

# Business lessons in a delicate balance and the richer, the poorer

[Business](#), [Accounting](#)



## A Delicate Balance

José Armas is a well-respected Chicano activist from New Mexico who served as co-editor and managing editor of *Literatura de Colores: Journal of Emerging Raza Philosophies* in the 1970's. He also worked with Bernice Zamora as co-editor for a collection of selected works of fiction penned by Mexican-Americans, *Flor y Canto VI and V: An Anthology of Chicano Literature*. Armas is also a publisher and Albuquerque Journal columnist.

A Delicate Balance is a short story which revolves around Romero Estrada, El Tonto, or “ The Dummy”. With nothing more than measly Social Security benefits to sustain himself, Romero does a job for the community: sweeping and cleaning the sidewalks. He is happy to perform this duty until Seferino, the barber's son, decides to pay him fifty cents each day for sweeping in front of the barbershop. It is not long before Romero quits doing his sweeping. Eventually he returns to his “ job” only to purposely miss the area in front of the barbershop and even piling up the trash and debris in front. It is not until Seferino leaves for college and no longer comes to the shop to help his father that Romero finally goes back to his very careful sweeping all up and down the street.

The story is told in third person narrative and gives the reader a good impression of the character of the people involved through their actions and their words. The reader is swept into the community and Romero's involvement with it from the very first paragraph. We watch the changes Seferino brings about in Romero as he practices a bit of business acumen on the unsuspecting, simple-minded man. By the end of the narrative, we

realize that Seferino was attempting to change Romero by making him more like the rest of the community's citizens but this is not what really what Romero wanted. It is, instead, what made Seferino feel better about himself. In attempting to change Romero, Seferino also tried to change the community and its dynamics.

The lesson in A Delicate Balance is not only about how a community and its businesspeople can work together to take care of its citizens but how a simple-minded man like Romero fits into that community. When sweeping the sidewalks, "the work took him the whole morning if he did it the way he wanted" (page ?) and it is clear that Romero takes a good deal of pride in doing this job well-done. It is his duty to keep the sidewalks clean and his strong work ethic comes from within himself as a need to give back to the community; it is not based on monetary value. In return, the businesspeople of the community give him things such as food and hair cuts, wrapping their arms around this most childlike member of their society and ensuring he has what he needs.

Pride is what keeps Romero sweeping and singing and happy. Seferino, however, is educated and sees things in a different light. He feels it would be a sign of respect to give Romero money for what he does. While his father has his doubts about the wisdom of paying Romero for his sweeping efforts, he reasons that Seferino is one of the few in the community to finish high school and go on to college and so he must know better. Sadly, Seferino never realizes that the very act of paying Romero may have made him feel better about himself, for Romero it was a blow to his sense of self. Getting paid with

money to do what he enjoyed doing anyway lessened its importance. Only when Seferino leaves for college, does Romero feel comfortable enough to return to his former life and friendship with the barber. Ultimately, a person in business is responsible for not only his own concerns, but for keeping his community functioning at its highest level. The author conveys this through dialogue between the characters and using third person point of view to present an overlook of the community itself.

### The Richer, The Poorer

Dorothy West (1901\* – 1998) was born in Boston and that is where she began writing, winning a prize in a short story contest and penning a novel, *The Living is Easy*. After moving to New York, she became a member of the “Harlem Renaissance”, a group of established authors. West was 88 when her second novel and, later in the year, a collection of her short stories, *The Richer, the Poorer*, was published by Doubleday.

This story tells a third-person tale of two sisters, Lottie and Bess. Since they were children, Lottie was the practical one who went to work as soon as she could while Lottie was the dreamer who never worried about tomorrow. The author nearly fools us into thinking that in the end Lottie will be the richer of the two but by the time the two of them reach old age, Lottie is a miserly, lonely woman with nothing but a house. Bess, the poorer sister, has no possessions but countless fond memories of a rich life with a husband and memories of events and places she’s experienced.

Through the use of a few, simple paragraphs that chronicle Lottie’s life, the reader quickly realizes that Lottie’s greed is the overwhelming force in her

life. When she and Bess are children and Lottie is already working for money, “ she could not bear to share with Bess, who never had anything to share with her” (page ?). Every penny of every single day is counted and tallied and put into a savings plan by Lottie. Her entire goal in life is to never have to worry about money one day. She lives in such a greedy, miserly fashion that no one is allowed to come between her and her money: “ to give up a job that paid well for a homemaking job that paid nothing was a risk she was incapable of taking” (page ?). Lottie does not realize that her need not to worry about money has itself become the greatest worry of all.

\*Some sources state her birth year as 1907.

It is Bess that turns her sister’s life around, without even knowing it. When Lottie reaches retirement age, her employer lets her go without a second thought and she is left alone with nothing, and no one, until Bess loses her husband and asks for sanctuary in Lottie’s house. Lottie is peeved at first that she must send the money for her sister’s passage back home as well as provide with her with the money she has so carefully scrimped and saved over the years while Bess was off gallivanting with her worthless musician husband.

Lottie continues to feed her anger as she looks around her at her dump of a house and makes a decision to fix up a room for her sister. After the room is prepared for Bess, however, Lottie finds she cannot stop improving the place and finishes the job properly. Now that her house is up to par, Lottie spends even more money improving her own appearance.

When Bess finally arrives, Lottie is dismayed that her sister is not amazed and thankful at the changes she has wrought. After listening to Bess's tales of adventure and fun, Lottie soon realizes that it is she who is the poor one - poor in relationships and love and life itself. Lottie learns her lesson, thankfully, before her life is over.

The underlying lesson of the story is not only about the dire consequences of greed, but a reminder to live each day to its fullest, with no regrets. The same holds true in business. Management teams who strive only to make the next dollar with no thought of giving back to their community, or their employees, will ultimately be unsuccessful. The ability to embrace each day and move forward to tackle new challenges, to flex one's creativity, to take a chance and embrace change, is what makes a company, or a person, grow. The author conveys this message through the use of third person voice to convey the changes that Lottie goes through from childhood to her final years, presenting a woman who has finally realized the gift of life.