

# Herald-Journal

## Noel Swain: Borrowing Etiquette

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Are you a borrower or a lender?

I grew up on a farm in the '50s and '60s. Until I was 16 years old I never

knew what a house key was. And as far as I remember, the house I grew up in was never locked. The farm I'm referring to was in the northeast corner of North Carolina in a county that had fewer than 5,000 residents.

We raised our own cattle and hogs. We milked cows and gathered eggs from the laying hens we had. We grew our own garden, canned our own vegetables and slaughtered our own animals for the meat we put in the freezer.

We planted two crops a year and rotated the different crops we planted in the fields. We grew potatoes, corn, soybeans and wheat. And if the farm did well, we'd take one week during summer to drive over to the Outer Banks for vacation on the beach at Nags Head.

I remember that one time before we left – dad was in the pickup truck loaded with supplies, and mom in the station wagon loaded with kids – someone asked dad if he was going to lock up the house before we left. He replied, "Why? Somebody might need something."

That's the way it was on a farm in the south in the '50s. And being one of seven children in my family, I've spent my life borrowing stuff from and loaning stuff to people without thinking much about it.

Over the years, though, I have come to realize that there is a certain etiquette to borrowing things from people you know.

Anything you can borrow today you can also rent. But you borrow because it can save you time and money. And when you do borrow you implicitly agree to a contract.

This is what it says:

1) If you borrow something and it breaks while in your possession, you fix it or replace it. You don't ask the person you borrowed it from what they think you should do. If they are nice enough to lend you the item in the first place, they're probably too nice to ask you to do what you already know you should do. So don't ask, just do.

2) If you borrow something like a car or a truck, bring it back clean and with a full tank of gas. If you bring it back dirty and empty, you are rude. You should never be loaned anything else ever again. If you bring it back clean and full, you will be well thought of and it will be appreciated.

3) When you do borrow something, once you use it, the borrowing exercise is not over, not until you clean and return what you borrowed. Don't ever make the person who loaned it to you have to ask for it back. That leaves a bad taste in their mouth and makes them feel used.

While nothing I've said here has much to do with investing and retirement, it does have everything to do with character and integrity.