



Talk

Viewpoints

Cape Cod Times Viewpoint Columns by Chuck Carey

A Nation of Shoppers

Chuck Carey

Somewhere in the early 1990's the price became more important than the product. Whether the merchandise is a screwdriver, a car or a million dollar building, quality and length of service life have become secondary to "how much I stole it for".

From the booming 1980's to the busted 1990's, we went from yuppies to scavengers who only respond to the bargain. Just as we forgot that the economy could slow down in the 80's, we have now lost sight of the fact that things can , and always do, get better. Two benchmarks for a study in extremes.

Something was lost when we blinded ourselves to the unique characteristics of the product. That something is value over time. The present slavish attachment to "generic" label discounts is just as artificial as was the brand-worshipping 80's. Are the cheapest always the best deal ?

Where is the balance ?

It's in the recognition that not all screwdrivers, cars or buildings are created equal. Some will perform for 25 years, some will fail in four. To steal the latter means nothing. To not recognize the former is ignorance.

Many commercial real estate buyers now, programmed by the past five years, are bound and determined to "steal it" and are often drawn into low quality situations that need 6 figure upgrades simply because they are cheap today. It's actually easier to sell a distressed commercial property now than one in good condition in a quality location with good earnings. Not all "cheap" purchases can be turned into class A buildings with any amount of money. What's that saying about a sows ear ?

In our "zeal for the deal" we sometimes lose the priority of quality and the long term benefit that it returns. It's good to be guarded but have we forgotten that the best is sometimes available for a few dollars more ?