

Stealth Wealth: I'm Just an Ordinary Average Guy



[Editor's Note: This post originally published on WCI Network partner site [Physician on FIRE](#). I love the idea of stealth wealth, even if we're not very good at doing it thanks to transparency and non-anonymity of this blog. Still, my assistant editor and neighbor Jill thinks 9 out of 10 of our neighbors have no idea we're multi-millionaires. Sure, they've seen a boat parked in my driveway recently, but all the years of [having beaters parked](#) there might be hard to forget.]

I've been publishing a [Sunday Best](#) since April of 2016. While I'm certainly not the first to compile and present a weekly collection of posts I've enjoyed, the concept has proven to be quite popular. The post is usually well read, and many featured posts get at least a hundred clicks the first day. It's not [Rockstar Finance](#) popular, but it does direct some traffic.

One fringe benefit that I receive is a look at what sort of articles are popular with my readers. In recent weeks, I featured several articles on something called Stealth Wealth from bloggers [Financial Samurai](#), [Joshua Kennon](#), and Justin from [Root of Good](#).

The Stealth Wealth posts were consistently fan favorites. As

of this writing, they have been viewed a remarkably similar 272, 274, and 267 times respectively, and have been the most popular featured articles from the last month's Sunday Best posts. I hear you, readers. You like to read about Stealth Wealth!

Here's my take.



Stealth Wealth: I'm Just an Ordinary Average Guy

What is Stealth Wealth?

You've heard of the Stealth Bomber – the sleek jet that flies through the skies undetected by radar. Stealth Wealth is like that, but rhymes so much better. It's wealth that exists but goes unnoticed by standard means of detection.

Stealth wealth is blending in with your surroundings. It's jeans and a tee shirt. It's watching football with a cold one. It's mowing your lawn with a cold one. It's tent camping. Yes, with a cold one, but around a warm fire. It's basically a country & western song.

That's the Stealth part. In order to be stealthy, you've got

to [Stop Acting Rich](#). In another book by Drs. Stanley and Danko, [The Millionaire Next Door](#), you learn quickly that many of America's rich don't do what we think rich people do. They drive Ford vehicles more than any other make. They eschew the caviar and champagne for crackers and, of course, a cold one.

Wealth is the other necessary component. What qualifies as wealthy? That's for an individual to decide, but being a millionaire is a good start. If you've got [your first million](#), and nobody but your closest friends and family would guess it, you're probably practicing Stealth Wealth.

What is Not Stealth Wealth?

Frequent displays of material wealth disqualify you. These include, but are not limited to:

- Driving a luxury automobile
- Wearing a ridiculously expensive watch or similar jewelry
- [The Kardashians](#)
- McMansion with weekly visits from the gardener and "pool boy"
- Facebook check-ins at The French Laundry
- Decadent Maui accommodations (unless reimbursed by employer)



view from our balcony. not bad.

Not only are these things not indicative of Stealth Wealth, but they are also often the enemy to actual wealth. Drs. Stanley and Danko referred to the practice of trying to look wealthy as “all hat, no cattle,” a phrase borrowed from a Texan who no doubt listens to country & western music.

How Do I Stealth Wealth?

I’ve got the Wealth part down. I’m a millionaire twice over thanks to a great career, a high [savings rate](#), and some dumb luck with the stock market that I’ve invested in heavily over the last ten years.

The Stealth* part?

[Joe Walsh](#), a member of [The Eagles](#) said it better than I can in [Ordinary Average Guy](#).

I’m just an ordinary average guy
My friends all are boring
And so am I
We’re just ordinary average guys



We all lead ordinary average lives
With average kids
And average wives
We all go bowling at the bowling lanes
Drink a few beers
Bowl a few frames
We're just ordinary average guys
Ordinary average guys

And every Saturday we work in the yard
Pick up the dog doo
Hope that it's hard (woof woof)
Take out the garbage and clean out the garage
My friend's got a Chrysler
I've got a Dodge
We're just ordinary average guys
Ordinary average guys...

