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Blue Planet: An Alien's Guide to Humanity - By Glenn Campbell

Chapter 4

Employment and its Consequences

To explain employment to you, it will be necessary to condense centuries of economic theory into a short and simplified summary. There are many subtleties of finance and monetary policy that we do not have time to cover here, but we can at least explain the fundamentals. To interact successfully with humans, you will have to get a job. Why? For one thing, your host family will be reluctant to support you when they think you are old enough to care for yourself. For another, you will need a job to expand your travel options. Having a steady income can greatly increase the quality of your transportation, accommodations, food and entertainment. In short, you will need a job to make the money to buy the freedom to do the things you want. Of course, this begs the obvious questions: What is money; what is freedom, and what do you really want?

What is money? Money is a credit for work you have performed, or for work that you will perform in the future, or work that you promise to perform and never do but that someone pays you for anyway thinking that you will. Most humans think of money as the paper bills and hard coins that people pass back and forth in retail stores, but in fact those physical devices have no value apart from what the buyer and seller agree they are worth at the time of the transaction. Money is nothing more than a gentlemen's agreement among a group of humans about the relative value of the products of labor. Like other forms of human language, money is subject to the whims of perception, and its value is constantly being redefined. If you say, "dollar," it will mean different things in different circumstances, depending on local resources, needs and human desires.

Money is an intermediate medium in the trade of goods and services. Let's say that you have accumulated too much clothing while someone else has too much food. If you get together with this person and trade some of your excess resources for theirs, both of you might benefit. This interaction is called barter. Money takes barter a step further by allowing you to trade your resources or labor for symbolic scrip -- dollars, for example -- which you can later trade for food or whatever else you want. Money is a popular medium of exchange because it is portable and easy to store, requiring in some cases only a few bytes of computer memory. Even if it is worth nothing by itself, people will kill, steal or work very hard for money because of the many goods and services it can purchase. While it doesn't solve all of your problems, money can give you more options for dealing with them and at least supply your physical needs.

You do not have to understand all of the subtleties of money to get a job. All you have to know is what you need: You

need to eat, right? (That's what your body is saying when your stomach makes those funny noises.) Stores and restaurants offer food, but you have to pay for it using the coins or paper bills that people think are worth something. The easiest way to get those objects is to work. Work is some form of directed labor on behalf of someone else that they think is valuable enough to give you currency for. To accept employment from someone, you do not need to know where they got their money or what their ultimate motivation may be. You do not have to agree with their judgement or philosophy because you are being paid to pursue their goals, not yours. Right now, you can't be picky about where you work because you have to eat soon before your body collapses.

Here is how a typical job interview might take place:

VISITOR: I want to work for money. Do you have a job I can do?

HOMEOWNER: Sure, I need someone to pull the weeds from my garden.

VISITOR: If I do it, how much will you pay me?

HOMEOWNER: I will pay you one dollar for every hour that you work until the weeds are gone.

VISITOR: Great! I'll get started right away. I will work very slowly to make as much money as possible.

You can see that the visitor has learned how to make employment inquiries. The homeowner made a job offer and the visitor accepted it. A contract now exists between them, so if the visitor completes the work as agreed, he can expect to be paid as promised.

==> If you want to be paid for your labor, you must have a contract before you begin work.

A contract can be an informal verbal agreement, like the one above, or detailed written form signed by both parties. The important thing is, you must agree on a price and the requirements of the work before you begin. If you see that something needs to be done and you do it on your own, the other person might appreciate your help, but you shouldn't expect to be paid for it. This is an important distinction because humans often give gifts, cook dinner and perform other labor for each other without pay. It might be an expression of a social bond or just one of the many bewildering altruistic acts that humans are capable of. If you want to be paid, you should make this clear from the beginning of the relationship. You and your employer will agree on the amount of work to be performed and the pay you will receive for it, and then you are both expected to live up to this agreement.

In real life, getting a job could be just as easy as the exchange above. When businesses need workers they often place ads in the newspaper or put up signs in front of their establishments saying, "Help Wanted." When individuals need help, such as parents needing babysitters, they send out verbal messages to their friends and neighbors. The needs of employers are cyclical and difficult to predict. Sometimes, the only prerequisite for a job is to be ready to work when needed. At other times, openings can be rare, with no signs displayed anywhere and intense competition for the jobs available. Most positions, in fact, are open only to people who have previous experience or education in that particular field. However, no matter where you live or what your skills are, there is almost always someone in your neighborhood who needs manual labor and is willing to pay you at least enough money to eat.

Once you are hired, you are more likely to remain employed or move to a better job if you can show that:

- (A) you are reliable;
- (B) you are polite;
- (C) you possess good judgment;
- (D) you learn new skills quickly;
- (E) you are flexible enough to work when needed;
- (F) you can perform a task efficiently in a short period of time; and
- (G) you understand your employer's needs and can adapt your efforts accordingly.

