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True Love Ways

It won't cost you much more this year to buy the items in "The Twelve Days Of Christmas." PNC Wealth Management released its 26th annual analysis of how much you would pay to purchase each of the 364 named gifts, and you'll be glad to know overall prices rose less than one percent.

Ideas For Success | *December*

Lessons about business and life continue to flow my way. So here, once again, is my annual gift to you for reading these monthly musings – the Top 10 things I discovered in 2009...

First Things First – During a coaching session one of my clients was describing the challenges he faces in his start-up company. Like many, he struggles balancing all the stuff on his plate. My response: "That's why I'm eliminating things getting in the way of my success." There will always be more to do, and most of us focus on what we enjoy, not necessarily what we need to be doing. I recently gave up my position as a columnist for an industry magazine, mutually agreed to end a long-term coaching relationship and decided not to renew a consulting contract. What will you let go of in 2010 to free up extra hours in your schedule?

Uncalculated Risk – Just last week I heard this statistic: only 17 percent of small- and medium- size businesses have a written plan... and that includes scribbles on a napkin. Talk about walking in the dark without a flashlight. If you haven't paused to write down your 'Rocks' for 2010, at least you know 83 percent of your peers are in the same boat. Of course, some people consider buying lottery tickets as sound financial planning.

Spin The Wheel – It's been nearly three decades since Pat Sajak began hosting *Wheel of Fortune*. A big sports fan, I heard him interviewed on the *Dan Patrick Show* during the baseball playoffs. When the subject turned to compensation and Patrick cracked about making big bucks for working just two days a week alongside Vanna White, Sajak delivered a great line: "I get paid the money I do to act like the 6,000th show is the sixth." Remember that whenever you feel yourself falling into a rut or becoming complacent.

Go For It – A few months ago I read where Seth Godin wanted to invite a select group of 10 small business owners to spend a day brainstorming. The cost would be travel to and lodging in New York City and a \$3,500 charitable donation. I decided to apply and wrote a compelling business case about why the marketing guru should pick Success Handler. He replied immediately with a personal e-mail. A week later, he sent another... notifying us we weren't among the chosen few. While that was disappointing, it convinced me that I'm one click away from anyone on the planet. In 2010, my biggest Rock is to reach out to a lot more smart people and see what happens.

While you'll still shell out \$87,403, that's an easier increase to bear than last year's 11 percent climb. (See, there's good economic news out there, if you only know where to look.)

The partridge in a pear tree fell 27 percent... rolling back to 2007 pricing at \$159. You'll also save big on six geese-a-laying at \$150, a 38 percent decrease. With unemployment hovering around 10 percent, lords, pipers and drummers didn't receive pay increases this year. However, three French hens climbed a whopping 50 percent to \$45 and five golden rings soared 43 percent to \$500. Nine ladies dancing and eight maids-a-milking were also up, but expect declines in 2010, as married athletes change their philandering ways.

To start the decade off right by maximizing investment returns, consider going long on geese (they're down nearly 75 percent in two years...time for a rebound?) and shorting gold (at \$1,200 an ounce, it can't go up forever...can it?). However, if you really want to find your fortune, piddle around in your garage over the holidays and invent robotic versions of the '12 Days' items. They're sure to be next year's Zhu Zhu Pets.

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To read previous issues of *Fast:Forward* – which has subscribers in 18 countries (USA, Canada, England, Germany, Australia, South Africa,

Social Disruption – My generation is known as technology 'Immigrants'... as opposed to our 'Native' kids. We're learners; they're naturals. In April, I started Tweeting. In July, I began blogging. Toss in Facebook, Linked In and a few others and – whew – there are many things to learn and track. Social Marketing is here to stay; the world wants to connect, and all of us need to determine the strategy behind our efforts and the best way to balance everything.

A Big Bow Wow – We put down our 16-year-old Golden Retriever in July. Those who have experienced that passage know it's tough. As we worked through detachment the next several days, our vet surprised us in two ways. First, a nice sympathy card arrived, signed by her entire staff. Then, she gave us a hand-painted casting of Genevieve's paw print. Those wonderful gestures touched our family. Regardless of the business you're in, look for opportunities to connect with your customers' hearts. They'll remember.

Target 2027 – Up and down. Up and down. The rollercoaster ride of the stock market the past decade is enough to make you woozy. With my Big 5-0 arriving in 179 days, we recently entrusted our retirement savings to a money management firm. Aligning with professionals who take a 'preserve capital first' approach and understand the intricacies of blending the stock market with fixed investments to create a diversified portfolio seems like a better approach than dollar-cost averaging and being 'all in' all the time.

Hold That Tiger – Dan Jenkins, the legendary former *SI* writer and author of many humorous sports novels, once described the "10 Stages of Drunkenness." Number one is 'Witty and Charming.' Four is 'Clairvoyant.' Six is 'Patriotic.' Nine and Ten: 'Invisible' and 'Bulletproof.' In the last three weeks, we learned the invincible Tiger Woods was drunk on power and wealth. The meteoric fall from grace of another high-profile celebrity is a reminder that happiness does not come from money and fame. If it did, then so many blessed with so much wouldn't act so little.

Think It, Say It – One of my weaknesses as a husband, father and friend is trying to keep those I care about from feeling pain. Thus, I tend to withhold bad news and act as a peacemaker whenever there is rising conflict. (Interestingly, this never is a problem with clients; when needed, I ask hard questions and address tough issues.) After one challenging situation this year that ended with Kathy saying, "Why didn't you tell me?" I vowed to stop being the great protector and start being the great communicator.

We Are The World – Are you aware a billion people do not have access to clean drinking water and nearly 40,000 children die every week from lack of this basic need? [Charity: Water](#) is one of the nonprofits that provides clean and safe drinking water – with 100% of donations funding freshwater projects in developing nations. Just \$20 gives a person in Africa safe drinking water for 20 years. [Take a look](#) at how Scott Harrison and his organization are saving lives.

This completes six years and 72 issues of *Fast:Forward*. Hopefully, you find joy and useful ideas by spending five minutes reading it each month. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year – and continued success the next decade in all things.

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