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HUFF
POST BUSINESS



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Buy Experiences, Not Stuff This Holiday Season

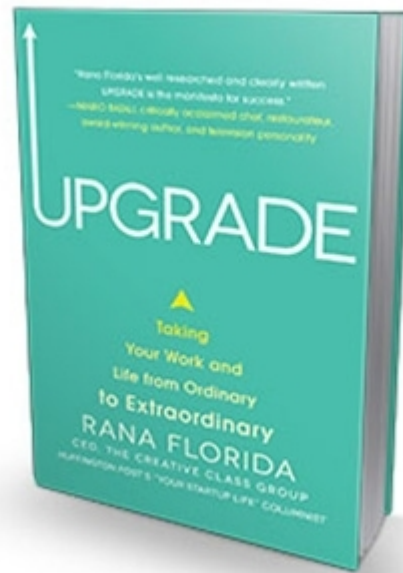
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The frenzy of the shopping season kicks off this week, with up to 140 million people shopping over the Thanksgiving weekend from Thursday through Sunday, according to [Forbes](#). The day after Thanksgiving, Black Friday, is the Olympics of shopping, with an estimated 55 percent of Americans hitting the malls.

So how much are they spending? "Dollar amount spending this holiday season appears consistent with last year, as 30 percent of consumers from all income ranges say they plan to drop between \$250 and \$500," the [Nielsen Newswire](#) reports, under a headline that reads "Tis the Season to Be Fiscally Cautious." "Twenty percent say they'll spend between \$500 and \$1,000, while only 6 percent will open their wallets wide enough to spend more than \$1,000." Gift cards, tech products and toys are topping the list but "Consumers also say they are planning on spending more this year on food, clothing, video games and cookware."

No matter how much or how little you're planning to spend this year, I'm urging you to buy experiences rather than things. As I wrote in my book, [Upgrade](#), most of us have more possessions than we need or want anyway.



Our garages are jam-packed with stuff, and our basements and closets are filled with unnecessary things that we continue to clutter our lives with. Open your closet or walk down to your basement if you have one and take a look at all the things you've acquired. DVD players, air hockey machines, wires, electronics, crates, and crates of toys, old new clothes, which you purchased months ago but the tags are still on. Things we think we'll need on a rainy day, when we throw a party or some "what if?" happens. We enslave ourselves to consumerism; we can't help it.

I wised up one year after exhausting myself at the malls during the holidays dealing with traffic, lines, and congestion, the mobs of people like me running around frantically trying to purchase dozens of perfect gifts for family and friends. When I finally returned home with my 10 bags of stuff and sat down to wrap everything individually, I thought, how are these purchases going to enhance my loved ones' lives? They were not going to do that, I realized. After they rip off the wrappings, they're going to put them away in their full closets and basements, where they will sit unused with the pile of other stuff. So, I concluded, from here on out, I am never purchasing another thing: no Abercrombie & Fitch sweaters, no J Crew moccasins, no pajama sets from Target, or fancy ties from Saks, no trendy Skull Candy headphones, lotion kits from Sephora, and the like. Just no more stuff!

I am buying them experiences: tickets to the basketball game, the baseball game, the opera, the ballet, a concert, an event, the science center, an airline ticket, or even a dinner gift card. I am going to spend that money on fun things that friends and family and I can enjoy together. We need to place more value on experiences than on things. At the end of our lives, we treasure our memories more than our things.

Here are some experiences you can buy your loved ones that will give you both enjoyment and fond memories.

Team Lessons



Every year, I buy my family a one-hour paddle boarding lesson for their Christmas present. On New Year's Eve, before the festivities begin, we paddle board together into the Miami sunset. It's a tradition I've cherished, as it's a fun bonding experience and a perfect opportunity to reflect on the year past while anticipating the new year to come.

Save a Life



According the Humane Society, "Around 2.7 million dogs and cats are euthanized each year in the United States simply because too many people give up their pets, and too few people adopt from shelters." Those numbers can be greatly reduced by opting to rescue rather than seeking out a breeder. The Humane Society says, by adopting you're saving two animals, "the pet you adopt and a homeless animal somewhere who can be rescued because of space you helped free up." The experience of pet ownership is quite special.

Tickets to Adventure



Tickets to the zoo, passes to a museum, aquarium, science center, planetarium, or botanic garden, whether it's in the recipient's hometown or in the nation's capital.

Game Time!