Fortunately for you, workers like this are extremely rare on earth and are highly sought-after once their skills become

known. For various psychological reasons, most employees just can't seem to pull it together. They fail to arrive at work on time and can't adapt to their employer's needs. On the other hand, good employers are also rare. No amount of profit can erase the deep-seated grudge most people have about being forced to work. This is related to their resentment at being waylaid on Earth. You can usually get ahead of these people by leaving your own grudges behind and resolving to do the best job you can regardless of the circumstances.

Choosing a Career

After your first few jobs, you will begin to want more than just employment; you will want a career. The problem with unskilled positions like weed pulling is that they don't pay very well and they quickly become boring. To find more rewarding work, you will need to specialize. If you become very good in one specific field that the market has a demand for, your work will offer more challenges and you can demand a higher wage. The career path you follow is only partly a choice. The rest is serendipity, where your career is chosen by the unique opportunities that happen to befall you.

"What should I be when I grow up?" Young visitors agonize over this question, especially around the last year of their public education. The answers they come up with are often highly idealized or hopelessly naive. Young people want to be movie stars, jet pilots, sports heroes, musicians, novelists, astronauts and politicians -- fields which are highly visible but viciously competitive and that offer a low realistic probability of success. In keeping with their resentment and sense of entitlement, many young people want to be "artists," pursuing their esthetic whims while some wealthy philanthropist or public institution presumably pays for it. They don't care where the money comes from; they just want to be applauded and taken care of. They feel entitled to special treatment by virtue of their appearance on earth.

Those who are more realistic often choose the heroic roles that appear on television and in the movies, including police officer, doctor, soldier, lawyer, paranormal FBI agent and rogue archaeologist. To a young person searching for identity, these roles offer instant recognition and the chance to join a culture and life-plan that is already well-defined. In the beginning, no one plans to be a salesman, repair technician, administrator, cashier, short-order cook, factory worker, insurance adjuster or convenience store clerk, although these kinds of jobs are more likely to be available.

Those who aim toward unrealistic goals, like becoming a movie star, often find themselves on the lowest rung of employment when their dreams fall through. Others who are more realistic may eventually achieve their modest goals, only to be trapped there for the rest of their lives. As years pass, technology and economics will create and destroy career positions, so that many people end up working in fields they hadn't expected. Careers can be planned, but more often they just happen, and the person who is most successful is he who can adapt rapidly to the winds of change.

Instead of choosing a "role," the visitor should seek skills. Each new job, be it pulling weeds or flipping burgers, is a valuable educational opportunity if you choose to use it. Even the worst job teaches you how to get along with jerks. Regardless of what you are being paid for, you should take this opportunity to learn everything you can about the tools and business that surrounds you. When you have learned all you can, then it is time to move on, this time with more focus and a better idea of what your career will be.

The highest form of career is that of the investor, who does not receive a paycheck. Instead he uses all of his acquired skills to anticipate human needs and think of creative ways to fill them. Then he makes a calculated gamble with his own time and money. Although the risks are high, the rewards are also high if he wins. The value of his investment will rise and he will be able to redeem it for a greater value than what he paid. Unlike any employee, an investor has full discretion over the use of his time, but he also bears the full burden of any loss or misjudgment. An investor includes anyone who works without a contract, including business owners, movie producers, farmers, cult leaders, junk dealers and free-lance professionals. Their reward is based on the uncertainties of the market, not a pre-agreed wage. Some investors play the stock market, but the most successful and satisfied ones play the fields they already know based on the skills they acquired while employed by others.

If you continue to acquire new skills, avoid sabotaging yourself and jealously protect your ability to change, you will probably become an investor, too, but for now you must take whatever job is available.

The Value of Money

When the visitor was hired by the homeowner to pull weeds, they both agreed on the value of a dollar: It was worth one hour of the visitor's labor. The visitor can now use this benchmark when deciding how to spend his money. When he goes shopping, he can convert the prices he sees in dollars and cents into his own private currency, which is hours and minutes. His conversion rate is going to be different from that of someone who earns, say, \$20 an hour. For practical purposes, the two of you are using different currencies. A five dollar purchase costs the visitor five hours, while it costs the other person only fifteen minutes. Most humans have difficulty making this conversion. Once the labor has been turned into money, its original cost is forgotten, and the cash is as easily spent as casino chips.

==> As you spend your money, you must never forget the labor that that it costs.

In simplest terms, money is liquidated freedom. A dollar might not always be worth the same, but for now there is a one-to-one correspondence between the money you spend now and the amount of work you will have to do in the future. "Work," as it is popularly defined, is not the thing that you most want to be doing with your time. You would rather "do your own thing," but you must surrender something to earn this privilege. If planned carefully, labor performed now can buy you more freedom in the future than what you spent, but freedom is never guaranteed, and it flows away easily once liquidated.

