



## The Ant and the Grasshopper Revisited

In an attempt to teach the virtues of hard work and thrift, a kindergarten teacher is reading to her class from the fable of "The Ant And The Grasshopper." The popular story describes the conscientious ant, diligently laboring and saving for the coming cold, hard winter, while the grasshopper merrily sings as he lives a season of slothful indulgence, feasting on the lush summer greens.

At the end of her reading, the teacher asks the class which they would rather be more like, the ant or the grasshopper? A little girl cries out, "A grasshopper!" The puzzled teacher asks, "Why a grasshopper?" The child responds, "Because the grasshopper looks happier!" The teacher marvels at the little girl's observation, since she had never even noticed how the countenance of a grasshopper appears to be smiling;

while that of an ant appears stern and belligerent. The teacher worries that the little girl will associate happiness with living to excess, and unhappiness with hard work and prudence.

But, in reality, our perceptions do have a tremendous impact on our attitudes toward our finances and how we manage them. Money is more than a medium of exchange; it is also a medium of expression. We are told to put our money "where our mouth is," but we are more likely to put our money "where our heart is," which, in reality, is to put our money "where our mind is." Whether it be love or hate, anger or forgiveness, joy or sadness, fulfillment or emptiness, boldness or fear, greed or generosity – our spending (or absence thereof) often reflects our inner being.

Big-time professional athletes are notorious for squandering their fortunes with

the same bold abandon as when bounding down the basketball court. Too many grieving widows and broken-hearted divorcees exhaust their savings as they spend to dull their pain. The 1981 movie character, Arthur (played by Dudley Moore), retaliates against his rich, overbearing father by spending lavishly. The faithful widow gives all she has out of gratitude and love. The angry litigant incurs legal costs many times the amount of any potential court award. A creditor, grateful for his own blessings, cancels a debt owed him from someone having hard times.

The point is simple – successful financial planning starts with knowing yourself, not by subscribing to *The Wall Street Journal*. Oh, and don't worry about that little girl – she later becomes chairman of the Federal Reserve.

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**SB**