

3 LESSONS

FOR THRIVING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

by Will Marré



Good news: more than 80 percent of economists now declare that the Great Recession has ended and our economy is growing again. Bad news: more than 80 percent of economists never saw the recession coming.

What does this mean? It means that no one really knows the future. But maybe this isn't as bad as it sounds — because in a way, the uncertainty is liberating. Self-determination is one of the best gifts given to human beings, and we live in a country and a time when creating our best future is squarely in our hands.

We also don't have to guess what to invest in to enjoy our best future. There is ample social research that tells us how we should “pursue happiness,” regardless of what dips our economic rollercoaster may freefall into. The surest way to grow and thrive boils down to three simple lessons that many of us have personally learned in the past two years.

Lesson 1: Focus on quality of life, not quantity of stuff.

People should talk more about their standard of life and less about their standard of living. That's true because virtually all research on human happiness concludes that once our base needs for food, clothing, shelter and health are met, increased quantities of material things actually create more anxiety than joy. More isn't always better.

It turns out that people aren't much happier in a 5,000-square-foot house than a home that is half or even a third of that size. In a recent poll, 48 percent of Americans said they have all the things they need to live

With the right attitude, real happiness is always close at hand.



and be satisfied. Except for perishable food and replacing truly worn-out items, they didn't need anything more. It is easy to be possessed by our possessions. But is there really anything we can buy that's worth the price of our peace of mind?

Lesson 2: Focus on quality of work, not status of job.

Millions of people have been forced to find new jobs during the economic downturn. All across the country, this has generated much soul-searching on a massive scale.

Most of us spend at least 2,000 hours a year for 40 years working, and more of us are recognizing that this deep investment of personal energy is a sacred act. New research from the Global 50 confirms that 86 percent of us want work that is meaningful. We want what we do to genuinely benefit people and our planet. Our life's work is not a job.

Our real work, our unique work that magnifies our gifts and satisfies our souls, is our career. Our careers should be viewed as a long-term joyful commitment to learning

specific knowledge and skills that we can't resist mastering. We should be so engaged that we teach and mentor others. Eventually we'll come up with original contributions and become leaders in our fields. At the highest level of work, we become unique and even indispensable. This is true whether we're a welder, nurse, consultant, teacher or banker.

Most of us are going to work for decades. Why not become great at something we value?

Lesson 3: Focus on quality of relationships, not how many people you know.

The World Values Survey concludes that the happiest people are those with the strongest ties of intimacy. In other words, they are those with the strongest connection to family or friends. Again, this is not a matter of quantity, but one of quality.

The greatest human need is to be deeply known and to deeply know others. It is tremendously satisfying to be emotionally and intellectually authentic without fear of rejection. All of us need others who know that we are more than our behavior, and who refuse to define us by our quirks and irritations.

All-enduring wisdom concludes that the highest aspiration of a human being is to love and be loved. Whatever we do and however we live must enable us to richly experience love. There are no possessions and no prestige that can compensate for a lack of it in our lives.

So how do we thrive in an uncertain world? Simple.

- *We create our own economy by saving and spending in ways that are personally sustainable.*
- *We commit to do work that matters intrinsically to us, and we strive to become masterful at it.*
- *We live at a pace in which we can be perfectly present with those whom we love, so that love becomes constantly present with us.*

We can all do all of these things, and we need no one else's permission to do them. All we have to do is start.

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Marré recently received an Emmy Award® for his writing of the documentary, *Reclaiming Your American Dream*, aired on public television stations across the country. Will's new book, *Save the World and Still Be Home for Dinner: How to Create a Future of Sustainable Abundance for All*, was released in September 2009 by Capital Books.

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