

EMPOWERMENT WITH THE WORLD

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Escaping Financial Traps

*Do not value money for any more
nor any less than its worth; it is
a good servant but a bad master.*

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

EMPOWERMENT WITH THE WORLD



* **Amanda:** *I worked for a very challenging company for eighteen years, and I went through some exhausting trials and tribulations with them. From highly visible and nerve-wracking lawsuits to incom-*

petent bosses to an employee turnover rate of more than 30 percent in a single year due to gross mismanagement, I endured my time there, toughed it out, in part because I felt that my role was important and helpful to people. But if I look back honestly, I think I really stayed because I had started on this path and didn't know how to get off. I continued to get promoted, making more and more money. I also kept getting more responsibilities, so the job was never boring. I think the great salary, promotions, new responsibilities, and perks just kept me there. The job wasn't a good fit for me, but it made possible some things that I felt were important, like a nice house, lovely clothes, a tennis club membership, travel, freedom and financial independence from my parents and others, etc. It's funny, I'm not a materialistic person overall, but I was so focused on doing my job well every day, building a strong and secure career for myself, and living this life I'd created (with its heavy obligations to a host of family and friends), that I never stopped to examine how unfulfilling and stressful my life was. I didn't see my relationships too clearly, either. I missed the fact that so many people were using and draining me, and many weren't capable of giving back at all. I feel like I was so busy living my life that I wasn't conscious of what I was missing—a career that thrills me, fulfilling relationships, and utilizing my creative talents.

Then, after being offered a different position with extensive travel, which I turned down, I was laid off, and I decided to make a huge change. I'd always adored music and theater and was very knowledgeable about the theatrical world, so I decided to take the

- * **STEP BACK TO EXPLORE** Valuing money above all else.
- * **LET GO** of beliefs, relationships, and actions that keep you small.
- * **SAY YES!** to a balanced relationship with money.
- * **BREAKTHROUGH**
"I fulfill my financial needs and honor who I am."

plunge and pursue being a music producer. This wasn't a lark—I was deeply committed to this and knew a great deal about the field, and I felt this was the right move for me. I spent six years on this road, working with various producers, learning the craft, scoping out new talent, representing great vocalists and their recordings, attending hundreds of shows and performances. I absolutely loved all of it. The problem was that I didn't make any money. I kept finding new great talent and exciting new projects, but the money didn't come. I simply ran out. Nothing substantial was coming in, and I couldn't pay my bills. It was so grueling, scary, and isolating . . . to be without money and unable to pay my debts. I'd never experienced that before. I even had to get some help from the very people in my life from whom I'd worked so hard to gain independence.

I come from parents of European descent, and they came from literally nothing. My mother was from a very poor family that had to scrape to eat. My parents are self-made, and they did tremendously well in their financial endeavors here. From this background, and growing up in a very affluent town, I guess I developed the thinking that having money was paramount, nonnegotiable, a given. I'd always been able to make good money . . . I took that fact for granted. So when I went out on a limb and pursued a new direction professionally, I never expected that I wouldn't make good money at it. Never. But I didn't. At a certain point, I knew I just couldn't go on. The money worries took over. I went through a very stressful time of asking myself, "Now what? What should I do? Do I walk away from producing, which I absolutely love and am great at, and turn my back on all I've done these past years?"

After struggling so long without money, I knew I needed a change, so I found a job in a field related to my corporate job. I didn't want to do this particular work at all, but I felt I had little choice. Quickly on, I saw that it was a terrible fit. The people, the work itself, the office dynamics, the way I was treated, and the pay . . . none of it worked. And then, just at the end of the year, my boss cut my salary dramatically, and I knew I had to leave. But after this experience, something shifted inside me, something big. I woke up somehow. I became very focused and sure of one thing. I said, "I've got to make a change here. I've got to earn money, pay off my debts, but still do something that's rewarding and enjoyable. I'm not going to give up on music producing, but I've got to take control."

