

The Difference in Coffee Pots

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If one thinks about the difference between generations (i.e my grandmother and myself or even my parents), we can tell real clear that there are some basic differences. My grandparents grew up in a depression era where one had to make the most of what ever you had. Today, some people might consider them stingy for not wanting to spend money on the latest item at the store. In fact, for the better part of my memory, my grandparents would give for Christmas things like flour, sugar and nuts.

I remember working with my grandfather on some sauna-like days at his farm loading hay or whatever needed to be done those days. For lunch we would come into the house and sit for something to eat. Grandpa would pour coffee into his cup from a coffee maker that surely came from the late 50s or early 60s.

One could look around the house and see that the entire time that they lived there, little had changed except that more grandchildren walked through the doors than before. Some things were replaced when needed, but they still had many of the same furniture, wall fixtures, decorations and other items that they always had. Even more, they were happy with what they had and grateful they had it.

Of course, each generation blames the other for the current misfortunes of society, and there are plenty of grudges to go around. Without the depression and world wars, would they have made the decisions we make today?

Investments that pay off?

The old idiom and claim that “they don’t make things like they used to” is starting to make sense. We carelessly walk away from the image today that items that we buy do not hold up to those from the early part of the 1900s. This is a product of capitalism and marketing, and it is one of the principle ideas behind Wal-Mart retail shops and fast food.

Slowly counter help has been replaced by self-service signs, and product quality has eroded over the years. This gives the consumer more power over their decisions and away from “pressure sales” because marketing has already got you to look at the product. At the same time, the company saves money with less labor needs. Today, one can walk through some stores, get what they want, purchase it, and never have to see an associate.

Today, it is an intrinsic element of the free enterprise system, and that system depends upon a sense of materialism and individualism. Service-oriented service is replaced by self-service and good marketing. We *need* the latest and greatest whatever to make us happy until the next latest and greatest comes along. On top of that, the packaging can make the difference between a product sitting on the shelf or going out the door as a purchase regardless of the product quality.

The coffee pot that I bought only a year ago is already showing wear. This, of course, encourages me to go back to the store to pick up a new one for the low price, which of course, I will have to replace in yet another year. The investment my grandparents made in their coffee pot somehow lasted decades where mine made just over a year.

We find that the packaging has increased for items over the years. Packaging is great for bringing the coffee pot home, but why do we need a box that is completely bigger than the product and gets tossed out with the garbage. Remember the old CD cases? People would buy a CD with a box that was 2-3 times its size. Another case, we cannot simply go to a McDonalds and order a hamburger and fries in a basket. Half of what we order at any fast food joint is thrown away as we walk out. Thus, packaging is a

large portion of what we buy today because without it, we would not know what we are buying or were looking to buy.

Investing advice reviews short-term numbers since many investors are looking to profit quickly rather than over the course of years. Value investors may still consider more long-term growth but within 5 year spans. Many American companies today do not have more than 5 years planned out, and thus long-term growth cannot be strategically considered if no plan is being considered. A professor once said that some Japanese firms have hundred year plans. Now that is long-term planning. They may not be able to predict all of the changes in the world over the next hundred years, but they can certainly strive to succeed in those hundred years.

Companies that made a killing in the tech bubble are today struggling to survive and most did not last even a year. The tech bubble was a package of blown out potentials and get-rich-quick schemes where people were quick to buy into the “latest and greatest” tech firm. Many investors crawled away from that with large holes in their pockets. Then, there are companies that managed to survive the bubble and realized they needed to look beyond the bubble glaze. They built strategies and roadmaps for success.

Upgrading?

With the evolution of computers and video games, the trend to buy the “latest and greatest” has increased dramatically. Ever-heard of the “must-have” gadget of the year? PC World and PC Magazine will tell you what they are. Something that will surely make somebody fly in technical delight of connecting some device to another device that is light, easy for some to use, and versatile with the additional adapter.

Our society cannot save any money because it is too busy buying the latest improvement in modern technology or replacing poor quality products. Nintendo has gone through 5 different version of its NES with each new rendition lasting a few years. Automakers build their cars with 5-year or 100,000 miles warranties (whichever comes first) so that we have to consider buying a replacement for that vehicle using, of course, customer loyalty benefits. Computer hardware and software have an even shorter life, as the demands of new software require new and better hardware. What happens to the 5 year old machine?

Clothes are in trend for only a few months. Ask Men's Health, MTV, or even FoxLife on Fox News. People "need" to get the latest fashion trend for the season. There are plenty of people who have closets and dresser chests full of "nothing to wear". We go to the local mall and get a new shirt or pair of pants that will last a few washes before we have to get another one again. Thus, we are in a constant state of upgrading.

Observed Behavior

This is not specifically a liberal nor a conservative consideration here. It is an observation of reckless and materialistic behavior, and companies and consumers share blame here. Companies perpetuate the idea for profits because they know they can get it. Consumers become competitive in their purchases by staying ahead of the Jones or at least not be the only without.

The question is where does this stop? If everything we use and we purchase everything only to replace it later, what does that say about the rest of our lives? Is it only the stuff that we purchase that needs upgrading all of the time instead of "making do"

with what we have (perhaps enjoying it more)? Does it extend to personal lives, friends, and significant others?

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