

# The Five Most Important Financial Things



They Don't Teach  
You In School

By Robert S. Laura

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You In School**

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TO DOYLEAN, AVA, & DRAKE

*My wife and children who graciously provided  
me with the time, energy, love and support to  
put into words the many things that I have  
learned through, with, and for them.*



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# INTRODUCTION

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There are only two types of people in this world, those who have money and those who don't. And whether you're in high school, graduating from college, or already in the workforce, every day you decide which one you are by the things you do with your time, energy, and money.

*The Five Most Important Financial Things They Don't Teach You In School* is the untold story about money and the impact it can have on your life. It's what no one tells you about getting the job you want, climbing the corporate ladder, saving and investing, managing your credit, and how those disciplines will lead you to find your passion in life. It's a real-life story about what it takes to get ahead and stay ahead.

My relationship with money started early. I was one of those kids who constantly knocked on neighbors' doors asking to shovel their driveway, mow their lawn, and rake their leaves. I even rode my bike for miles collecting

and returning bottles and cans... always in search of the almighty dollar.

But it wasn't until college that I realized how truly important money was, and the many benefits it provided me. For me, college was the first time I was on my own and the first time I realized what it meant to be broke. If you've ever been broke, you know that it just outright stinks. There's just no other way to put it. Being broke was both frustrating and depressing because I didn't know who to turn to or how to turn things around. So, I set out on my own and developed my first list of money saving strategies for surviving in the real world.

My first strategy was bold and gutsy. It went totally against the grain and right at the heart of every poor person's main objective: food. I chose to go toe-to-toe with the old wives tale: "Don't go grocery shopping when you're hungry." Turning that concept completely on its head, I would show up starving at the supermarket every weekend at around 11:30 AM. This was, without a doubt, a hungry college student's paradise because it's when all the food company reps were handing out free samples. A little charm and some friendly conversation always led to extra

samples. This, in addition to the unethical practice of eating store food and conveniently forgetting to pay for it, kept me full on the weekends.

My second strategy utilized well-timed anger and subtle threats. During the lunch or dinner rush, I'd call fast food restaurants with an angry voice and tell them the drive thru just gave me the wrong order. I'd throw in a cuss word or two, and if necessary, threaten to contact their corporate office. Since it was so busy, they didn't have a lot of time to talk, so the usual response was, "Give me your name and next time you come in we'll give you a free meal." I rode that meal ticket twice a week for a solid couple of months before I ran out of local establishments.

Other popular strategies that worked included taking zip-lock baggies into all-you-can-eat buffets and returning text books early for the best possible price. I even went as far as giving plasma. This was the most extreme, yet offered the largest pay-off. Basically, if you could muster up the courage to go into a filthy, public health facility, lie down on a cot some homeless person just vacated, and let a nurse who looked more like a lunch lady start sucking

out your plasma, man you knew you were broke. The whole process seemed to take forever, but walking out with a crisp \$20 made it all seem worthwhile.

Those strategies, while mostly unethical and immoral, are what I actually did when I didn't know what else to do. There was no class in high school or college that taught me how to stand out in a crowd, how to push myself to the next level, or how to make my money work for me instead of me working for it. The common things I was taught like, go to college, work hard, and dress for success didn't differentiate me, they made me just like everyone else. And so, I realized very quickly that this was not how I wanted to spend the rest of my life. Looking back on those days, I realize how far I've come and how much easier it would have been if I knew then the things I'm about to share with you now.

From humble beginnings, I underwent a transformation that now drives me to help people avoid all the trouble and frustration I endured. On the following pages are *The Five Most Important Financial Things They Don't Teach You In School*. It's the real story about money and what it takes to get ahead and stay

ahead financially. Just as all the music in the world stems from five pitches, and five colors combine to paint every amazing sight we see, these five financial concepts will create a sea of endless opportunities for you... not to mention, you won't have to worry about going to jail for stealing food or defrauding fast food restaurants.



# BRANDING YOURSELF

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The first financial thing they don't teach you in school is that "branding" yourself is an essential part of getting the job you deserve at the salary you want. After all, financial success begins with earning a good income because you have to make money in order to create the lifestyle that you want.

Branding, from a corporate perspective, is the process of making a consumer visualize a product or service in terms of its unique features and benefits. Companies spend millions on ad campaigns and marketing material to differentiate and distinguish themselves with the goal of having consumers think of them when they want or need their product. They strive to create a memorable message that puts them above the competition. Well, this same concept holds true for individuals in the job market who also need to effectively differentiate and distinguish themselves from other candidates.

Branding yourself is vital because throughout your career the value you add to an

organization will constantly be measured and compared against others. You will always face the possibility of being outsourced, and there will always be another crop of younger, equally intelligent people anxious to outshine you. That makes it important to not only stand out in an unforgettable way when you apply for the job but to also do so on an ongoing basis.

From a branding perspective then, if you want to get the right job at the pay you deserve, you have to be able to effectively make yourself valuable and memorable. A very simple strategy for doing this involves creating a *Life List*. A *Life List* is exactly what it sounds like: a list of things you have accomplished or plan to accomplish in your lifetime. Simply having one demonstrates to others that you are motivated and willing to take on new challenges. Furthermore, it helps demonstrate to current and prospective employers that you are an interesting and accomplished person that has acquired a unique skill set on your own.

