



FINANCIAL PREPAREDNESS

"One of life's most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn't do our homework, that we are not prepared." ~ Merlin Olsen

Issue #46
December 24, 2021

Gifts and Gear Guide

I grew up in a family that spent Christmas Day opening gifts. One by one. All day long. No breaks except for food and potty stops. We called it The Giftathon. Most of the gifts I received were things I didn't ask for, want or need, things like tea towels (often with a seasonal theme) and pillowcases (mostly secondhand, though with embroidery and/or tatting; I now have dozens if not hundreds of each. I'm not a fan of having things in my house that I never use, so I started giving my family a Do Not Give List each December, which included "no clothes," "no live animals" and "no cheap books from that bookstore in south Georgia"). But invariably I'd be told, "You're too late! They're already wrapped, tagged, tied and under the tree." When I opened these gifts, I guess I was supposed to show excitement and appreciation. As a result, I'm kind of "gifted out" for life.

During college, I took a course in behavioral economics, where we studied economist Gary Becker's idea of applying economic theory to the activities of everyday life. One of those activities was gift giving. Becker concluded that generally, giving gifts destroys wealth because the recipient usually doesn't value the gift as much as the donor. So as someone whose job it has been for 26 years to create wealth, I've not been a fan of giving gifts, especially on what I call "Hallmark holidays" where it's expected. The feeling of that expectation reminds me of the Thoreau quote, "I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion."

Nevertheless, there's a time and place for giving gifts, so here are some tips from a grizzled veteran:

- Give a gift when it's unexpected. It's a way of letting the recipient know you're thinking about them.
- Give something you know the recipient would love (ask them what they'd like), not something that only you like. Giving a gift is not about you, it's about the recipient.
- You don't necessarily have to spend money. It could be something unique, something you made, or a gift of your time and attention.
- There are some situations where you can offend someone if you *don't* give a gift. However, giving nothing is better than giving a cheap gift or being passive-aggressive about it.
- If you do buy something, include a gift receipt so the recipient can return or exchange it in case they don't love it.
- If you give a gift card, something with lots of options (e.g., Amazon) is better than a card that is very specific, such as a card for a certain restaurant or gas station.
- Don't begrudge someone if they didn't give you a gift, or didn't give you “enough” or what you wanted. It's not your money and they probably don't owe you anything. Don't sit around waiting for people to give you things. Go out and earn the damn money yourself.
- If someone gives you something you don't want, be gracious about it (to the best of your ability). Don't throw a hissy fit—it makes you look immature, and you'll just ruin the day for everyone else.

Now for my first annual list of recommended gear. This is great gear that I own myself and highly recommend. (Thank you, free market, for providing this gear!) It's too late to give these as a Christmas gift this year, but you might be able to get a good deal in an after-Christmas sale.

If you're going to walk in shoes (you should go barefoot as much as possible), in order to walk properly (see [Deskbound: Standing Up to a Sitting World](#) by Kelly Starrett), you need to wear shoes with a minimalist or “zero drop” sole instead of “high heels.” I wear two shoes from [Xero Shoes](#): the [Oswego](#) around town or when walking on the street, and the beefier [Terraflex](#) when walking/hiking on trails. Both are super comfortable (I wear a 2E width, but the toe box in these is so roomy that there's no need for a wide version) and lightweight. They have an annual sale around late November/early December. If you like them, get at least one spare pair as a prepping item.

Best Pants Ever: [5.11 Tactical Decoy Convertible Pant UPF 50+](#). These are comfortable,

lightweight, unobtrusive, quick-drying, and a little stretchy. They convert into shorts, though you'd never know it. The zippered cargo pockets on the side are low profile, and the front pockets have a spot for a knife clip. There are four pockets in the back and a secure snap closure in the front. I've had four copies of this pant's predecessor (Traverse 2.0) for years (it seems like they'll last forever), but 5.11 took it to the next level with these pants. They have a good sale around Black Friday each year (I got these for \$68, a deal). They have a few stores, or you can order online.

[Kershaw Launch 4 CA Legal Automatic Knife](#): With a folded length of only 3.2 inches, this knife is short and light enough to carry it with you everywhere. Push a button and the blade immediately deploys and stays locked in place. The blade stays sharp a good while. I use mine every day.

[Streamlight 66318 Microstream Ultra Compact Tactical Flashlight](#): Also small and light enough to EDC, I use mine every day.

[Sleep Number 360 P5 Smart Bed](#): Totally adjustable and extremely comfortable. Good sleep is your most important life hack.

[Nest Easy Breather Memory Foam Pillow](#): Get the Side Sleeper "size" if you sleep on your side. You can remove fill if it's too high or firm.

Best Vacuum Cleaner Ever: [Shark AZ2002 Vertex](#). Very powerful, versatile and easy to use.

[Ikea Ranarp floor/reading lamp](#): This was recommended by Wirecutter. It has a heavy base and was quick to assemble. It's a nice light for reading, and at \$50, it's a steal.

Best day planner: [Kokuyo Jibun Techo](#). Comes in a variety of sizes, styles and colors. And no, you don't need to know Japanese to use it. Get a [Pilot 4 color ballpoint pen](#) to go with it.

[LapGear Lap Desk](#): Includes a slot for a phone. The device ledge at the bottom is helpful.

[BestBookStand](#): Holds a book open and allows you to read with your head looking more straight ahead for better posture. (Note: of the sizes shown, I can only recommend #2, 3, and 5; the other sizes are different products.)

[Page markers](#): magnetic with an arrow on one side to show you exactly where you stopped reading.

[Nuun Sport electrolyte drink tablets](#): Drop one of these into your water bottle before a sweaty workout to help replenish lost electrolytes. Taste good and only 1g of sugar.

[PUR gum](#): I chew this gum when I walk. Sweetened with xylitol, a natural sweetener. They also make nice breath mints.

What You Should Be Doing Now

1. Spend some time being present and making memories with your loved ones this week. Get outside and go for a hike.
2. Start thinking about your plans for next year: a one-word theme, intentions (instead of goals), daily habits, vacations, annual traditions, your Stop Doing list. Schedule a day to review, think long-term and plan where you won't be interrupted.
3. Books to read: Elevate: Push Beyond Your Limits and Unlock Success in Yourself and Others by Robert Glazer.

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Generally, I don't have time to answer questions about your specific situation, but if you have a general question that I think other readers also have, [let me know](#) and I will provide an answer in a future issue.

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Before starting a new diet or exercise regimen, you should consult with a doctor, nutritionist, dietician, or personal trainer.

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