This brings us to the second question: What is freedom? Freedom is the ability to control your own resources, including your time, and use them for whatever purpose you think is best. When the visitor goes to work for the homeowner, he is agreeing to give up some of his freedom in exchange for money. He is now working for what the employer thinks is best. The visitor has made a deliberate sacrifice of his personal freedom in hopes of a greater reward. The time he spends pulling weeds can never be regained, but by making this trade-off now, he may be increasing his future discretion. After all, what kind of freedom do you really have when you are starving? As a pauper, he would have plenty of free time, but a dollar or two in his pocket would greatly increase the potential uses of that time.

Freedom is having free time, the tools you need to use it and, most importantly, the ability to change the path of your life to take advantage of unexpected opportunities. A person who is free can say, "I see a better way to conduct my life, so I'll change right away." Someone without freedom cannot change, and any opportunity to improve himself passes by. Money can sometimes increase your freedom by giving you more resources to work with, but money is only one tool of many. Wealthy and famous people, even if they live in big houses, are not necessarily more free than those with average incomes; the rich may have access to more resources but not necessarily more time to use them or more ability to change. Freedom is more a function of how well you manage your obligations than your gross income.

The value of money is unique to you. It fluctuates daily depending on your current circumstances, your future prospects and the amount of money you already have. If you happen to be destitute, a little bit of cash can buy you a lot of freedom, while money fades to irrelevance near the end of your life when all you need is time. If you are already wealthy, more money probably isn't going to benefit you significantly. Too much, in fact, can attract more obligations and actually decrease your freedom. A rich man may have enough money to buy an expensive yacht, but then it has to be maintained and berthed at a high annual cost. Once he buys the boat, the man must fight to retain his high income to pay for its upkeep; as a result, he may never have the time to actually sail. In theory, the man could use his boat to sail around the world and live the romantic life of a carefree vagabond, but in reality it rarely happens. The yacht is a symbol of freedom, not freedom itself, and the money used to purchase it is, in most cases, freedom wasted.

Regardless of your monetary wealth, you have a certain limited time on Earth, and these remaining hours are the true currency of your life. You can judiciously trade some of your hours to improve the quality of those you have left, but you must never throw them away. At the visitor's wage, each dollar you spend now is an hour of freedom knocked off the end -- a sobering thought when ordering pizza or buying anything else you don't really need.

Understanding Credit

Earth society, as a whole, wants to rob you of your money, and hence your freedom. On Earth, the one relentless message you will hear from every medium is "Buy, buy, buy!" It doesn't matter if you have no money now. The Earth

economy will still let you buy things through a Faustian facility known as "credit."

====> **When establishing yourself on Earth, avoid spend money that you do not yet have.**

Let us suppose that visitor who has been pulling weeds wants to buy something that costs ten dollars -- say, a model airplane -- but he has only worked five hours for the homeowner. How can he obtain the other five dollars? Obviously, he could save the money he has and later work for five more hours. But suppose the visitor thinks he needs the plane right now and doesn't want to wait. He approaches his employer and says, "If I promise to work for you for five hours tomorrow, can you give me the five dollars today?"

The employer replies, "No way! Why should I pay you for work you haven't done yet?"

The visitor thinks about it for a minute, then hits upon a brilliant solution: "If you give me five dollars today, I will work ten hours for you tomorrow."

The employer replies: "Sure."

The visitor has learned to apply for credit. Credit is money received now for future labor, and it is one of the most dangerous substances on Earth. The visitor has just accepted a loan from his employer at an interest rate of 100 percent per day. That's 36,500 percent per year simple interest or

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290108342939268459861326461331834231866757300 percent per year if compounded daily. If the visitor fails to perform his ten hours of labor tomorrow, the employer would, in theory, completely control the visitor's life and all his future earnings within a matter of days.

The charging of exorbitant interest rates is called "usury," and most people will gladly accept it. You see, humans as a whole are highly impulsive: if they want something, they want it right away, regardless of the long-term consequences. Most earthlings who are not already enslaved by hunger or political oppression will eventually be seduced by credit or its equivalent. We don't just mean the borrowing of money against the promise of future labor but all of the other ways that humans pre-spend their lives before they happen. The psychology of why people try to neutralize freedom whenever they have it is the topic of a future chapter. For now, it is sufficient to describe the risks of credit and why you should avoid it like the plague, at least in the early part of your career.

