

Parents Also Deserve a Graduation Gift

PERSONAL
RON LIEBER

In Asian tradition, children express thanks with their first paycheck.

At this time of year, college graduates start their new lives and tally up their gifts. A message to those graduates: You ought to be buying gifts too — for your parents.

Nobody ever told me this, not even my mother, the retired Neiman Marcus personal shopper who never met an occasion that did not call for a gift and helped scores of people buy them for others over the decades.

Instead, I picked up the parent present idea from Korean-American friends. In their families, handing over a gift on the occasion of receiving their first paycheck (or, in some cases, handing over the paycheck itself) is practically compulsory.

But it's also a source of great pride for both the giver and the recipient, a chance to express gratitude at the end of what has often been a long journey.



GOODBYE, MINIVAN After her graduation, Justine Chang, right, paid a large portion of the down payment for a new car for her mother, Sunny Chong.

The tradition of the parent gift may not have its roots in South Korea, for many other Asian and Asian-American children hand out presents or take their parents and their friends out for dinner when they first earn some money.

After the Korean War, it became common for young adults to buy their parents red thermal under-

wear. Korean studies scholars suggest a number of possible explanations. The red may have represented warmth, or it may have simply been the cheapest dye or the easiest to use. Long Johns were useful during the postwar period when both money and proper heating systems were scarce.

Not every person can afford de-

voting the first paycheck to gifts, given the tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt that many recent graduates face. But some recent Korean-American college graduates who can afford it (or go into more debt to do so) tend to buy luxury gifts.

The mother of Justine Chang, who just graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, spent many years driving a minivan dinged up from various children learning to drive in it.

So Ms. Chang, who is now a litigation assistant for an international law firm in San Francisco, put about \$6,000 toward a down payment on an Audi Q7 for her mother. She was able to afford this because of an insurance settlement after her own car was destroyed in a fire, but she has been using her earnings from part-time work since she was 15 to take her family out for meals and for other gifts. "You should know intuitively how much they gave up for you and do whatever you can to make sure they have a comfortable life," she said. "I didn't think it was a Korean thing."

Her mother did, however. Sunny Chong handed over her first paycheck from Captain D's Seafood Kitchen to her own parents. "I was

so proud that I could do something," she said. "I said, 'This is my first earnings, and it's all yours.'"

Simon Park, another recent Berkeley graduate, was able to hand his mother a \$1,300 Louis Vuitton purse as he prepared to start a management consulting job.

But his pride comes from a deeper place. One of his strongest memories from his time studying abroad in South Korea was seeing the elderly women who scrubbed toilets in the dorms and academic buildings. "You see on a day-to-day level what some people are still having to go through and the commitment they make to survive," he said.

His parents come from the generation that emigrated. When his family ordered pizza, his mother would eat the crusts and leave the rest for her children. "She'd say 'Oh, I'm full,'" he said. But he knew she wasn't.

Although he has never bought anything that expensive for himself, he declared that the sky was the limit for her handbag. "I kind of thought of it as coming full circle, as a way to commemorate everyone's suffering and persistence," he said.

"It's a way to say 'Mom, you did a great job,'" he added. "I want her to be proud of herself."

Avoiding Overdraft Charges

YOUR MONEY
ANN CARRNS

Chase, one of the country's largest consumer banks, is making changes to its overdraft protection service.

An overdraft occurs when customers spend more than is in their checking accounts, but the bank covers the shortfall and charges a penalty. But many consumers sign up for overdraft protection services, which allow funds to be moved automatically from a separate account or a credit card to cover a shortfall.

This month, Chase will do away with its \$10 overdraft transfer fee. At the same time, the bank will bar customers from linking their checking account to a Chase credit card or a line of credit for overdraft backup. Instead, customers must have backup funds transferred from a Chase savings account. Chase has been notifying account holders of the changes, which take effect Aug. 20.

The changes appear to be generally beneficial for consumers, said Joy Hackenbrach, a research officer with the Pew Charitable Trusts' consumer banking project. "It's a positive step forward," she said.

Ken Tumin, founder of Deposit Accounts.com, noted that customers who didn't have a Chase savings account would need to open one if they wanted transfer protection. A possible downside, he said, is that consumers currently earn low interest on funds kept in a traditional savings account.

Moreover, he said, consumers could potentially still end up paying a different kind of fee — albeit a smaller one — when using a savings account to cover overdrafts. That's because federal rules limit the number of withdrawals or transfers from a savings account to just six a month. Any more may incur a fee — currently \$5 for each extra transfer or withdrawal, according to a Chase disclosure.

Q & A

¶ How can I avoid overdraft fees on my checking account?

Monitor your balance so that you don't overspend. Many banks allow customers to set up automatic alerts, via text or email, that warn them if their bank balance drops below a certain threshold.

¶ Should I choose overdraft coverage for debit card transactions?

Banks can't charge overdraft fees for debit card transactions unless you "opt in," but the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recommends against it. That means, however, that any debit transactions that would overdraw your account would be declined.

¶ Are new rules expected on bank overdraft practices?

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has not proposed new regulations. Pew supports a rule requiring banks to order account transactions in a neutral manner, rather than reordering them in ways that may increase the potential for overdraft fees.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE ETHEREDGE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

FORGET THE BILLS Patrons at a Sweetgreen location in Manhattan. A handful of the chain's restaurants stopped accepting cash this year with few customer complaints.

Where Your Cash Can't Buy Lunch

SHOPPING
GLORIA DAWSON

Patrons of Sweetgreen are particular about their salads. When the company recently removed bacon and sriracha from the menu, customers took to social media to complain. But after a handful of locations stopped accepting cash in January, barely anyone noticed, the company's owners said.

