

Q & A with Jason Apollo Voss, author of *The Intuitive Investor: A radical guide for manifesting wealth*

[Reading your manuscript, one gets the impression that your financial career had the earmarks of a calling rather than a conventional “vocation” \(in the workplace sense\). Is this a fair assessment?](#)

Yes, that is a fair assessment. At the age of 23 I knew that I wanted to be a mutual fund portfolio manager, and I spent the next 12 years of my life dedicated to being the very best that I could be. That included an emphasis on all of the stuff most people think about when they think about analysts, like crunching numbers, modeling things mathematically and so on. But it also included other things such as an ability to creatively and intuitively assess the information landscape to make good decisions. Very importantly, I also considered high ethical standards and concern for shareholder returns to be essential to the calling of portfolio manager. At the Davis Funds we had a simple mantra that I believed in very strongly: Never do anything that you wouldn't want your mother to read about in the media.

[In the book's Introduction you discuss your realization of the \(then\) impending meltdown; what do you think went wrong? Is it fair to characterize the whole industry as corrupt, self-centered and short sighted?](#)

That is a simple and important question, but a difficult and complex answer. A portion of what went wrong was that the intellectual processes of Wall Street were divorced from the essential wisdom processes of Wall Street. That is, there was too much emphasis on doing anything and everything to make that additional dollar, and not enough emphasis on the long-term consequences of focusing exclusively on money. Too much emphasis on left-brain analysis actually obscures the proper functioning of the intuition. Consider the following analogy: What happens to us if we continue to eat high fat foods and do so for many, many years? Or what happens to us if we continue to buy things using credit cards in excess of our ability to afford them? In the first case we're likely to have a heart attack and die, and in the second we are likely to eventually declare bankruptcy or experience financial difficulties for many years afterward. We all know these things intellectually. But what happens if we ignore these things due to emotional shortcomings? That's right, the strong intuitive sense that says, "enough is enough" is short-circuited. And there, in my opinion, is the biggest reason for the mortgage crisis and the worst recession in almost a century. Too much gorging by individuals and Wall Street.

[Briefly, where/how do things like meditation and recognition of intuition figure into your background?](#)

Well, meditative states are natural brain states, so all of us have been meditating all of our lives. The problem is that most of us think that meditation is done by what I'll call "shaven-headed cave dwellers." That seemingly mystical standard seems unobtainable to most of us, so we've convinced ourselves that we aren't meditators.

But I like to compare meditation to running. All of us know how to run naturally, but some of us choose to become proficient at it and we become Runners (capital 'R'). But should the fact that we are not Olympic runners diminish our enjoyment of running? No, of course not. So all of us meditate, but most of us just don't know it.

I began meditation as a practice when I was 7 years-old. But I didn't know that's what I was doing. When I wanted to experience the bliss of meditation I would put on music to achieve the state and I referred to it as "getting introspective." It wasn't until my late 20s that I began meditation in the formal way that most of us think of meditation. In short, meditation has always been a part of my life, as it is for everyone. So it has informed everything in my life up until now.

Why is the idea of involving the right brain in these decisions so troubling to some?

There are many reasons, but for starters: Our scientifically-based society has an obsessive preference for things that are measurable and analyzable because those things adhere to the dominant scientific-method paradigm. Unfortunately, creativity and intuition, major topics of *The Intuitive Investor*, defy easy measurement. But that highlights a major disconnect as well. Namely, the left-brain and its analytical emphasis so dominate our culture that we don't see that we blindly use the tools of the left-brain to assess, I think incorrectly, the right-brain. If I work it the other way, the bias is more obvious. Imagine we use the right-brain's preference for unbounded, organic answers to assess issues of accounting. I think most of us prefer absolute answers in accounting, not creative answers. So the right-brain is not the right tool for the accounting job. But then too, the left-brain is the wrong tool for assessing the right-brain.

Is it fair to say that your intuitive approach to investing is something that existed in the golden era of American capitalism (19th-20th centuries), but has been somehow subverted/lost in the last 50 years? If so, why and how did this happen?

