



What we pay attention to, what we track day-to-day, is what we put energy into, and what guides our lives - individually and as a culture.

The evening TV news seems to always start out, "The Dow Jones Industrial Average is up (or down) six points." With voice tone of elation or despair to match.

Why is this newsworthy? Why do we focus on it? Six points, when the Index was 100, was a 6% change. With the Index now inflated to over 12,000, it is only four-hundredths of one percent change. Insignificant. Why even mention it? Because it's important to the corporations that own the broadcast stations that we think that paying attention to corporate indexes is important.

Cover up your TV screen, and listen to the tone of voice in the evening news. How much are we guided to see things as frightening, terrorism, crisis, or dangerous? How amazing when occasionally not enough bad things are happening in the entire world to fill up the evening news! And that isn't even considered newsworthy.

Advertising increasingly forces itself into our attention - TV, radio, billboards, ads on vehicles, even our clothes. No one calls our attention to the "free" alternatives to what is being sold, or the "free" things that are being lost in commercialization of our lives.

Economics gets weirdly twisted to serve certain ends. We're told "profit" is good. But classical economics claimed that competition would eliminate most profit, and prices would drop to just "fair wages". So something isn't working right if there's a lot of profit year-after-year. And "Free Trade" only allows money and goods to move around, not people.

We look proudly at our "Gross Domestic (or National) Product" as an indicator of how well we are doing. So the better the GDP, the more "stuff" we've produced, the better off we are. Really?

A higher GDP can also mean that we're just paying more for the same stuff. Or higher costs to get oil because we've used up all the easy-to-get stuff. Or the stuff we buy is shoddy, and we have to pay to replace it. Higher health care expenditures might just

mean we're sicker. The only sure thing about more money spent on highways is that it costs more to get from here to there.

Closer to home, our local property values have skyrocketed. That may be good if you're going to sell your house and move to someplace where property is cheaper. But it's bad if you're trying to buy a house or rent a place to live. Property values measure scarcity. People wouldn't pay more, if they could find another similar place for less. So really, it is a measure of "bad", not "good". Lower property values mean in the aggregate people are having to pay less to be where they want.

Robert Kennedy once said: "The gross national product includes air pollution and advertising for cigarettes and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and jails for the people who break them. GNP includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm, and missiles and nuclear warheads . . . it does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of our streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, or the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

Bhutan has a different Index. "Gross National Happiness". They're tracking something very different. What happiness do we get from our work, from our free time, from other people? How much do we give?

Try this. Write down what you pay attention to throughout a day. And your emotional response. How much media? How much ads? How much people? How much nature? How much highway time. How much too many different things at once to really pay attention to?

How much time do you spend doing things to make other people happy? To change the world? To change your own life? To enjoy the sunshine? How much just complaining?

And then, maybe we should ask, "What are the most important things we could pay attention to, to track, and to let guide our lives?" Then get the other stuff out of our lives.