

## What Can I Build?

I marvel at what I have today, especially when I compare it to my life growing up in the 1950s. No one could have told me 60 years ago that I would some day have my own computer, an air-conditioned automobile with a music system containing thousands of songs, a telephone I could carry in my pocket, a camera that required no film, the ability to freely converse with—and even see—people around the world over an “Internet,” a machine that washed dishes for me, and a house that remained warm in the winter without having to fetch oil from the basement in order to feed a heater in the kitchen. Yet although I have been blessed with those modern conveniences, I realize that my life is very much commonplace. I am not unique. What I have, almost everyone else in the United States also has. That is the genius of America and capitalism.

I have always been a hard-working, productive person who earned a decent living and never went “on the dole,” but I also recognize that I am relatively average, as human beings go, and that if I am not a millionaire it is not “someone else’s” fault. My lot in life is the result of my actions. Yes, I might have been slightly worse off had I not been raised well by parents and grandparents who taught me the value of a dollar and a sound work ethic, and I might have been slightly better off had the government not hindered my wealth creation with taxes and regulations, but for the most part I am where I am because of what I did or did not do.

When I look at people of significant wealth and accomplishment I do not feel any sense of envy. In fact, I am generally in awe of their talents, skills, and dedication. I could not have invented the light bulb. I could not have created a computer in my garage. I could not design and build 100-story buildings. I could not create a 3-D printer—or even an inkjet printer. I could not figure out how to turn crude oil into plastic. The last thing I would do is envy and resent people for the fortunes they earned imagining and creating the things that have made my life easier and more enjoyable. Yet we are confronted on a daily basis by people with overwhelming amounts of envy and resentment toward the entrepreneurs who make our lives more comfortable and pleasurable. Yes, there are few wealthy people who have mountains of money for no seemingly good reason (i.e., the Kardashians), and others who merely inherited and abuse it (i.e., Paris Hilton), but they are the exceptions—and we know about them only because of the media’s proclivity to focus on the outrageous, rather than the quiet producers who operate the engine of the economy.

For some reason society’s haters seem to love those in society who are most useless (the Kardashians, the Hiltons, the drug-crazed actors, the “gangsta-rappers”), while they hate everyone and everything associated with the production and distribution of the creature comforts and modern conveniences they take for granted. They hate factories and smokestacks—and express surprise when those factories are moved to China. They hate businessmen and tax the heck out of them—and are surprised when they move from high-tax environments like New York City to low-tax environments like Florida. They want jobs—but they hate the creators of jobs and ridicule Texas for its pro-business

environment because many of the jobs are low-wage (as if every job could somehow be high-wage or every singer could be as talented as Frank Sinatra).

Today the rallying cry of the left is to raise the minimum wage, as if paying someone an additional two or three dollars per hour somehow makes him worth that much more to his employer. But the factory created the job for the worker; the worker did not create the factory. The worker might assemble the refrigerator, but someone else designed it and the assembly line. The person who makes light bulbs is certainly valuable, but he is nowhere near as valuable to society as was Thomas Edison. The man who invents a better mouse trap is worth more than the man who builds them on the assembly line.

Wealth is created not by legislative fiat, but by increased productivity. Arbitrarily raising the wages of low-skilled laborers does not make them any more skilled. In fact, it will price some of them out of the labor market altogether (with touch-screen menus replacing fast-food workers). By the time the minimum wage increases percolate through the economy, prices will have increased to the point at which everyone ends up just about where they started. Office clerks will still earn less than company presidents.

The haters resent the CEOs as if they are responsible for everyone's position in life. But that hatred will not move a person *one inch* toward prosperity or happiness. Instead, be the best office clerk you can be and get promoted to head clerk, and then to department manager, division manager, and CEO. Don't hate those who are successful. Instead, *become* successful—and that does not happen with a "*He* didn't build that!" attitude. Success is achieved with a "What can *I* build?" attitude.

Although the haters excoriate capitalism and the (regrettably not-so-) free market, they are nevertheless first in line to buy the new iPad or iPhone, and they eagerly discard perfectly functioning refrigerators solely because they are white rather than stainless steel. They hate the factories but they love the products. But the products do not make themselves. Instead of hating factories, they should salute them every time they pass one. Instead of honoring Che Guevara, they should honor Edison, Bell, and Carnegie. Instead of electing the Barack Obamas, Hillary Clintons, and Elizabeth Warrens who hate factories, they should elect people who value and know how to build factories.

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