The Dangers of Credit

In business, credit is a tool that is used to obtain equipment or real estate that will produce greater profit in the long run than the cost of interest. A farmer might buy a tractor on credit at 10% annual interest knowing that this equipment, if used to plough his fields, will probably generate a much greater profit than the cost of the the loan. There is an element of risk in this plan, because the price the farmer receives for his crops may vary from year to year, and in any one year he may not receive the profit he had hoped for. Credit is always dangerous, because you never know what the weather or conditions of the market will be tomorrow. Nonetheless, the farmer's risk is a calculated one, with a greater probability of success than failure; otherwise, he wouldn't do it (or wouldn't do it for long before going bankrupt).

In people's personal lives, credit can also be an equally valuable tool. For example, buying a home on credit is usually a better deal in the long run than paying rent. The risks, however, are usually higher than they are for a business. A farmer at least knows that he wants to be a farmer; an individual may not have that certainty. If the visitor commits himself now to a 30-year mortgage based on his current salary as a weed-puller, the loan may effectively force him to remain a weed-puller for the rest of his life.

Listen to the visitor's rationale at the time at the time he signs the mortgage papers:

- There will always be weeds.
- People will always need me to pull them.

- Weed-pulling is all I will ever want to do.
- I will never want to live anywhere else but the house and city I have chosen.
- If I ever have to move, I can sell my house and pay off the mortgage. I will get back some of the money I spent and maybe even make a profit.

Each of these assumptions should be prefixed by, If things go as I expect. In fact, any one of them could turn out to be false. For example, technological innovations, such as chemical weedkillers, could render The visitor's job obsolete. The local economy and real estate values may falter, leaving him with a house he cannot sell. Most devastating of all, the visitor might begin to see that pulling weeds is not the most fulfilling job he could be doing. If did not have a mortgage holding him down, he might have taken some time off to explore the world, "find himself" or perhaps train for another career. The more commitments he has, the fewer his options. Under unfavorable circumstances, the mortgage may prevent any escape from his first job and stifle the unforeseeable growth that would otherwise have taken place.

Signing a mortgage is a relatively rational decision with a concrete financial reward. Other personal credit decisions are made for irrational reasons with no hope of future profit. Credit is often used by individuals for "lifestyle enhancement" -- i.e. buying things they don't really need. This is where customers happily submit themselves to the usary rates of credit cards. The rationale for these often impulsive purchases go like this:

- I want it.
- I need it.
- It's on sale.
- If I don't buy it now, the opportunity will be gone.
- It makes me look stylish.
- It will impress the girls/boys/family/friends.
- I deserve it.

The last statement is the most interesting. It reflects the misguided sense of entitlement most humans seem to feel when interacting with the world. "You owe me," they seem to be saying to no one in particular: "I have been brought to Earth against my will, so I expect to be compensated." Alas, there is no cosmic accounting service to properly compensate these victims. Instead, any item bought now as a self-proclaimed "reward" is paid for by the victim himself in future earnings, with a corresponding loss of freedom.

While there may be some good uses of credit for those who are already well established -- namely the conscientious purchase of a home, a vehicle and certain business tools -- it should be studiously avoided by newcomers. Credit should never be used for things that are not essential, like clothes, vacations, entertainment systems or the latest technological gadget. Credit should be entered into only with the clear knowledge that its cost is far greater than the interest rate. It is the commitment that kills the unwary, not the interest. The most frightening scenario is being forced to make payments on some expensive object that has already outlived its usefulness.

[To be continued...]

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New installments will be added here at irregular intervals.

The Chapter Released: 6/1/99

Reader Comments

Regarding "Chapter 4: Employment and its Consequences" - Latest First

New Chapter Required for Y2K?

This paper is full of valuable insights concerning "the true meaning of life." Would you consider adding a chapter on how you expect Y2K to change: Employment and its Consequences; the value of money, wise investments; and the best locations, (if any), on the Blue Planet from which to observe "The End of the World as We Know It;" Or, are you going to make the rest of us (gray-matter-challenged) folks try to figure it all out for ourselves? I'd love to get a few hints from a Master such as you, because I believe the **** could start hitting the fan just 30 days from today: June 8, 1999.

-- schulk (schulk88@hotmail.com) 6/8/99 (#4)

Where is this headed?

I'm watching with trepidation ... is this going to end up as a scripture for a Scientology-style death cult? Isn't Joe Firmage already working on that? At any rate, I can't wait for the chapter on sex. Also, I'm hoping there will be some opinions on the best 4-by-4 vehicles on the market today.

-- Grigory Sorrolla y Stulpnagel 6/3/99 (#3)

Employment and it's consequences

WOW!! I do beleive Glenn has finally come into his own, he is a modern day Socrates!

-- Joe Yasinski 6/2/99 (#2)

Your draft is excellent ...

Your draft is excellent and quite thought-provoking. I am looking forward to reading the other segments as they are released. --Michael Estes

-- Michael Estes (mestes@methow.com) 6/2/99 (#1)

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