Amanda's story tells of the deeply challenging experience of being disempowered by money in two potent but different ways. First, her original career that gave her financial success and security was grueling, stressful, and draining. It didn't give her the chance to pursue her true lifelong loves—the arts, performance, music, and theater. She earned great money but wasn't able to focus on what she deeply valued and treasured. Second,

Amanda experienced agonizing fear when money failed to materialize. She lived in constant dread that the money wouldn't come, and her worst fears came true—it didn't. Either way, money had the upper hand in Amanda's life.

Your Relationship with Money

Allowing money to be our master is one of the most serious errors of our time. It's an epidemic. Many of us believe that money will cure all ills, keep us safe, bring us luck, power, and esteem, make us beautiful, fulfill us, and make it okay that we're not doing what we long to. Money can be numbing, like a narcotic. I've worked with individuals whose shopping addiction is as destructive as a severe drug addiction.

Many folks today speak of money the way people in ancient times spoke of their ferocious gods. Money must be fed and feared, revered as the master. It seems that we continually give money our gifts of sacrifice, like lambs on an altar, just to remain in its favor. We offer up our talents, our longings, and our souls, praying to be spared hardship and suffering. If we hold money in higher esteem than ourselves and our creative spirits, it will control us.

However, if we take money for granted, as something that always flows automatically, we miss seeing the true meaning of the situation: Money, and how you feel when you are making and spending it, is a form of energy. The way it flows and feels relates to your own sense of worth, security, and strength in the world.

To be fair, I've seen many people make beautiful magic with their money. I've met inspiring individuals who have turned their hardships and personal suffering into global endeavors that change the world for the better. Theresa Wilson, founder of The Blessing Basket Project® (www.blessingbasket.org), is one of these individuals (see chapter 13). Many creative individuals use their money and talents to bring glorious and moving pieces of visual art, music, and literature to the world. Clearly, money can make possible an expanded experience of joy, beauty, and goodness.

What separates people who have a joyful relationship with money from those who don't? People who are successful and joyful in their money relationships are generally empowered in other aspects of life as well. As Maria Nemeth discusses in her insightful book *The Energy of Money*,¹ money is one of six vital energy forms, along with time, physical vitality, enjoyment, creativity, and support of friends. How you are with money also reflects the quality of your relationships with other key energy forms.

With regard to money, I've observed a number of key tendencies.

Money tends to flow joyfully and easily when:

- You are in balance as a creative individual and can adjust positively to changes in your outside world.
- You know that you are valuable, good, and important, despite what’s happening around you.
- You avoid being overly committed to a single facet or dimension of yourself.
- You take actions that reflect a positive, all-encompassing view of yourself.
- You feel respected and valued in your relationships.
- You know *you* guide your life and can modify your course when things aren’t working.
- You view money as a positive, affirming element.
- You have clear ideas of the good you will do with your money for yourself, others, and the world.

Money tends to stop flowing joyfully and easily when:

- You’re out of balance and react negatively to change.
- You carry beliefs that you are bad or inadequate, and you worry about others’ negative opinions of you.
- You have strong attachments to how things “should be” and what you “deserve” rather than being able to live and learn from how things are now.
- You act from fear and doubt and behave in ways that limit you.
- Your relationships with others are strained, resistant, and conflictual.
- You blame others or outside circumstances for your problems with money.
- You believe that having money is somehow bad, dirty, or selfish.
- You don’t know what good you’d do with money, if you had it.

Focusing solely on your lack of money will lead to being driven by fear, worry, and self-doubt. You won’t be able to see the options available to you or the positive directions you could take. Conversely, if you generate abundant money but are overly focused on the material items it affords, you’re allowing something outside yourself to make life enjoyable and meaningful. Either way, money rules.

If you are struggling with money, I recommend that you take a look at how you feel

about money in general, and how you relate to it. Rebalancing and strengthening your internal relationship with money now will help you create a more satisfying financial experience in the future.

