

Read All About It: The Wise
Inheritor's Guide To Freedom
From Wealth

By Charles Lowenhaupt

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The Wise Inheritor's Guide To Freedom From Wealth

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Just after I finished writing my just-released second book, *The Wise inheritor's Guide to Freedom From Wealth*, I wrote a piece for a well-respected publication about an unhappy wealth inheritor who was struggling with addiction, fighting to refashion his legacy, and who ultimately died. I saw in his story some clear illustrations of the challenges many wealth inheritors face as they try to live productive lives and put money and legacy in their place.

I thought the perspective was entirely relevant for inheritors and their families. Surprisingly, I was criticized for focusing on the misfortune of one wealth inheritor without talking about all the happy wealth inheritors in this world. Indeed, one of the industry's leading consultants wrote to tell me that it is time to quit talking about the challenges of wealth. Instead, I should start highlighting all the successes of wealth.

I have considered the reaction and was unmoved.

Of course, there are many wealthy people who are happy and satisfied and leading the life they want to lead. I am reminded of a contemporary of mine whose father created huge wealth. The father told his son that the wealth he created was partly on account of his own capability, but mainly on account of luck and opportune timing. 'I created the wealth so that you could lead your life and pursue whatever interests you want to pursue.' His son started a school in the inner city, ran it for many years, and changed thousands of lives. He never needed or will need a guide to "Making Family Wealth Work for You," which is my book's subtitle. Nor did his father need a guide to raising his son to chase a dream.

The happy wealth inheritors like the schoolmaster above, are leading lives which are not defined by their wealth. None would say, "I am happy because I am rich." Each in his or her own way has managed to find freedom from the burdens of wealth. None really needs help figuring out how to put money in its place since each, on some level, has done that.

But what about those who cannot figure out how to fit life into their substantial wealth? Don't they need help? Don't they deserve our attention? Shouldn't they figure out a way to chase their own dreams and become all they can become?

Aimless and Unhappy

Over the years, I have concluded there are too many unhappy wealth inheritors.

I meet them as we advise families, and I meet them as I speak at conferences. Or I meet their parents who are distressed that their children are aimless and need "motivation." An eighteen-year-old told me: "I don't know why I am alive. How will I ever live up to the expectations in the family name?" A fourteen-year-old replied: "You and I both

know that all I need to learn to write is my name on a check or credit card slip.”

As I lectured on the topic of *Freedom from Wealth*, the title of the book that Don Trone and I wrote five years ago, I often found that those who came up to me afterwards were wealth inheritors saying they craved freedom from the burdens of wealth. Wealth creators – those whose passion and intellect created the fortune in the first place – generally had the satisfaction of self-actualizing, following a vision and succeeding. They had the satisfaction of the chase. However, their children were robbed of that exhilarating experience and missing the opportunities to make something of their lives – passionately to pursue self-actualization. The wealth creators and their children, usually separately, told me stories of failure and unhappiness.

The challenge of growing up wealthy was most starkly illustrated in a meeting some years ago at one of the first “next gen” sessions of an association of wealthy families. A group of twenty- to thirty-year-olds was meeting over dinner. I was tasked with moderating the discussion about wealth. I asked what these wealth inheritors wanted to talk about, and a young man raised his hand immediately: “It is much harder to grow up rich than poor,” he said. Rather than reacting, I asked others to jump in. All of them agreed entirely. They told stories of unhappiness – friends who liked them for their money; Saturday mornings at bank tutorials rather than soccer matches; the embarrassment of grandpa’s Bentley; relatives telling them how they would never need to work; the pretense of living poor when they were actually rich.

After a healthy period of their venting their unhappiness, I ended the discussion by asking how many people would agree that it was harder to grow up rich than poor. We then began a long conversation. It became clear that all had been raised to define themselves by their wealth. None had been given guidance in how to grow up rich.

It was this encounter that I first understood that wealth inheritors, in particular, needed help. They feel alone with this dilemma and there are few resources to help them. They deserve and need guidance, and that’s precisely the reason I wrote this book.

In fact, lots of experts are offering perspective to ultra-high net worth families about how to run a family office and the fine points of alpha and beta in investment management. The world is overrun with experts helping families write “Constitutions” and build “Mission Statements.” We can find parents, friends, and counselors urging young people to “find their passions.”

However, there aren’t enough people talking about how wealth inheritors can grow up to be happy. Nor are enough people helping parents to help their children grow up with wealth. It is time to start those conversations. Much of the work we do with families, many of my talks and articles involve those conversations. My new book addresses the topic directly and sets out areas any wealth inheritor and any parent of a wealth inheritor needs to consider.