

CHAPTER 1

Are You Living YOLO?

I used to hear YOLO more often exclaimed while shopping at the mall or taking shots at the bar.

It didn't matter what part of the country I was in or the generations that made up the group I spoke to. People would laugh when I used the term *YOLO*. What was it about YOLO that elicited that response? Was it coming from a place of youthful and joyful carelessness? Or was it a reaction of nervous laughter?

Mae West was quoted as saying, "You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough."

I wouldn't have thought that someone born in the late 1890s could capture a millennial motto so perfectly. Maybe it's a mindset of any generation born before the turn of any century. Or maybe it's that the desire to live a purposeful life runs across all generations.

THE MILLENNIAL EXPERIENCE

I am a member of Generation Y and proudly accept the word *millennial* to describe my generation, the first to grow into adulthood in this millennium. My baby-boomer parents worked toward a purposeful

life, and I am a product of their hopes and dreams. They taught me the valuable lesson that life was hard, but life had meaning. They raised me to believe that I could accomplish anything, and that I should strive to live my dreams. Holding these beliefs to be true, I grew up with a sense of entitlement—that I was entitled to live a life with meaning.

What has happened outside of our households has influenced my generation's view of the world and our place in it as well. As millennials, we experienced the dot-com crash of the late 1990s and the Great Recession during our formative years of personal and career development. We've lived in a constant state of war and terror for most of our lives. We saw the greed of Wall Street and the material excesses of our parents, who bought larger cars and bigger homes, and used equity to finance uncontrolled spending. Then the stock market crashed and our families were faced with financial hardships because of layoffs, home foreclosures, and reduced retirement savings.

It isn't a surprise that as a result of how we grew up, we adopted the motto *YOLO* (which stands for You Only Live Once) as an expression of the uncertainty of tomorrow. Our motto means that you should seize the moment as it happens without a thought about money. We have used our desire to live a carefree life and our uncertainty about our future as guiding principles in making financial decisions. *YOLO* explains our irrational spending behavior and our preference for experiences over things.

THE YOLO MINDSET

YOLO has influenced our behaviors around banking, saving, spending, and investing. We don't value banks in the traditional sense; we prefer the experience of convenient apps and personal service to meet our banking needs. We know the importance of saving money, but saving is often delayed in favor of paying off student loans—a debt we took on to pay for education we were told we needed to get our dream jobs—or spending on experiences to make up for all the time spent at work and on our side hustles. The *YOLO* mindset about saving means you're aware of what you value and willing to invest your time to attain it.

We are a generation that loves to share socially—a result of our parents teaching us to share with others. This has made us more susceptible to peer influence and social-marketing tactics, which has influenced our spending habits. We buy things and experiences we don't want in order to give others the illusion of happy lives on social media. We have become compelled to shop more because of targeted ads that follow us online from retailers who know our habits—spending habits we weren't aware we had.

This mindless and uncontrolled spending means allocating more of your future time to work. I personally don't believe in the notion that we must stop all spending. Spending is a part of living. You're spending on what you need and what you want. However, when you're spending mindlessly, you're not in control. I advocate spending money where it matters, and that means being clear about your values—knowing what matters most to you. If in order to buy things you don't value you must spend more time at work, then how much of your life are you actually living? The YOLO mindset about spending means you're aware of what's important and won't sacrifice a lifetime of happiness for short-term gratification.

Growing up during a period that saw two economic crashes has had a profound impact on how we view investing in the stock market, too. We see investing as risky, but we've also seen how quickly the market can recover. Investing is a great way to cultivate a lifestyle of less work by making money with money. The YOLO mindset can be used to prioritize asset building over salary increases. If you only live once, building assets to generate income is the most effective use of your time.

As an older millennial, the YOLO mindset is ingrained in my psyche, and I, too, have used YOLO as an excuse to make irrational financial decisions, but eventually I learned the true value of living YOLO. As the years have gone by, I've learned that tomorrow is as real as today, and the financial choices we make now have a big impact on the life we live in the future. If we only live once, let's make decisions that support a healthy and financially stress-free lifestyle.

The YOLO mindset is ideal when applied to the understanding that today is the best day to start saving, investing, and spending mindfully in order to live a purposeful life. Living YOLO is awareness that our

time is our most valuable asset, and that once it is spent, it cannot be repurchased at any price. Time therefore should be used wisely, so that you're doing more of the things you value and fewer of the things you don't. For example:

Saving. You should be aware of what you value and be willing to invest your time to achieve your goals.

Spending. What you spend money on is a reflection of your values. Spend on things that matter the most to you and add value in your life.

Debt. Debt reserves your future time for work rather than fun. Prioritize debt elimination to gain more time for living.

Investing. Growing your assets decreases your need to exchange your time for income. Make money with money.

Remain mindful of your YOLO mindset and how it's impacting your financial behavior. As you continue reading, you'll gain more awareness and can apply this mindset to creating a vision for your life, gaining clarity about your values, and setting the right financial goals.