



IN BOUNDS

A Return on Investment

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Editor

My wife and I have a little game we play whenever we have made a big ticket non-essential as well as some essential purchases such as a used pontoon boat, our hot tub or even a new television set. After receiving the investment we will consider the total cost of said item divided by how many times the product has brought us satisfaction. With each additional use the "return on investment" is reduced and thus increasing the ROI. The more we use the item, the less it costs and thus the greater our satisfaction.

For example, the first time we used our pontoon it cost us \$2,500. That was five years ago and today our ROI is down to less than ten bucks a ride! Of course, we don't consider the associated peripheral debits such as gas, oil and an occasional part as that would just muddy the water pardon the pun. The ROI factor can be applied to almost any investment in life whether financial, vocational or personal.

Indeed the used car we gave to my step daughter didn't have the best return on investment as the transmission subsequently went out, but the education each of our four children is getting

with our help will have significant payback. In the meantime however the ROI is mounting and we try not to tabulate the total output as it could bum us out!

In our line of work we each have employees who require a greater or lesser degree of investment on our part to satisfy our needs. We pay more wages for those who show their abilities and in turn our ROI is met. Their understanding of the job at hand and fulfillment of our expectations satisfies and justifies the investment. However, we also manage individuals who are compensated less; require more management from us and often times don't show a ROI for quite some time if ever (sort of like a used car with a bad transmission).

Case and point: A few years back I hired a young lad who was full of energy, intelligent, money hungry and who showed a willingness to work hard. He started at a low wage because he didn't bring a skill set with him. However, I thought the young man was teachable and worthy of my investment. Unfortunately, I soon learned that my ROI was going to be long in coming - if ever - as the youth turned out to be habitually late, disrespectful of our equipment and lied a couple of times and not the Napoleon Dynamite type lie either.

The flip side of that is a recent hire who had volunteered to do work with his high school golf team in exchange for the privileges of playing the course. Every time I checked on the group of freebees I noticed him always working. When I commented that I needed a quick sweep with a push broom in front of the pro shop he rapidly grabbed a broom and began to work, not only in front of the Shop, but down the sidewalk curb and to the clubhouse entry. I hired him on the spot and haven't had any second thoughts about taking a personal interest in his future by giving him lots of one-on-one opportunity. To date he has not let me down and I am constantly impressed with his attitude and desire to do the job efficiently and accurately. My ROI has been satisfied.

On a personal note I have had the opportunity to mentor several individuals whom have been captured by the compulsion known as alcoholism. As a recovering drunk myself, I have a unique opportunity to reap a gigantic ROI when sponsoring another. Through their eyes I can reflect upon my 14-year journey from insanity to sobriety, unhappiness to joy. And I can also share support and set an example for them to follow, sort of a return on their investment in me!

Personal ROI isn't as easy as financial or vocational ROI. It is human nature to give greater of the self than the possible return of rewards, particularly when an individual's heart and soul are on the line. A bad transmission is just that, a mechanical failure. A poor employee is to be expected and soon replaced. But to spend time, emotion and thought upon another's well-being is potentially a great risk; one with a solid upside or painful disappointment. I have experienced both ends of the spectrum as recovering friends discover their own way, make good choices or stumble, learn to live life anew or regress into old habits. During those times my heart reflects my ROI. I celebrate the conquering hero and suffer the loss of another soldier.

Does this diminish my desire to invest upon the future of another wayward soul, or for that matter another lemon or potential super employee? Nope, not at all, for the roller coaster of life requires each of us to take a chance, throw the dice or choose a straw. Sometimes fate is with us, sometimes against. Standing still and leaving destiny to the wind isn't really an option. By using a simple tool such as the ROI, I can balance my gains over losses and, hopefully, come out a winner more times than not. -JM



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