# The man who lives without money

[](http://www.abc.net.au/reslib/201004/r547030_3212363.jpg)Mark Boyle has forgotten about money and says he has found happiness.

Irishman Mark Boyle tried to live a life with no **income**, no **bank balance** and no **spending**. Here's how he finds it.

If someone told me seven years ago, in my final year of my business and economics degree, that I'd now be living without money, I'd have probably choked on my microwaved ready meal. The plan back then was to get a 'good' job, **make as much money as possible**, and buy the stuff that would show society I was successful.

For a while I did it - I had a fantastic job managing a big organic food company; had myself a yacht on the harbour. If it hadn't been for the chance purchase of a video called Gandhi, I'd still be doing it today. Instead, for the last fifteen months, **I haven't spent or received a single penny**.

The change in life path came one evening on the yacht whilst philosophising with a friend over a glass of merlot. Whilst I had been significantly influenced by the Mahatma's quote "be the change you want to see in the world", I had no idea what that change was up until then. We began talking about all major issues in the world - environmental destruction, resource wars, factory farms, **sweatshop labour** - and wondering which of these we would be best devoting our time to. Not that we felt we could make any difference, being two small drops in a highly polluted ocean.

But that that evening I had a realization. These issues weren't as unrelated as I had previously thought - they had a common root cause. I believe the fact that we no longer see the direct repercussions our **purchases** have on the people, environment and animals they affect is the factor that unites these problems. The degrees of separation between **the** **consumer** and **the consumed** have increased so much that it now means we're completely unaware of the levels of destruction and suffering embodied in the 'stuff' we buy.

Very few people actually want to cause suffering to others; most just don't have any idea that they directly are. The tool that has enabled this separation is money, especially in its globalised format. Take this for an example: if we grew our own food, we wouldn't waste a third of it as we do today. If we made our own tables and chairs, we wouldn't throw them out the moment we changed the interior décor. If we had to clean our own drinking water, we probably wouldn't shit in it.

So to be the change I wanted to see in the world, it unfortunately meant I was going to have **to give up money**, which I decided to do for a year initially. So I made a list of **the basics I'd need to survive**. I adore food, so it was at the top. There are four legs to the food-for-free table: wild food, growing your own, bartering and using waste grub, of which there far too much. Most of the year I ate my own crops. I cooked outside - rain or shine - on a rocket stove.

Next up was shelter. So I got myself a caravan from [Freecycle](http://www.freecycle.org/), parked it on an organic farm I was volunteering with, and kitted it out to be off the electricity grid. I'd use wood I either coppiced or scavenged to heat my humble abode in a woodburner made from an old gas bottle, and I had a compost loo to make 'humanure' for my veggies.

I bathed in a river, and for toothpaste I used washed up fish bone with wild fennel seeds. For toilet roll I'd relieve the local newsagents of its papers (I once wiped my arse with a story about myself) and it quickly became normal. To get around I had a bike and trailer. For lighting I'd use candles.

Many people label me an anti-capitalist. Whilst I do believe **capitalism is fundamentally flawed, requiring infinite growth on a finite planet,** I am not anti anything. I am pro-nature, pro-community and pro-happiness. And that's the thing I don't get - **if all this consumerism and environmental destruction brought happiness, it would make some sense**. But **today all the key indicators of unhappiness - depression, crime, mental illness, obesity, suicide and so on are on the increase**. **More money it seems, does not equate to more happiness.**

Ironically, I have found this year to be the happiest of my life. I've more friends in my community than ever, I haven't been ill since I began, and I've never been fitter. I've found that **friendship, not money, is real security**. That **most western poverty is spiritual**. And that **independence is really interdependence**.

Could we all live like this tomorrow? No. It would be a catastrophe, **we are too addicted to money**, and we have managed to build an entire global infrastructure around **the abundance of things**. But if we devolved decision making and re-localised down to communities of no larger than 150 people, then why not? For over 90 per cent of our time on this planet, a period when we lived much more ecologically, we lived without money. **Now we are the only species to use money, probably because** **we are the species most out of touch with nature**.

People now often ask me what is missing compared to my old **world of luxury and business**. Stress. Traffic-jams. **Bank statements. Utility bills**. Oh yeah, and the odd pint of organic ale with my mates down the local.

Mark Boyle is the founder of the Freeconomy Community [*www.justfortheloveofit.org*](http://www.justfortheloveofit.org). 'The Moneyless Man', a book about his year without

**ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:**

1. What's Mark's background?
2. When did the change in his life path come? What urgent issues was he discussing with his friend?
3. What is Mark's view of the consumer and the consumed?
4. When Mark decided to give up money what list of basics did he make?
5. Describe his life under the new circumstances.
6. What does he say about consumerism?
7. What gains did he have during his year without money?
8. Do you think the man is just mad? Why? / Why not?