But positive thinking isn't enough to turn things around. We have to take action that helps us step up to be the person we long to be. If being in debt feels terrible to you, figure out how to reduce your debt and do it. If working part-time in another field would give you access to health benefits that you desperately need, say yes! to a job that you feel good about. Do what you need to feel balanced, hopeful, and powerful in your relationship with money, and positive results will follow.

Amanda continues: *From that point on, things have been different. I sought employment in an HR-related field that I'd had previous experience in, but I made sure to find a position that was going to work on my terms. It's very flexible, and I can act independently, earn a healthy commission, and apply the particular HR skills that I enjoy utilizing (versus many of my previous tasks and responsibilities that felt like chores). I'm connected to a successful firm with a great reputation that I could be excited to work for. Before I took the job, I met several of my colleagues, and I was impressed with them and with what they said about the organization. My boss seemed to be great and was well thought of, too. I felt like this could be a solution that was more than feasible for me, for the time being, allowing me to support my creative side while doing professional work that I enjoy. I've been there six months now, and I really like it. I am great at the work, I find the people stimulating, and I feel respected for my talents. I'm one of the top performers, and I like it!*

I know that this job isn't forever, but becoming more solvent and paying off my debts now feels right. I'm much more secure and confident now that I've taken charge of my life. I'm not going to give up on my dream of producing—I've come too far for that—but I know I need patience. I'm on a career journey that allows me to pay my bills and address my debts, but also commit other available hours to producing music, which is my dream. This job allows me to use the skills and talents I truly enjoy, while being very flexible and independent. I keep working toward my creative goals and am developing several music projects while making a living that keeps me engaged and afloat. My relationships with people have changed for the better, too. I simply don't have time for people who drain me or take for granted that I'll be there for them, when they're not there for me. I've slowly cleared away things and relationships that don't support me. My life is working well for me now, and I feel really good about the direction I'm heading in.

AMANDA'S ADVICE

- Do what's required to feel balanced about money. Take action that allows you to handle your debts well, but do it consciously. Let work represent important aspects of who you are, even if it's not the ideal situation yet.
- Know the creative endeavors you want in your life and make sure they are represented. Don't give up on your creative dreams. Keep working on them. If they're important enough to you, you'll find a way.
- Clear away people and relationships that drain you and bring you down.

Balance Your Relationship with Money

What is a healthy, balanced relationship with money? From my view, it involves earning (and having access to) all the money you *truly* need and want, while acting in a way that brings you a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and integrity. Balance with regard to money implies that the relationship is one of equality and respect—that money facilitates your efforts to be and do what you wish to, in life and work. Money allows you to share with the world who you are and what matters to you. Money is not the end result, nor does it possess any particular qualities or traits in and of itself. It is simply an energy form. Money is the means through which you can either expand yourself or limit yourself. If viewed and handled positively, money allows you to apply your unique capabilities and gifts in and for the world.

Clients have come to me confused and desperate about money, often explaining that their businesses and professional endeavors have been disastrous financially. Other clients who make tremendous money feel like they are selling their soul for financial security, as I did for many years. In working with these individuals, over time we uncover a myriad of ingrained beliefs about money that are negative, restrictive, or fear-based. My negative thinking about money led me to believe that I would always make great money but would have to give up my soul and dreams to do it. It has taken me years to revise this one destructive belief. But I'm committed to acting from an empowered view that is money is not the enemy. My new framework is "I am able to generate abundant money while doing soul-enriching work."

What are your beliefs about money? How are you acting and living that keeps you subservient to and fearful about money?