I've got an awesome wife, and two amazing kids, but otherwise it's pretty much spot on. We've got the Chrysler and a Chevy (no Dodge). Replace bowling a few frames with curling a few ends and there's not much else to say.

But I will, anyway. Although I do like to bring attention to this blog (thank you for [the latest feature](#), J. Money), I don't like to bring attention to myself in everyday life. I live in a safe middle-class neighborhood. It's a nice home, but nothing extraordinary.

I don't own designer brands. I don't wear a watch or even a [Fitbit](#). My boys are enrolled in a public school. I don't pay much for flights; [I've become skilled at getting free flights](#).

I downplay the doctor card. I don't lie about what I do for a living, but I only offer it up when asked, and quickly move on if at all possible. My job doesn't define who I am, and I've got [more interesting things to talk about](#). Well, interesting for a boring, ordinary, average guy, anyway.

**[It's tough to be completely stealthy when you're building a blog, and writing about financial independence, investing, and wealth creation. For what it's worth, I'm anonymous to almost all of you, but I can't very well establish myself as a writer worth reading in the personal finance arena without establishing some credibility as a physician who has achieved financial independence and some level of wealth.]*

Have I Always Been Stealthily Wealthy?



I wish I could answer in the affirmative, but the truth is I wasn't always this way. I bought a convertible when I was in residency. It was a used Mustang, but it set me back \$12,000, which probably exceeded my net worth at the time. When I took my first permanent job, I hired a contractor to build us a

stunning 4,000 square foot home on a six-figure lot I purchased with the help of a 0% interest credit card check.

I had worked hard, and **I bought into the concept of delayed gratification**. It was my time. My time to shine. Time to show the world that I had arrived. On my 31st birthday, I arrived at my birthday dinner in a limousine that my wife had arranged for a couple of friends and us. The year before, I rented the limo to drive my friends and me around town to celebrate my Big Three – Oh.

I would never rent a limo to celebrate myself these days.

Don't get me wrong. I enjoyed these things while they lasted, which was, unfortunately, not all that long. The Mustang convertible was impractical as a sole vehicle for a [traveling locum tenens physician](#), so I sold it. The house was impractical to own after the only hospital in a 40-mile radius went bankrupt. So I sold it – years later at a huge loss.



fun while she lasted

I learned something from my non-stealthy, wealth-deterrent ways. One is that the finer things didn't make me all that happy, and became a burden when I no longer had a use for them. They didn't matter much to other people, and didn't

matter much to me, either. People, the good people anyway, care more about who you are and how you behave than what you have.

Are There Benefits to Stealth Wealth?

Ya, sure. You betcha. Lots of 'em.

You're less likely to be quoted the doctor price / lawyer price / rich man's price if you don't look or act like a rich man.

You'll have an easier time fitting in most social settings that don't include terms such as yacht, polo, or Illuminati. An ordinary, average appearing guy (or gal) is simply more approachable.

As a result, you'll find yourself associating with peers whose living and spending habits are rather ordinary. It's easier to keep up with the Joneses who have potluck gatherings in the backyard than the Joneses who hold catered events at the golf club.

“People, the good people anyway, care more about who you are and how you behave than what you have.”

When your Wealth is Stealthy, the expectations of you will be tempered. People won't automatically turn to you when the check arrives, or be offended if you're not feeling generous enough to pick up the tab for everyone's bad decisions at the bar. No one's going to ask you what fancy car you'll be getting next if you've never leased one in the first place.

Possibly the best benefit? The look of shock and awe when you share the news of your pending early retirement. I haven't experienced that yet, but when you don't appear to be "doing all that well," the last thing your co-workers will expect is that you can somehow afford to retire when you can't seem to afford jeans without holes in them or drive anything better than that rust-bucket. Soon, the time will come when I prove them wrong.

Do you practice Stealth Wealth? Care to share your methods? Have your habits changed over time as mine have?