
The green isn't gained from envy

<http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/09/03/24/10297621.html>

03/24/2009 07:41 PM | By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News

Any magazine publisher intent on boosting flagging sales this year can always fall back on issuing one of those Rich Lists, which so many people seem to find compulsive reading.

Latest on the pile is *Forbes Magazine* with their listing of "The World's Billionaires" - of which there are now only 793 (down from 1125), with \$1.4 trillion (Dh5.14 trillion) of their personal wealth having evaporated in the recession.

There is something eerie about seeing the cash-strapped news-reading public eagerly checking these league-tables of opulence. Is it just innocent escapism, wanting to share in an unattainable world of Rolls Royces and private jets?

Personally, I don't think so. For I have developed the habit of studying the "Readers' Comments" section on various controversial websites, which I often find highly revealing.

And what signals do I pick up there on the latest billionaire line-up? Nothing but envy and more envy!

Now clearly, if you spend all day envying billionaires, you are wasting much precious time in pointless dreaming. But envying those closer to home may be turned to advantage; it could be the grit in the oyster that spurs you on to greater ambition and achievement - as long as it is not the sort of envy that turns into corrosive jealousy.

My own career in stress-management started just when North Sea oil was emerging as a big new industry, where young engineers could make their name.

One of my very first clients was in that position - chief engineer to a high-profile specialist in putting-out fires on oil-rigs.

This was called "capping," and it was the most glamorous branch of the industry. The boss was the man of action, and his engineer (technically better-qualified) was the loyal lieutenant who managed the support-team.

Meanwhile he longed to be the next capper. But that needed certain qualities - split-second reactions, 20/20 vision, tireless endurance, and a huge sense of fight - everything he just didn't have.

He was in fact totally suited to the support role, but he could not shake off his envy of all the attention given to the star performer.

Whenever his boss was seen on TV, with royalty or Hollywood stars, my client would suffer bouts of self-doubt and depression, and even my best efforts could only bring temporary relief. The solution, when it came, was as unexpected as it was welcome.

While negotiating a contract in Malaysia, he met and married a Buddhist lady. And what is the Buddhist position on envy? To react to other people's good fortune with celebration, not resentment!

I was happy to see that this change in his outlook and mindset restored his balance and his work performance was never distracted by envy after that.

Behaviour: Rich-list effects

- The public has a psychological need to study rich-lists.
- Envy of billionaires is pointless and self-destructing.
- Constructive envy of close colleagues can sharpen ambition.

- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.