Know What You Long to Do and Honor It with Balance

Amanda uncovered a deep longing to work in the music industry, as a producer and developer of projects and talent. This creative longing powerfully emerged after she was laid off from her long-term corporate career. I've seen this over and over—after years of drudgery and pain of doing work that doesn't fit, something snaps and we awaken to creative or soulful longings that won't be denied. Honoring our creative longings is vital; it is a positive and essential aspect of a satisfying life. But it's critical to honor these longings *all along the way*, with conscious thought and empowered action. Following our desires can turn destructive if we end up becoming a servant to them. Balance is everything. Creative and spiritual longings are within us from the beginning of our lives, but we often ignore them. When disregarded, these desires finally break free and demand urgently to be addressed. But urgency begets imbalance.

I broke down from having to navigate through dehumanizing corporate political warfare. I was desperate to find a new work path that would help people. This spiritual longing emerged so fiercely that I neglected everything else in order to immerse myself in my psychotherapy studies. The problem with this shift was that my family's standard of living required me to earn a sizable income, and I had stopped doing so. I continued to earn insufficient money for years, in blind stubbornness—refusing to change our lifestyle yet not able to support it. In becoming a slave to doing good, I was neglecting both my other responsibilities to the family and other productive dimensions of myself (the successful business professional, the effective leader, the wise money manager, etc.). I was unrealistic, too, about how long it would take me to earn the money I needed and wanted to in my new career. I didn't listen to the solid advice I was given, that a full, self-sustaining private practice would most likely take five or so years to develop. "Not for me." I thought. "I'll do it much quicker!" Turns out I was wrong.

A better, more balanced approach that would have reduced my stress and freed up some much-needed energy would have been to 1) get out of denial and face my financial realities head-on, and 2) get part-time, stable work (with health benefits, if possible!) in an organization related to my new field. This approach would have helped me pay my bills while also expanding my skills as a therapist and coach.

People sometimes ask me, "How long should I keep this up, following my dream?"

I typically respond, “If you can consider giving it up, then most likely you’re not really committed to giving it everything you’ve got.” Following your dreams requires guts and an amazing amount of tenacity, courage, perseverance, and patience. If you can foresee giving up on the dream, maybe it’s not for you after all. In other words, figure out what you *can’t live without doing*, and do that. But do it consciously, with balance.

Even when following your dreams, focusing on only one dimension to the exclusion of all others (in my case, my spiritual longings and in Amanda’s, her creative desires) leads us to act in out-of-control ways. Other needs in your life must also be addressed through balanced action—paying your bills, saving for the future, protecting your health and welfare and that of your family, and so on. The goal is to honor your creative and spiritual longings in balanced ways *while* addressing your financial needs so you feel secure.

Various approaches to getting the financial support you need exist:

- Consult with a reputable financial consultant, who can assist you in evaluating your financial situation and making solid plans for your transition and your future.
- Get advice from respected experts in your field about what you’d like to do, an estimated time frame for achieving it, and the skills, education, and tools required to succeed (and listen to the advice!).
- Participate in workshops and seminars on financial planning given by local or national organizations (such as the chamber of commerce, a local library, women’s business development centers, SCORE, and Make Mine a Million Dollar Business), and learn about grants, scholarships, and loans available for women.
- Develop a solid business plan for your new endeavor, with guidance from the above-mentioned organizations or individuals.
- Study several of the hundreds of terrific resources on financial planning and money management (I recommend Suze Orman, David Bach, and David Ramsey’s books, for starters).
- Ask someone you know who is powerful and effective in her money management skills to mentor you and provide ongoing guidance.

Addressing your financial needs along with your other needs and longings will ensure that your life continues to flow from a centered, secure place and is reflective of the many dimensions of you. Money thus becomes a form of support and enrichment for your integrated life—no more, no less.

Shed What Keeps You Down

Amanda describes the quality of her relationships both before and after taking control of her life and honoring her needs and longings. Before, many of her friends and family seemed to take advantage of her, assuming that she'd be there for them through their troubles, yet they were unwilling to support and nurture her when she needed it. She felt a servant to many relationships and situations that weren't healthy or positive for her.