I don't think that it was "lost." As I said earlier about meditation, all of us meditate, we just don't know it. All of us are using both the left-brain and right-brain in every single decision we make in life. However, the right-brain has become the silent partner in that organic whole. As a student of the financial markets I have read investment commentaries from decades ago and those of more recent years, and all great investors are using a combination of intellect and intuition to generate their successes. So the only thing that has shifted is that to discuss right-brain things like intuition has become taboo, or even forgotten.

"Intuition" isn't the only right brain function your book addresses; "ethics", "morality" and "conscience", though with far fewer mentions in the text, are concepts that seem to hover throughout the book. How exactly does one make money with his/her intuition, and will that intuitive investing be synonymous with ethical investing?

Well it's quite simple really. There is no such thing as a future fact. But most of us invest using some fact-based methodology. But, by definition, a fact is something that occurred in the past, yet investing is something that unfolds in the future. So facts and investing are

incongruous from the outset. Facts don't answer the question of whether to buy or not to buy an investment. Instead, choice is what results in a buy or a sell decision. Yet all choices are based in the realm of emotions, even fact-based decisions. This is because we trust that past facts will repeat themselves in the future. But trusting is an emotional choice. Unfortunately, most investors don't understand this fact and they ignore the power of their right brains. In fact, many people go so far as to remove the right brain as much as they can from their analyses. Yet the future and its myriad, organic, non-linear possibilities are nicely understood and assessed by the right brain and by intuition. So incorporating intuition into your investment process results in a holistic, complete brained approach and decision.

As for the relationship of intuitive investing to ethical investing, they aren't the same thing but they are certainly complementary. To experience pure, undistorted intuitive signals you need to be pure and undistorted yourself. The currency of the intuition (of investing) is a pristine feeling of the truth. That leads to a "knowing" when you are assessing something intuitively. Without consciousness one pollutes this feeling of the truth with emotional preferences. These emotional prejudices lead to distorted, and likely incorrect, interpretations of intuitive signals. Secondly, to have that feeling of the truth, one must know truth to the core of one's bones. So dishonesty is the exact opposite internal environment to create for yourself if you want your intuition to thrive.

[Isn't intuition something that some have and some don't?](#)

Absolutely not. I consider intuition to be something that can be taught and that responds to methodology. All of us have intuition. But what does seem to vary is people's understanding of how to access the intuition as a tool, as opposed to just receiving intuitive information serendipitously. *The Intuitive Investor* lays out a very precise methodology for cultivating and accessing your intuition and not just in an investing context.

[What makes you think your methods will work now?](#)

I think that this question is a variation on the following question: Maybe your career success was the result of luck, yes? Early on in my career as a portfolio manager I wondered the same thing as my results started rolling in and I was doing pretty well. I wondered if I was just getting lucky. So I spent many months trying to think of objective criteria for evaluating my own skills, besides just raw performance numbers. The answer as to whether you have "it"—that is, good investor skills—is whether or not you understand information well. That is, do you avoid buying businesses and then later that decision turns out to have been the correct one? Or in the more familiar case, do you buy businesses that then later turn out to perform well? One of the primary focuses of *The Intuitive Investor* is how to understand information. The intuition just happens to do a very good job of assessing the vast, organic, non-linear investment landscape.

[Discuss the applications this book might have beyond the realm of investing.](#)

One of the first pieces I lay down in *The Intuitive Investor* is a new definition of investing. I consider investing to be making a conscious decision. In my worldview, every decision we make is an investment decision. In every decision we expend our resources (time, energy,

money, reputation) in hopes that the benefits of our decisions are greater than the costs of those decisions. The greater the amount of consciousness brought to our choices, the more potent are the outcomes. So *The Intuitive Investor* is also a book that will help everyone to make more conscious choices; whether that is a money investment, or an investment in a relationship, or an investment in a big move for a new job.

[Now that we have a better idea of what the book is, can you fill us in on what it is not? What shouldn't we be looking for in *The Intuitive Investor*?](#)

This book is not ungrounded or unfounded speculation. It isn't woowoo. It isn't unscientific. I wrote *The Intuitive Investor* to be an experiential manual so that everyone can experience the states of consciousness and the investment tools that I am writing about.