiums for a disabled employee (especially if that employee is never going to return to work), and if there was cost sharing before disability occurred, will this continue? Do they ask for post-dated cheques? How long should the employer keep the disabled employee on the medical and dental plan?

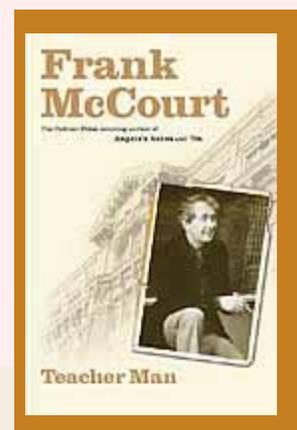
Medical and dental premiums can be directly impacted by claims, and a disabled employee may have high claims that can affect the company's overall group insurance rates over time. There can also be legal issues if there isn't a corporate policy in effect; especially if an employee believes he or she is covered until age 65 and the employer only continues benefits for a limited period of time.

It is critical for companies to have a policy in place that clearly spells out what happens to health and dental benefits while an employee is on disability claim, and that this policy is well communicated to employees. It is recommended that employers seek legal advice regarding the specifics of such a policy.

Laurie Sobie

Read it!

Teacher Man is funny, touching, captivating, and uplifting. McCourt is obviously a great writer. For the vast majority – those who *have* read *Angela's Ashes* – that is already known. His most famous book made him a celebrity and exhibited his incredible talent for writing. **Teacher Man**, a moving collection of stories from his 30 years labouring diligently as a teacher in New York City, makes it clear that long before he began writing he was already a wonderful human being.



risk management

group services

Changing the World, One Purchase at a Time

When you go shopping, what influences your purchasing decisions? Is price an overriding factor, or do you measure the bang for your buck in other ways? In the grocery aisle, do you rush for the bananas at 39 cents per pound, or do you choose the organic variety -- picked by labourers not exposed to pesticides -- at twice the price? Is convenience the reason that you pick up your morning coffee at the Tim's just up the street, or are you willing to travel a bit out of your way to Starbucks, which pays farmers a fair wage for the coffee beans they harvest? Is horsepower driving your next car purchase, or will it be electric power?

Slowly but steadily we are moving from a society of consumers motivated primarily by how our purchases affect *us* to one that seeks to understand the global impact of our buying habits. Issues touching us all, from global warming to the plundering of our natural resources to the widening gap between rich and poor nations, have caused us to pause to question the merits of our decisions beyond self-gratification. We demand goods and services that will meet our needs, but we are beginning to want more from the companies that bring their wares to market; we expect that they behave in a socially responsible manner.

The media is quick to bring us stories of companies behaving badly: a manufacturer repeatedly dumping toxic waste into a river because the fines are less costly than fixing the problem, a clothing company paying slave wages to workers in Southeast Asia to maximize profits. Examples of those benefiting at the expense of someone or something have become, sadly, commonplace. What we don't hear about nearly as often are stories of companies behaving courageously, those that act in ways that don't jeopardize the future of our social, economic and natural resources; companies that believe that being socially responsible is not a marketing strategy but is a reflection of a corporate conscience, that "doing the right thing" can be an end unto itself and that profits and passion can co-exist.

Companies with a conscience may once have occupied the fringes of the marketplace, struggling to differentiate themselves from the multinational giants that monopolized the

shelves of retail establishments. But with industry leaders like Starbucks, Interface (the world's leading manufacturer of commercial carpet) and Timberland leading the charge, the message is spreading beyond the granola and Birkenstocks crowd to mainstream consumers. Starbucks has incorporated fair trade practices into its business model, with its goal "to help ensure that farmers receive an equitable price for their coffee and strengthen their farms for the future." Instead of reducing its costs of doing business, Starbucks has adopted the belief that investing in its suppliers will not only guarantee a sustainable product but will assure future category dominance and market share by offering a superior cup of coffee.

Led by C.E.O. Ray Anderson, Interface has transformed its image as a "plunderer of natural resources" (every year Anderson's factories produced hundreds of gallons of wastewater and over 900 pollutants) to that of an environmentally-friendly enterprise. By developing strategies to reduce waste and conserve energy by recycling, Interface was able to reduce the carpet trimmings that end up in landfill from six tons daily to zero, and decreased carbon monoxide emissions from its boilers by 99.7%. And despite the enormous cost of its commitment to corporate social responsibility, Interface is more profitable than ever.

Timberland, founded in 1952, proudly trumpets its slogan: "Boots, Brand, Belief". In the November, 2005 issue of *Fast-Company* magazine, Jeffery Swartz, C.E.O., states that his company's vision is "to use the resources, energy, and profits of a publicly-traded footwear-and-apparel company to combat social ills, help the environment, and improve conditions for laborers around the world." And he's doing all of this without compromising shareholders' return.

We try to teach our children that doing the right thing is often the hardest thing to do, but that it is always the most rewarding. It seems that this simple idea has started to permeate the collective conscience of the corporate world. But if we want to see permanent and widespread adoption of the concept of social responsibility, we need to continue to vote for change with our wallets. If we do, we *can* change the world, one purchase at a time.

David Frank

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