

# Be the Master of the Thrift Store

Brand new Cole-Haan leather shoes, just my size: \$5. Four matching framed prints of old Roman coins: \$4. Ralph Lauren windowpane-checked three-button suit: \$20. Waist-length mink coat: \$32. Real pearl and rare stone necklace: \$3.50. Hand-painted wine carafe imported from Israel: \$2. Twinkie warmer circa 1983: \$1.50.

I'm talking thrift store here, as in Goodwill. You got \$20 in your pocket, so time to pop some tags.

You would never shop there, right? Well, why not? Don't let snobbery stop you. There are amazing things in the Goodwill, or any thrift store, but you have to have the right attitude, an eagle eye, a sense of adventure, and a love of lost treasure.

Once you focus and get dedicated, the place is awesome. For my part, I go every two weeks. I often leave without anything, it's true. It's fun in any case. But you find just the thing, pay a fraction of the retail price, and leave happy. Get enough of this stuff, and you live happy.

## We Are All Poor

But, wait, isn't this just for poor people? Not at all. Goodwill has an amazing economic model. They take donations, and people drop their stuff off every day, in exchange for which the donor gets a tax write-off. That alone is interesting: you are supporting lower taxes just by shopping there! The employees get paid out of the revenue, and any additional profits go to gradual upgrades in the shopping environment. In this way, you are also supporting jobs for people who otherwise might not find a place in the job

marketplace. So you can feel good about that too.

Mostly, you stand a good chance of getting great stuff cheap. It's true that 95% of the items in the thrift store are stuff you don't want. You would call it junk. Fine. But let's be realistic. The same is true of high-end stores. Most of that stuff you don't want, and what you do want is way too expensive. You often roam the aisles for hours and come away empty-handed. At least at the thrift store, you can pretty much afford everything, so it all comes down to finding something that works for you.

If you shop there enough, and develop a mastery of the place, you are left wondering how malls survive at all. But here's why. You know that feeling when you walk into Bloomingdale's? There's a sense of awe at the appearance of vast wealth: the astonishing appeal of luxury items that you would love to have if only you had the money. It may or may not be true, but this is the impression you are given.

Well, the Thrift Store is none of that. At first glance, it looks like a pile of rubbish. If that is the only takeaway you have, you lose. The joy of thrift store shopping comes from the hunt itself, the sense that you are outsmarting everyone who allows snobbery to get in the way of saving money. Your reward is to be the smartest dude around.

## **Navigating the Thrift Store**

Let's cover some basics. There are five main sections I care about: clothing (including shirts, sweaters, sport coats, and suits), shoes, household items, wall hangings, and jewelry. You should cover each section with each visit.

Look for name brand items. For example, in shoes, go with Cole-Haan, Johnson & Murphy, Footjoy, and other known items. If it looks weird, it probably is weird. There's a slim chance that it will fit you but it is always worth a try if you find

the right shoe. When it works, it's a delight. You have just saved 95% on something you want!

It's the same with suits. You can always google the brand on your smartphone. The trick with suits is finding the right size. With experience, you can tell on sight. Once you have the right jacket, now you have the daunting problem of finding the right pants, since the stores usually keep these separate. Check the pattern, color, and weave carefully and plant it firmly in your mind. Start looking through pants with an eye toward this one thing. Half the time you won't find it. But when you do, bingo, you win!

Shirts are the easiest win in the thrift store because the sizes are all marked. You can make out like gangbusters here. Instead of \$50 to \$100, you will pay \$2. Sweet!

Household items are so much fun to shop for. You can get great vases, wine and martini glasses, knives, bottles, plates, and so on. But what about getting things that match? Don't all the things in your kitchen need to line up in terms of style and color? I have one thing to say about this: boring. It's actually much more interesting to have a big variety of glasses, plates, and even flatware. I've seen the fanciest of restaurants do this; why not your home? Once you get used to it, life is much more interesting.

Always check the wall hangings. There is probably a blank space somewhere in your house. And there's nothing wrong with throwing out what you have and replacing it with something better. In fact, this is a great way to keep your household interior fresh. It's strange how people keep the same paintings up for their whole lives, even several generations. Forget it! We change our clothes, paint our walls, and buy new homes. Why not switch out wall hangings too? The thrift store makes it super easy.

Thrift stores have lots of costume jewelry, most of it of

horribly tacky. But every once in awhile – and you have to look closely for the “diamond in the rough” – you will find just the thing. Test the pearls with your teeth to make sure they are scratchy. Gold is usually marked with its fineness. Diamonds usually stand out.

And let’s not forget sports equipment. You might snag a \$200 tennis racket for \$2 (like I did!).

The main thing is to treat the whole experience as a game, a kind of treasure hunt, as with the Parable in the Bible in which the guy sees a treasure in the field and buys the whole property from the unknowing owner just to get it. Jesus said that this was an awesome thing to do.

One more thing. Even if you never buy anything in these stores, there is something like archeological joy in just looking. This is the stuff that capitalism creates that people are willing to give away! That alone is a wonderful thing. Our refuse is more wonderful than anything Louis XIV would have had in his private quarters.

After all, just imagine how dazzled he would have been with a Twinkie warmer. Now we look at it and think: that’s perfectly ridiculous. Or is it? Wouldn’t you actually like a warm Twinkie right now?

And about that mink coat, similar to Macklemore’s, I found it in the Halloween dress-up section.

*This article was originally published on [FEE.org](#). Read the [original article](#).*

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