

NerdFest or Gathering of Millionaires?

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Some benefits of being an emergency doc are that I don't work that many hours and I have an extremely flexible schedule. This not only allows me time to build a side business called The White Coat Investor, LLC, but it also allows me to go on a lot of trips. I took a lot of fun trips this summer, including Alaska, Zion National Park, Lake Powell, and climbing trips to The Wind Rivers and the Shawangunks. In October, I decided to attend a couple of conferences instead of a "fun trip." The first of these was [Bogleheads 12](#) in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, home of Jack Bogle and home of [Vanguard](#).

The [Bogleheads forum](#) is hands down the best investing forum on the internet. It is extremely active (500-1000 posts per day), heavily moderated (which I've learned to appreciate now that I have to moderate the comments on my own website), and filled with not only helpful people, but also very intelligent people. Like good doctors, Bogleheads try to base their investing on the best evidence they can find and avoid emotional and behavioral errors. I've been participating there since I was a resident, long before the forum migrated from [Morningstar's Vanguard Diehards forum](#) to its own site and at one time was one of the top ten most frequent posters,

although I've slipped to fifteenth since I started putting most of my online effort at giving people a "fair shake" on Wall Street into this blog.

Bogleheads 12

Each year 200 of the Bogleheads get together for a 2 day reunion and conference. Many people I tell about this (including many Bogleheads), think this is pretty bizarre. One recent comment about it from a non-attendee read like this:

[What is this] a bunch of middle aged white dudes with "Captain Picard" like hair style getting really excited to go to financial motivation speeches with break out classes covering back door Roth IRAs?



To which the only reasonable answer is, "Yes, it's a total nerd-fest." At 38, I was definitely one of the 5 or 10 youngest people at the conference. The majority of attendees were males from 50-70. At least half were retired. There were many business owners, engineers, doctors, techies, authors, financial advisors, and even a diplomat. The conference ran from Wednesday at 6 pm to Friday at 1 pm.

People attended for all kinds of different reasons. Some were asked to come speak or be part of a panel. Others were there primarily to learn more about investing. Still others wanted to connect with people they've "known" online for years. Some came just to meet Boglehead "celebrities" like Jack Bogle, Gus Sauter, Rick Ferri, Bill Bernstein, and others whose writings had heavily influenced their investing decisions and most likely, made them a lot of money. Most attendees thought it was pretty cool to go over to the Vanguard campus to visit their money and hear from those who are managing it. I suppose it is a bit like the annual [Berkshire Hathaway](#)

[meeting](#). Certainly the same advice is given out- buy good businesses, hold on to them forever, keep your costs down, invest in index funds etc. But is it nerdy? Of course it is.

Investing is nerdy. Buying, holding, and rebalancing a fixed asset allocation of index funds and worrying about your savings rate is not only boring, but intensely nerdy. Debating the proper duration and amount of TIPS in your portfolio would bore the vast majority of people I know to death. I have no idea why I find it interesting, but I do. I also like watching The Walking Dead, following the Vuelta a Espana and dinking around building a website, activities most people also consider kind of nerdy.

Get Rich Slowly

I can tell you what isn't nerdy, however, and there was a lot of it at Bogleheads 12. Being a millionaire isn't nerdy. Early retirement isn't nerdy. Never having to worry about whether you can afford something you want isn't nerdy. Not having to fork out \$30K a year to an investment advisor isn't nerdy. Helping others become financially successful isn't nerdy. I think it's all pretty cool. I didn't know very many millionaires growing up, and still don't in real life, despite working with lots of doctors and other professionals. But millionaires are a dime a dozen when you're hanging out with the Bogleheads.

A [poll from 2011](#) showed that half the Bogleheads are millionaires and 90% of them have more than 100,000. Given market returns the last couple of years, I wouldn't be surprised to see the percentages are even higher now. How do you learn to be a doctor? You hang out with doctors and do what they do. How do you learn to be a millionaire? You hang out with millionaires and do what they do. So what do Bogleheads do? They educate themselves, boost their income whenever possible, carve out a decent percentage of that income to build wealth, follow a reasonable, low-cost

investing strategy and surprise, surprise, after 2 or 3 decades they're rich. Who knew it was so easy?

I saw some [recent blog posts](#) where millionaires were interviewed. The blog commenters were all really excited and wanting to ask additional questions about the featured millionaires. I could have written the posts myself without ever having read them because the story is always the same, and it's the same story countless Bogleheads could tell you over and over again. Get a good job, save a decent percentage, get a decent return on the savings, rinse and repeat.

You certainly don't have to go to a Bogleheads reunion in order to be a Boglehead or learn everything you need to know to be a successful investor. Reading a few [good investing books](#) and/or hanging out on their forum for a while is more than enough. But if you'd like to meet Jack Bogle before that transplanted heart of his gives out, visit Vanguard, and learn a little about investing, consider signing up for Bogleheads 13 next year. Even if you get appendicitis while you're there, you'll still likely make most of the events. Watch the forum for the announcement because it sells out fast. Don't be like one of my colleagues who I told about the trip. Instead of saying, "That sounds nerdy" she said, "I wish I had learned about that stuff when I was your age. I wouldn't have to still be working."

FinCon 13

The other nerdy conference I attended in October was FinCon 13. I went from being one of the youngest and poorest at the Bogleheads meeting to being one of the oldest and richest at FinCon. This is essentially a financial bloggers conference. Some people go there to learn about finance and investing, but most people are there to network with other people and learn more about making money online. Unlike medicine, where once

you get through the long pipeline you're essentially assured of a decent income, making money online is like the Wild West. It is very much a pyramid, where [the top does very, very well](#) (such as [Pat Flynn](#) who blogs about blogging to the tune of about \$70K...a month) and the vast majority make little to nothing. It can very attractive for someone with an entrepreneurial spirit (especially if, like me, they don't have to risk their family's lifestyle on a dream thanks to a great regular job.) One of the highlights was enjoying a \$100+ dinner with [Mr. Money Mustache](#). You won't be surprised to learn that neither of us paid for it. (Thanks [Lending Club](#)—I'll be counting that dinner as part of my investment return!)

It turns out it is very easy to make a little bit of money online, but very difficult to make a lot. It's not unusual at all for a blogger to not make any money at all their first year. It's pretty tough to blog for a living like that. The barriers to entry might be low, but the long ramping up process weeds out most would-be professional bloggers in the first year or two. At any rate, I learned a lot at the conference that will hopefully improve your experience on the website, and improve the return I see from my time on it. If you're a blogger or have interest in developing any kind of internet-based business, I suggest you take some time to attend FinCon14.

What do you think? Have you attended a Bogleheads meeting? Was it a NerdFest or a Gathering of Millionaires? Comment below!