



Ponder in 2021. What will your New Year be about?

I had a friend in elementary school who would answer every question with a question. He was the eternal QWAQ (question with a question) enigma. Only recently, I realized what a genius he was.

Hey, Tommy, how are you feeling today?

About?

It made me crazy. *About. About?* Is that an answer?

Then I thought of the word within the context of 2020 to anchor myself for 2021. Perhaps some readers will appreciate the perspective. Stay with me.

What's Your Life About?

Will you reassess priorities for 2021?

What are all your experiences, heartaches, memories, and trials worth to you? To others? Are you up to the journey for 2021? What are your plans to forge ahead?

The "about" is a continuous change. A journey. Because the "about of life" is a moving target depending on where you are currently. It's a culmination of experiences - past and present that inspire motivation and, ultimately, actions. Also, the "about" in all of us can expand and contract regardless of age.

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How Does 'About' Rise To A Life's Surface?

All it takes is a spark or event that flips a switch in your head. Sometimes you don't realize it until compelled to act, regardless of personal consequences. For me, it was the financial crisis and the aftermath. I realized my life was "about" the clients I served above all else, including my health.

Decades ago, I formed a mission to help people make positive money decisions and changes that would improve long-term fiscal health. I sought to help others cut through the hype, the dogma (and there are piles of dogma in financial services). Subsequently, I realized that money was much more than swapping out a portfolio's investment A for investment B.

I Believed A Lie.

Unfortunately, I bought into the bull-market hype early in my career. In 2006, I dug deeper into market history, studied people - their motivations and emotions on the highs and lows of money. As a result, I began to understand how imperfect everything was. **Is.** Even seeking to be perfect is

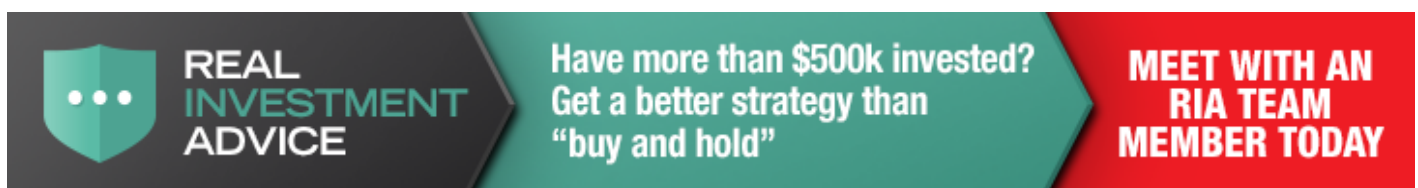
an imperfection, a flaw. Yet, for some odd reason, young brokers were taught how the market was eternally, perfectly a rising bull.

[Stocks always rebounded from significant losses](#) and created massive wealth for participants, allegedly. Spokespeople for my former employer lamented in 2007 that a financial meltdown was a statistical impossibility, and I should ignore the signs of imminent carnage in fixed income markets.

I finally realized that market wealth for many investors doesn't recover quickly (if at all) from significant contractions. The precious time it takes for investments to break even is worth something to households but nothing to brokerage firms. The ultimate winners are these financial organizations. In their boardrooms, clients are not flesh and blood. People, households are categorized as revenue winners or losers, reduced to numbers in financial statements.

I sought to be a source of information, the reference point of a clear perspective. I wanted badly to offer clarity to media outlets, clients, and yes, even to mentors who shall remain smarter, more perceptive, and bigger-than-life (in my eyes anyway).

Speaking of mentors.



Mentors Should Be Smart.

Heck, they should be better, sharper. It should be all 'about' them.

Perhaps 2021 is 'about' learning from people smarter than us. And there are a lot of intuitive humans around if you open your eyes to them. Frankly, we can seek to learn from anyone if we're open-minded enough.

My definition of "smart" is sparked by communication that flushes my skin and makes me feel like there's the wind in my face even if standing in west Texas. In August. At noon. Not a breeze to be found. Also, mentors come in various sizes, colors, ages.

Some don't even need to be human.

My Personal 'About' Was Late To The Game.

I guess what I'm saying is the "*about*" in my life came along pretty late, and I want to make sure you don't make the same mistake. During the 2008 financial crisis, I woke up. The lovely house of cards we call 'the system' was 'about' to fold in on itself and take most of us with it.

My veil of ignorance lifted. The light of truth entered my thoughts. It encouraged me to dig deeper into my personal "about." The disaster shook my world.

I dug into the 'about' of lots of things, including the financial services business. Most of what I found, I didn't like. Frankly, still, I'm not too fond of it. Subsequently, I was motivated to change my future and help form a financial firm that cuts through the bullsh*t with, thankfully, partners today who feel the same.

Daily, I help others with decisions, correct the incorrect brokers expound (they're called brokers for a reason; they break stuff). On the day after Christmas, I assisted a radio listener to unwind the

junk his broker told him about Social Security, ran an analysis one hour later, and changed his mind.

Who Helps Me On My Journey? Who Helps You?

Make your "about" somewhat about them in 2021.

Let them know how much you appreciate their guidance.

For me, it's a cadre of writers, associates, academics; our employees who do everything they can to help RIA fulfill its mission. Philosophers, the stoics (more about them on my 2021 recommended reading list coming soon), academics help me think outside the financial box.

Then, there's a woman at a local donut shop who works the morning shift to raise four kids. She smiles and makes me laugh. I slip her a twenty. She thanks me. She smells like baked goods and sausage. She's a professor of fortitude.

Always thank your teachers. Gush a little in their presence. Be genuine. They'll know if you're not.

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The 'About' Of Candid Coffee.

Our [Saturday Candid Coffee](#) genesis was to create something all 'about' you and the health of your financial union. A series of 'across the kitchen table' sessions where real money ideas ignite and explored. A home-based intelligence center that mainstream financial media or the industry wouldn't dare to enter or know what to do if you allowed them in, anyway.

We believe COVID will wage war on household finances and the economy for years. As a result, you require a battle plan, an open forum for discussion where this is no judgment, only clarification. Our mission is to help you prepare for the war ahead. Candid Coffee is one of the ways for us to tap the hearth of your finances.

Our Next Candid Coffee Is Coming Soon!

On Saturday morning, January 16th, Danny Ratliff, CFP, and I will be hosting a Candid Coffee Financial Boot Camp where we will share basic, simple tenets compiled over twenty years from our most financially fit clients and mentors.

[***These rules are simple but not easy to follow.***](#) We will cover the financial guardrails that need to be forged around your household balance sheets in 2021 and beyond. My hope is for you to share these rules with your children and grandchildren. You'll be able to sign up soon and send us your questions.

Also, recent studies outline how U.S. households will look to bolster their finances in 2021. Perhaps we've finally learned as a society how economic crises arise more often than irresponsibly claimed by the financial industry. After all, how many outliers do you require to be financially devastated? **Only one.**

Finally, as we wave good riddance to 2020, I'll leave you with this thought for 2021. I am overwhelmed by gratitude this year and plan to carry it forward.

Perhaps a radical acquiescence of suffering and all that is "meant to be" is truly the Holy Grail of happiness. To fight '[Amor Fati](#)' is to burn inside. Wedged within the hot space between where we wish things were in a place of gratitude for how things are, festers debilitating friction. Ironically, to fight, to wish things were different, is to fall victim to despondency and self-pity.

I wish all readers a prosperous and healthy New Year.

I am grateful to you.