

Fads, Trends & Principles

When looking at the world, you can divide much of it into Fads, Trends or Principles. A little mantra for this is that we should *Play with Fads, Work with Trends, and Live by Principles*. This is easier said than done because in modern times we are too often *Seduced by Fads, Ignorant of Trends and Resistant to Principles*.

except when it is to move away from whatever is expected of you and rejecting what's already in place. Fads are less about creativity than they are about reaction. Art and artists are often quick to reject the traditional in favor of their new visions. Fads are popular with modern artists and that attitude spreads into business and culture, though they would be the first to deny it. Fads pretend to be trends.

To do just the opposite is also a form of imitation. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

We should play with fads because they can be fun and help us to enjoy life. From styles of clothing to styles of culture, they are about being in the moment of life and reveling in being alive. Just keep them in perspective.

We should thank God for beer and burgundy by not drinking too much of either.
G. K. Chesterton

Do you have enough fads in your life so that you're not boring? (The *Church Lady* on SNL had no fads.) Do you have so many fads in your life that you're irrelevant? Choose wisely.

Trends

Trends are about movement. Fads are like the waves on the water. They rock the boat and so they capture our attention. Trends are like the currents which move the boat. Currents are more difficult to see, but have far more power. One can navigate by learning more about the currents of trends and stop obsessing about the waves upon the water.

Trends are more adult-like because they take longer-term attention span to notice. They often involve a sense of investment, whether that is with a long-term stock, the growth or decline of a company or even the way that we invest in the rearing of our children. They take time and if we reacted to every little change with our investments, we cause more harm than good.

We work with trends because that's where our work will do the most good - long-term thinking applied to the notion of leveraging our resources and efforts to multiply the outcome. If you can pull some fads in to help achieve this goal, trends can work even better.

I don't set trends. I just find out what they are and I exploit them. Dick Clark

Principles

Principles are about the eternal. Things that don't change, shouldn't change, can't change. These are difficult to defend in an age where many loud people say that there are no eternal, no truths. I believe it is true to say that they are wrong.

Those are my principles. If you don't like them, I have others. Groucho Marx

This is not to say that principles are carved in stone. The fact is that they ebb and flow. In some eras, some principles are more regarded than in other eras. For instance, ask yourself which is more important, freedom or equality? You'll probably have an



Fads

Fads are all about being in a moment in time, particularly to enjoy that moment. In that sense, they are very nice things because they are very human things. Fads can burn if they are held too close, seen as truth, or embraced as a lifestyle. In put in their proper place, fads are great.

Because of our economic and social obsession with trends, it's not really surprising that there's an almost equal and opposite reaction in our modern obsession with fads. Too much of anything will cause a reaction, often in the opposite direction. Even worse, we often suppose that fads are trends. Fads are marketed as the next wave of the future, oddly one right after another.

You can never get enough of what you really don't need.
Eric Hoffer

Fads often go with adolescence — to do something different, to be bored with the same old thing, especially when the culture and economy join forces to help convince you that new is better, and old is, well, old. They are also about attention—people who start or lead fads are all about capturing attention. Why would someone embrace a fad if no one else would notice? In an attention-based economy (only when I get your attention can I get your money) fads are lucrative because of the constant turnover of what is cool.

There is nothing culturally more subversive than the modern commerce of quick turnover in ideas. Philip Rieff

Fads give the illusion of progress. They are anchors that stop movement, discouraging it,



An Owner's Guide to the Future

answer, but you can easily find someone who will disagree with you. This is because freedom and equality are principles. They are both true at the same time and yet they are opposites. It's a paradox, and a delightful one at that. There are times when freedom is more important and at other times where equality seems to be favored. One without the other would either be a jungle or a dictatorship.

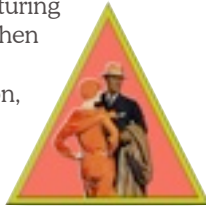
Just as fads anchor you to a moment in time, principles free you from time. Principles are not simply about this time, they are about all time. We can have the sense of principles being more elder-oriented because for too many of us, we don't seem to appreciate them until we've grown tired of everything else that competes with them. They're not limited just to elders as we have all met youngsters who seem wise beyond their years.

We grow conservative as we grow old it is true. But we do not grow conservative because we find so many new things spurious. We grow conservative because we find so many old things genuine. G. K. Chesterton

Fads, Trends & Principles in the Modern World

Fads are about attention.

Given the vague statistic that the average person in the modern world encounters several thousand advertising messages a day, your ability to get your message through depends a lot on knowing which fads are capturing attention at this moment. When you're trying to gain the attention of a younger person, be that your child or your new worker, are you able to use the right words, images and metaphors that work with them, without trying to be like them, of course? It's not a fad that the younger generation easily sees and rejects efforts to manipulate them.



Trends are about intention. Which trends do you follow? Which do you ignore? Once you know about a trend, more than likely you need to form an opinion about whether it is useful. Which fads can you use to pull others into either supporting or resisting a trend? In navigating current trends, have a sense of direction and

Fads, Trends & Principles, page 2

Fads, trends and principles can be used as lenses through which to look at what's going on around you. They are not always distinct from each other, as there's often a little bit of principle inside of a fad. Trends are often revealed first through the fads that show up in a culture or an economy. Principles are often obscured by the modern obsession with both fads and trends, and the popular naivete that say principles either don't exist or shouldn't . . .



endurance so you can anticipate how to use it in your favor.

Have an understanding of both investment and delayed gratification with trends. Because trends take time, one has to have a sense of the endgame — where is this trend likely to lead us five, ten, even fifty years into the future? In the Western world, we have been so seduced by the short-term and quarterly results that we are quite fad-like in our planning. The Eastern cultures might teach us about having a much longer sense of time. Our own history, in terms of what we have forgotten or choose to ignore, can also teach about the value of long-term trends as well.

Principles are about truth.

Imagine that you were asked to begin a document with the words, "*We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .*" how might you write that document? Do you believe that anything is true - that truth even exists - or do you believe that everything is relative and one so-called truth is as good any other?

In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principles, stand like a rock.
Thomas Jefferson

Unlike fads, which have tremendous marketing budgets behind them,

principles are often left on their own and are not as easy to understand from them in the day-to-day, busy world. In this world, the spoils go to the distractors — those best able to grab and hold your attention, and thereby gain access to your money — are the ones who get the gold and get to rule.

Only intuition can protect us from the most dangerous individual of all, the articulate incompetent. Robert Bernstein

Not all principles are to be equally valued, just like not all change is forward. The great struggle of our age is to define what should change and what should stay the same. It's often said that in the future we'll need more science and math in order to compete in the global economy. That's true.



What is even more true is that if we are to thrive in the future, we will need to study more philosophy, theology, history and biography. Science cannot tell us why we are here and what is the purpose of life. These four subjects may not be able to answer such questions either, but at least they lead us in that direction and that's a very good foundation from which to start.

Knowledge is power, but only wisdom is liberty. Will Durant



David Zach, futurist www.davidzach.com 414-278-0414

3