Even Sweetgreen executives thought going cashless was "a hare-brained idea" at first, said Jonathan Neman, a co-founder and co-chief executive of the company. "But we looked around and saw that airlines haven't been taking cash for a while." At Sweetgreen's 48 locations throughout the United States, cash purchases have declined to less than 10 percent today from 40 percent of all transactions when they opened their first restaurant nine years ago, he said.

Although America is far from becoming a cashless society, cash transactions are less frequent than even a few years ago. Restaurants like Sweetgreen are pushing credit and debit cards and mobile apps for payments. Apps enable restaurants to gather data and feedback, and allow consumers to order ahead and skip long lines.



"One of the biggest complaints at Sweetgreen is the line, so by reducing cash we're able to serve customers a lot faster," Mr. Neman said. At the six Sweetgreen locations where cash is not accepted, employees can perform 5 percent to 15 percent more transactions an hour, he said.

Forgoing cash is not without obstacles, though. Many Americans still use cash by choice or because they have no alternative. A 2015 study on consumer payment choice from the Federal Reserve found that although credit card use was steadily rising, slightly over 26 percent of purchases were still made in cash.

Mobile payments are expected to continue growing as well. Sweetgreen's in-app purchases make up one-third of the company's transactions, Mr. Neman said.

Another drawback of cashless restaurants is that credit cards and apps leave a digital trail, which worries consumer privacy advocates. A cashless environment also excludes the unbanked, nearly 8 percent of the population, according to a Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation survey.

The poor and unbanked are a concern for Sweetgreen, Mr. Neman said. One potential answer is to install gift card machines in select stores where customers could pay cash for Sweetgreen cards, he said.

Consideration for the unbanked was among the chief reasons Bozzelli's Deli & Pizza relaxed its policy after opening a cash-free location in Washington this year, said the owner, Mike Bozzelli.

A small group of opinionated patrons led Split Bread, a sandwich chain with two locations in San Francisco, to change its cashless policy about two years after opening in 2012. "When we would get negative reactions, they were very, very strong," said David Silverglide, co-founder and chief executive at Good Food Guys, the company that owns Split Bread.

"I think they were ahead of the trend," Sam Oches, editor of the quick-service restaurant industry magazine QSR, said of Split Bread. Sweetgreen might have an easier time this year because of increasing app use and the brand's popularity. "If anyone is going to make this work, it'd be them," Mr. Oches said of Sweetgreen.

New technologies often go hand in hand with cashless businesses. Two new locations of the London salad chain Tossed are cashless and cashier-free; customers check out using kiosks with iPads.

For Major Food Group, which owns restaurants throughout New York, going cashless is simply a business decision.

"There is an immense amount of work, process and error that goes into taking, processing, monitoring and depositing cash," Jeff Zalaznick, a co-owner and managing partner, said. "The amount of time and money that this costs is not worth the amount of business that is done in cash. The fees that you pay on the additional credit card sales are far less than the money you spend internally to take the cash."

Less than 8 percent of sales across his restaurant group are in cash, Mr. Zalaznick said.

"It is the way of the future," he added. "We are just embracing it."

Consuming More Is Not A Path to Contentment

SKETCH GUY
CARL RICHARDS

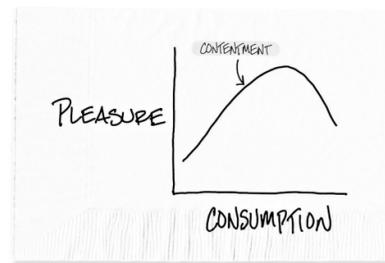
The more you consume, the less content you are.

If you don't believe me, think back to the last time you ate just a bit too much of your favorite ice cream. For me, that's Jeni's salty caramel. There are few things in life better than that first spoonful. Except, that is, for the second bite, and then the third and the fourth.

But somewhere along the way — at right about the last five spoonfuls in the pint for me — it starts to taste not so good. In fact, at that point, I don't even want it anymore. I usually finish it out of a sense of obligation.

The phenomenon of liking something less and less, the more and more you do it, or have it, actually has a name. And it's as close to a law as we get in economics. It's called the law of diminishing marginal returns. It's one of those fancy academic concepts with a definition a mile long. But strip away the mumbo jumbo, and you'll find something you've experienced.

Maybe it was enjoying in circles on a tire swing too many times as a child. Or watching one too many episodes of that new Netflix series. I bet many of us have scrolled through Facebook until our eyes burned, our brains went numb, and we suddenly wished we could have that lost hour back.



CARL RICHARDS

stick with the financially cheap (but calorically expensive) frozen treats. Enough is probably not at the bottom of the pint for you. Maybe it's a quarter of the way through, or halfway through the second scoop in the sundae. Wherever it is, learn to recognize it, and stop there.

The best way I know to do this is to keep an eye out for the signs. "I can't

stop" means "enough" is coming up soon. "I'm bored" means the time to stop is now. "Ouch, my stomach" is how you know you missed your exit.

Start paying attention as you consume. Practice anticipating that point of contentment before you reach it, so you'll still have time to wind down. If you don't, you're bound to end up with a stomach-ache, along with everyone else who went too far.

The point is, pleasure fades.

In fact, at a certain point, pleasure and "more" become inversely related, and "more" becomes the name of the place where you wind up when you don't know when to quit. There's even a spot before more, and we're going to call that spot "enough." We all know where enough is — it's where you're content.

It's just as true for high-priced items as low-priced ones, but let's