

## The Bottom Line

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We all die. That, in the simplest sense, is the bottom line. But it is a bit too simple. Because the bottom line is how we lived - and died. That is the meaning we define for our lives. And that is the legacy we leave behind. It is the story we wrote in the living of our lives and - so long as we are truthful - that story has meaning, even if no one reads it. Webmaster thinks about this very often. Almost every night when he goes to bed.

Webmaster realizes that this is not what most people in our society (and perhaps the world) currently mean when they talk about 'the bottom line'. Most people are thinking about money. Short term profit. Who dies with the most toys. All that material stuff. Webmaster holds such people in utter contempt. Well, maybe not utter (he is trying to be moderate). Let's just say contempt.

And webmaster understands that most people would think of him as naive, or stupid, or worse. So what? The bottom line is that, when you look in the mirror at night, you have to be satisfied with what you see. Well maybe not exactly satisfied, but not ashamed. You have to be able to go to bed and be reasonably sure that - if you don't wake up - your grandchildren will not be embarrassed by how you lived.

Of course, life is a journey and one does make mistakes along the way. Sometimes very embarrassing ones. The best one can do is to recognize the mistake, apologize and fix it (if that is possible), learn from the mistake and move on - resolving not to make the same (or similar) mistake again. And the fact that life is a journey has interesting implications, especially if one is living a life of the mind. One learns many other things and has the time (especially when one is older and perhaps retired) to think about things. To see them from various perspectives and analyze - in ways that did not at first seem possible - what certain events actually 'meant'. To see that many of the events that - at the time - seemed so intensely important, were actually not all that important. The fights - or arguments - that in so many cases were never really resolved. In so many cases no one really one or lost - unless one's perspective is that whoever is left standing (living) has won.

Most of these things are clear to someone who lives a life of the mind. Not that we exist only in the mind, but that our actions must be informed by careful thought and thoughtful consideration - of our own needs and those of others. And the realization that whatever life we were born into, there is an enormous amount of serendipity at work in determining whether things go well or not so well. We are all members of the genus/species *Homo sapiens* and thus we have an obligation (or should feel the obligation) to live our lives wisely - or at least to try to do so.

The bottom line is the result of a very complex calculation of what constitutes

a decent balance between self interest and enlightened self interest. Webmaster is pretty sure that someone else said this first (everything has been said before): if you cannot please yourself (when you look in the mirror) then you cannot please anyone else. Or to put it another way, if you think you lived a decent life, then no one else's opinion really matters. And if you don't think you lived a decent life, then no one else's opinion matters. That is why Webmaster does not like 'prizes'. To him the only prize that matters is the one his gives himself, if he feels he deserves it.

That is the bottom line.