

GET ON BOARD THE NON-CONSUMPTION TRAIN¹

Dave Chameides[©]

I sat down at the keyboard this morning, all set to write up a new post when I found this note that I thought was worth sharing. I've had it on my computer for a while and, to be totally honest, have no idea where I found it, so I can't really give credit where credit is due. My apologies to the original author but I assume that, given the nature in which it was written, they won't mind me sharing it. As I recall, this was printed on a little card that the owner carried in his/her wallet. Every time they went to make a purchase, they were confronted with these questions—all of which spoke to the underlying wish: I want my money to support the environment, not destroy it.

- (1) Is this purchase something I need?
- (2) Do I already own something that will serve the same purpose?
- (3) Can I borrow one instead of buying new?
- (4) Can I make something that will serve the same purpose?
- (5) Can I buy a used one?
- (6) Would someone be willing to split the cost and share this with me?
- (7) Can I buy or commission one made locally?
- (8) Can I buy one that was made with environmentally responsible materials?
- (9) Can I buy one that serves more than one purpose?
- (10) Can I get something human powered instead of gas or electric?
- (11) Can I compost or recycle it when I'm done with it?
- (12) What is the impact on the environment of the full life cycle of it?
- (13) Does the manufacture or disposal of it damage the environment?

I love this because it's simple, to the point, and a great "thought tree" if you will. I'm actually going to write it up on some used card stock and pop it in my wallet right now.

Many of you may feel that it's a little ridiculous to have to carry something around like this, and indeed it may be. Sort of like having your mom looking over your shoulder shaking her finger at you for something you're about to do. But consider this. According to Consumer Reports, the average American is exposed to 247 commercial messages every day. If you do a little quick math, that comes out to 7,212,400 commercial messages over an 80-year lifespan. Crazy, isn't it? Of course, if you don't watch TV, you'll cut a lot of those ads out, but even then you're still bombarded.

Look in any magazine, newspaper, Internet site, or on any city street and you'll see ads everywhere. On billboards, vehicles, T-shirts, and in some instances, even people (don't try that at home). And what are all these ads telling us? That we will not be happy, healthy, wealthy, wise, popular, or anything else—unless we buy these products.

So what do we do? We buy. And every time we buy, we create demand, create waste, consume energy, and invariably, in the long run make ourselves less happy. Sure that iPhone rocks, but only until the new one comes out, and then you've got to jump on the train and consume again right?

¹ Care2, healthy & green living, September 12, 2010

So do I think that carrying around a little piece of paper is really going to change the world? Of course not. But I do believe that in order to start making things better, to clean up this whole waste/consumption mess, we all need to start thinking a little different. And in order to do that, we need to start asking ourselves some hard questions. Why do we feel that buying things will make us happy? What is fundamentally missing that we are trying to fill with mass produced product? Perhaps a little reminder like this will help us start that process and put us on the path to commercial freedom.

OK, riff over; I don't want to do a redux of last week's post. Write up the little list if you think it'll help and run through those questions at the store the next time you are about to buy something non-essential. Before you know it, you'll be steaming along on the non-consumption train and realize it's really a much better place than you thought it was.

Live sustainably.