After gaining a clear understanding of what she wanted in life—to honor her creative desires while attending to the business of managing her life constructively—she shed things and relationships that were draining, negative, and unsupportive. Now she simply doesn't have time or energy for things that keep her down and small. She's outgrown them.

Honoring all that you are in life takes a great deal of energy, time, focus, and commitment. To do so, we need people who encourage and invigorate us. Here's a useful question to ask yourself in evaluating who in your life is helpful and who is not: "*Does this person want me to be all I can be in life, based on my definition? Is s/he capable of supporting me on this new path?*" If the answer is "No," then some clearing may be necessary. If you want to move away from some people and relationships that are holding you back, you may wish to get outside support and guidance on how best to proceed. A coach or therapist can be a great place to start. To find a coach in your area, visit www.coachfederation.org. For a directory of marriage and family therapists in your area, check out www.aamft.org.

MOVING FORWARD TO BREAKTHROUGH

* STEP BACK

To gain awareness of your beliefs about money, in your journal, capture all your thoughts. *No censoring, please—write everything that comes to mind.*

- Think back to when you were a child. What messages were you told by your parents and other important authority figures about money? What did you learn about having or not having money, the importance of it, the power of it, the desirability of it? List those messages in your journal.

- What *new* beliefs have you developed about money in your adult years? Write them down.
- Looking over all the thoughts you hold about money, identify those that feel restrictive, negative, or critical or are based on insecurity or lack. Cross out those that feel negative.
- What new, positive thoughts can you create about money and what it will bring to your life? What positive outcomes will come—to you, your family, others, and the world—when money flows to you as you hope? (For instance: I'll take family vacations that create beautiful memories; I'll beautify my home; I'll protect the health of my family; I'll take time off to relax; I'll finally write my book, etc.). Write them down.
- Review this list of positive outcomes daily. Look for evidence that these outcomes and positive beliefs about money are valid and true for you and will in fact come to pass.

✱ **LET GO** of beliefs, relationships, and actions that keep you small.

In your journal, capture all your thoughts. *No censoring, please—write everything that comes to mind.*

- Think about the key people in your life today. List them.
- For each, ask yourself: Does this person want me to be all I can be in life and work? Is s/he able and willing to support me on my new path? If the answer to these questions is “No,” think about how you can empower yourself to protect your longings and desires and keep them safe and supported. (Seek the help of a therapist, coach, women's group, or other support networks.)
- In what situations do you feel “smaller” (less powerful) than you wish to?
- What one step can you take today that will help you regain power in these situations? How can you achieve balance?

✱ **SAY YES!** to a balanced relationship with money.

Recommended Steps

1. Quietly go inward and ask yourself—consult your inner guidance, your intuition—to explore taking affirming action in regard to money.

- What needs to be done now in your money situation that would make you feel more empowered and in control?
 - What holds you back from doing these things?
2. Accepting for a moment that improving your money relationship is in your hands, brainstorm what you would be able to do this month to
 - Feel better about money
 - Earn more money
 - Save more money
 - Manage your money more wisely
 - Be more powerful, loving, and balanced in your relationship with money
 - Enjoy money
 3. Commit to taking one important step this month to gain control and self-confidence in your relationship with money.

Remember

Money is energy that flows when you flow. Connect with what you long to do, balance that consciously with what you need to do, and let money be a helper, supporter, and respected friend. Clear away beliefs and actions that keep you angry, resistant, and unsupported. It's up to you to do this, and you can.

Amanda reminds us

“Taking full charge of my life feels great. For once, I am balancing what I long to do with what I need to do, and I'm good with it. I believe with all my heart that I will have everything I dream of—a fulfilling career, great relationships, creative projects that excite me, and a lifestyle that means joy, freedom, and independence. Believing in my dreams, and taking action that supports me and what I need, has changed everything.”

✱ **BREAKTHROUGH** “I fulfill my financial needs and honor who I am.”