### **WOW Stories**

Whether it's on a college application, at a job interview, or during a business function,

you need to be able to convert your *Life List* accomplishments into “WOW” stories. WOW stories are an integral part of branding yourself because they can be used to highlight a skill, personality trait, or unique experience. They are what will make you memorable.

Imagine an employer plowing through a mile-high pile of resumes. At first glance, similar objectives, experience, and education blur them all together. Then, the difference becomes apparent in the achievements section. It's there that resumes jump off the stack. These are items from my own *Life List* that have appeared on my resume:

**Achievements:**

- Authored a book
- Ran a marathon
- Speak two computer languages (XHTML, CSS)
- Plan to scuba dive the Great Barrier Reef

I've lost count of the number of times people have asked me about the book I wrote. The following is the related WOW story I developed as part of my branding:

*“A lot of people have a desire to write a book but most never make the time to do it. I didn’t want to let that happen to me, so I enrolled in a class on how to do it and then made a commitment to make it happen. It proved to be one of the most trying, yet enlightening, experiences of my life... something I’m very proud of... and something I use to push myself to accomplish new things.”*

A *Life List* is designed to help you get the job interview you want, while a “WOW” story takes it to the next level and gets you the job offer. Together, they brand you as an accomplished, memorable, and valuable person.

Creating a *Life List* with accompanying WOW stories is pretty easy. The primary focus of any good story is action, so use the following list of verbs to build your own *Life List* and WOW stories!

*Explore, Visit, Swim, Accomplish, Climb, See, Know, Study, Read, Ride, Learn, Run, Complete, Ski, Photograph, Make, Write, Catch, Become, Teach, Play, Dive, Watch, Own, Perform, Ship, Compose, Travel,*

*Find, Win, Live, Go, Record, Speak, Scuba,  
Parachute, Publish, Try*

Above all else, have fun with it. Ask others if they have a list and what's on it. It's a great conversation starter for both business and personal discussions. It's also a great way to unearth experiences that may have helped or hurt a person's career.

A *Life List* and WOW stories help you create a memorable and valuable "brand" so you can get the job you want at the income you deserve. Furthermore, by using them to continually brand yourself throughout your career, you'll create opportunities to quickly accomplish the next financial thing they don't teach you in school.

## **Chapter Focus: Branding Yourself**

**What's Your WOW Story?**

**What Makes You Different?**

### **Sample *Life List***

Write A Book

Run A Marathon

Backpack Across Europe

See The Seven Wonders of The World

Visit Every Major League Baseball Stadium

Get A Part in A Movie

Start A Family

Learn A Second Language

Scuba Dive The Great Barrier Reef

Go Parachuting

Read The Bible From Cover to Cover

Own A Ferrari or Lamborghini

Graduate From College

Catch A Swordfish

## CORPORATE CLIMBING

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Getting the right job is an exciting start to your financial life, but climbing the corporate ladder is where the fun really begins. Therefore, it's important to learn the *Fake It 'Til You Make It* concept, which is the second financial thing they don't teach you in school. While it may initially sound superficial, the *Fake It 'Til You Make It* concept is actually a deep and profound notion that separates extraordinary people from average people.

Basically, *Fake It 'Til You Make It* is a matter of acting like you already are someone you want to be in order to get the opportunity to become it. By thinking and acting like you already are the person you want to be, you create the space for the transformation to take place. It's a powerful concept but it requires courage, desire, and a willingness to put yourself in uncomfortable situations. When asked about their secret to success, many successful entrepreneurs and CEO's admit they took on roles and responsibilities before they were ready, and capitalized on them.

## **Getting Into The C Suite**

The **C Suite** is a common term for any corporate title that begins with the letter **C**, such as Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Information Officer, etc. These positions represent the top rungs on the corporate ladder and, more and more often, are going to younger, less-experienced professionals instead of to the more seasoned employees who traditionally earned advancement by “putting in their time.” Mastering the four elements of *Fake It ‘Til You Make* including lunching up, reading up, having a bad short-term memory, and getting a mentor, will position you for a quick assault on the **C Suite**.

### **Lunching Up**

As part of your assault on the corporate ladder, make it a point to eat lunch twice a month with members of the group one rung up the ladder. This strategy works like osmosis: people who see you eating with this group assume you are in the same class. It’s the nature of people to make such assumptions, so use it to your advantage.

Lunching up will also make you aware of other things going on within the organization and will alert you to changes or opportunities that you can capitalize on. More importantly, it will help you understand the hierarchy of the organization and who makes the decisions. Knowing who the important players are lets you know who you need to get noticed by. I once read about an MBA student who said she would only take a job if her contract included lunch with the CEO once a month. She got it, and guess how long it took her to get promoted? One-year for Vice President, three-years to Senior Vice President, and after five-years, she had a board seat. Lunch up!

### **Reading Up**

Once you know who makes the decisions within the organization, your next step is to find out how they go about making them. This step is achieved by finding out what industry magazines, books, and newspapers they're reading. Whether you uncover these details during a meeting with a quick glance of the bookshelf, or stop by after hours to see which magazines and newspapers are displaced, by duplicating their information-gathering

techniques you literally place yourself on the same page as them.

Keeping up on industry trends, corporate news, and the impact it's having on your company's products or services will also create opportunities for you to show superiors that you have the knowledge base to function at the next level. So, give yourself a competitive advantage by finding out who makes the decisions, what information they're using as a guide, and then duplicate their actions. Keep this old adage in mind: "*Reading is the key to being what you want to be.*"

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