MONEY & INVESTING

The Way to Wealth

by Benjamin Franklin

Franklin's money wisdom in one short speech: work hard, waste nothing, and stay out of debt.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Your worst taxes are the ones you levy on yourself: idleness taxes you twice as much as the government, pride three times, and folly four times.**

Father Abraham opens there for a reason: no tax commissioner can remit these. God helps them that help themselves.

02 **There are no gains without pains: steady industry, not luck or legacy, is the root of getting ahead.**

Diligence is the mother of good luck, says Poor Richard. Plough deep while sluggards sleep, and you shall have corn to sell and to keep.

03 **Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of - and lost time is never found again.**

Franklin calls wasting time the greatest prodigality. One today is worth two tomorrows - so if you have something to do tomorrow, do it today.

04 **Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry makes all things easy.**

He that rises late must trot all day and still scarce overtake his business at night. Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

05 **Oversee your own affairs with your own eyes: the eye of a master does more work than both his hands.**

If you would have your business done, go; if not, send. And mind the small things - for want of a nail, the shoe was lost, then the horse, then the rider.

06 **If you would be wealthy, think of saving as well as of getting.**

The Indies have not made Spain rich, because her outgoes were greater than her incomes. Get what you can, and what you get, hold - and save while you may, for no morning sun lasts a whole day.

07 **Beware of little expenses: a small leak will sink a great ship.**

Many a little makes a mickle. What maintains one vice would bring up two children - it is the small, repeated spending that quietly eats an estate.

08 **Buy what you have no need of, and before long you will sell your necessaries.**

A bargain you do not need is no bargain, and silks and satins put out the kitchen fire. It is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it.

09 **When you run into debt, you give another man power over your liberty.**

The borrower is a slave to the lender, and lying rides on debt's back - running in debt is the first vice, lying only the second. Rather go to bed supperless than rise in debt.

10 **Creditors have better memories than debtors.**

Creditors are great observers of set days and times, and the due date that seemed far off arrives before you are prepared. Count on them remembering, even when you would rather forget.

11 **Do not depend too much on your own industry, frugality, and prudence - they may all be blasted without the blessing of Heaven.**

Father Abraham ends in humility: ask that blessing humbly, and be not uncharitable to those who seem to want it. Remember Job suffered, and was afterwards prosperous.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

This is not really a book but a short speech - the preface to Poor Richard Improved, Franklin's almanack for 1758, signed by his pen name Richard Saunders and dated July 7, 1757. Franklin stitches together twenty-five years of his own almanack maxims: a crowd gathered at a vendue (an auction) grumbles about hard times and heavy taxes, and a plain old man, Father Abraham, stands up and answers them entirely in the sayings of Poor Richard.

His first move is to hand the blame back: we are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly, and God helps them that help themselves. Then comes industry. Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of; there are no gains without pains; and oversee your own business with your own eyes, because not to oversee workmen is to leave your purse open.

To industry he adds frugality. Think of saving as well as of getting; beware of little expenses, for a small leak will sink a great ship; and buy nothing you do not need, or you will soon sell your necessaries. Hardest of all he warns against debt: to run in debt is to give another power over your liberty, and creditors have better memories than debtors.

Then the sting - two of them. Father Abraham admits industry and frugality can still be blasted without the blessing of Heaven, so stay humble and charitable. And when he finishes, the crowd applauds the doctrine and immediately practises the contrary, rushing to buy extravagantly. Franklin, who admits the wisdom was not a tenth his own but gleaned from all ages and nations, quietly resolves to wear his old coat a little longer. His closing line is the test of the whole piece: we may give advice, but we cannot give conduct.

DO THIS WEEK

This week, track every small expense for seven days - coffee, apps, snacks, fees - and add them up honestly, leak by leak: many a little makes a mickle. Then plug the single biggest leak and move that money straight into savings.

By Benjamin Franklin, first published 1758. Read it in one sitting if you want the oldest, plainest money advice in American letters.