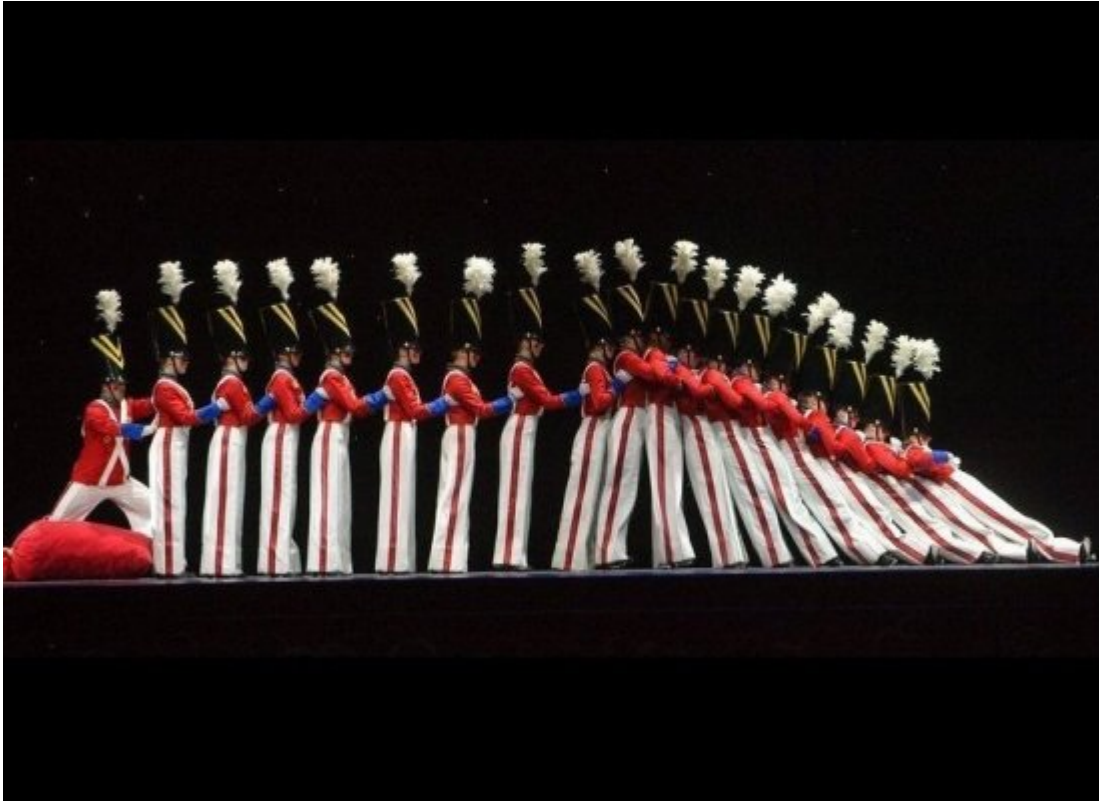
From tennis grand slams to courtside seats for the NBA playoffs or a seat behind home plate at an evening baseball game, buy your tickets now and enjoy the fun in the future.

Private Tutors



Always wanted to learn the guitar but never had time? Or the bongos? In-home or onsite tutoring can take you from novice to expert, or simply help you enjoy an experience you've never had.

Holiday Cheer



It's the holidays, spread the love! From the Nutcracker matinee show to the Rockettes evening spectacular, take the entire family out for some holiday cheer.

Performances



Whether it's tickets to the opera, the ballet, or the symphony, a Broadway show or a hometown production, an upcoming rock concert or a favorite comedian; there's always something to see on stage.

Dinner Date



Give your special someone or friends a home cooked dinner party or a gift card you can both use--to your favorite restaurant, a place you've been saving up to go to on a special occasion, or the hottest nightspot in town.

Classes



Whether it's cooking classes at your local community center, workshops at the Institute for Culinary Education in New York City, there are courses on everything from cycling, painting, sculpture, and dance to computer programming, for everyone from the rankiest dabblers to the most serious hobbyists. A well-taught class isn't just a learning experience but great fun.

Travel



Whether it's going across the state to visit a relative, or across the world to an exotic location your loved one has never seen, the experience of travel is a much bigger present than any mere thing.

Membership



Buy a membership in a wine club, a science club, museum, an arts center or some other organization or club that's meaningful to them. Local cultural institutions rely on membership funds for operations, so the support is invested back into your own community. It's a gift that keeps on giving.