

Face Reality

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A long time ago, more than a decade back, I found myself standing on the side of the road, on a turnpike, somewhere on the East Coast of the United States. I had been dropped off on the side of this strange highway by a woman I was with, who, in a fit of rage, demanded that I get out of the car and had sped away—my luggage and all—in the automobile.

I was trying to figure out what had gone wrong. The entire experience of getting kicked out of the car had lasted no more than a few minutes. One moment we were speeding along in good spirits discussing the night before. The next moment I was standing there on the side of the road. I may have had \$20 or so on me—enough certainly to get to a phone and make a call (this was before cell phones were prevalent). But standing there, I was very confused at what had happened.

The night before, we had gone to a party in a townhouse in New York City. The townhouse was owned by a girl who was not more than 23 or 24 at the time. She had been an heiress of some sort of publishing empire, from what I remember. The townhouse was pretty large even by New York standards and was furnished very nicely with all sorts of old rugs, nice curtains, comfortable chairs, and whatnot. There were vases, grandfather clocks, and other bits of decor you typically do not see in the home of a 23-year-old woman.

When we walked into the party, the girl came up and introduced herself to us, looked up and down at the girl I was with, then began leading us into another room.

"I love how this place is furnished," my date said to the heiress. "I especially like the wallpaper in the vestibule."

The heiress heard her but did not say a word. I thought it was a little rude. I could tell the girl I was with was visibly annoyed and seemed to feel some sort of social slight had taken place.

The party was very good from what I remember. The people were interesting and there were all these caterers milling around despite the fact the heiress was just having a few people over. The girl I was with was not having a good time. In fact, I found her standing in a corner glaring at the heiress. This made me a little uncomfortable, so I went over to my date.

"I'm going back," she told me after we had been at the party around ten minutes. "I do not like this party. I'm tired."

"It's 10:00 on a Saturday night. Are you kidding?" I asked.

Instead of letting her go home alone, I left the party with her. The party had been quite a bit of fun and I was very sorry to leave.

The next day we were on the road and the girl brought up how rude she thought the heiress had been to her the night before by ignoring her statement about the townhouse being nicely furnished.

"I thought it was a little rude too," I told her.

"Why do you think she didn't answer?" she asked me.

"I have no idea. I'm not the one with a multimillion-dollar trust fund like the heiress. Maybe it was a class thing. Who knows?"

"Class? Are you saying I do not have class?" the girl I was with responded. "I am from a long line of very rich people and grew up around lots of money. How dare you say something so insulting and rude to me?"

The girl started screaming and before I knew it, she had pulled the car over to the side of the road.

"GET OUT OF MY CAR!!" she screamed.

"Get out? I'M FROM DETROIT. I have no idea where I am!!"

"GET OUT OF MY CAR! I NEVER WANT TO TALK TO YOU AGAIN!!" she screamed.

"Listen ... I'm sure you have lots of class. I was not trying to upset you. I just was providing you various hypotheses about why the girl was rude to you. Maybe she was drunk. Does any of this really matter? Who cares?" I said calmly.

Less than ten seconds later she was pushing and shoving me and trying to force me out of the car. I sat up and got out of the car.

A few moments later, I was standing on the side of the road.

A couple of hours after that I was standing at the Greyhound bus station. I got on the bus without a change of clothes. I was starting to grow a beard.

Every hour or so, the bus would stop, and everyone would get out and smoke cigarettes. The bus broke down in a bad neighborhood in Pittsburgh, in the middle of the night, and we sat on the road a few hours before a school bus came and picked us up, and then took us to another Greyhound bus. Some guy got on in Pittsburgh with a guitar and started playing it for all the passengers. He really sucked. He seemed to be rapping county songs and spent a lot of time tapping his hand on the guitar for a beat, instead of strumming the strings. The bus kept stopping at all these random towns and locations and everyone kept smoking.

Twenty-four hours after that, I was a very weary traveler, pulling into the bus station in downtown Detroit and calling my mother.

I have met few people in my life who were ever willing to face reality. Instead of facing reality, most people do everything they can to avoid it. They distract themselves with drugs, alcohol, sex, food, risky activities, and more. Many people lie up in hospitals having suffered heart attacks, aneurysms, and other health issues caused by unhealthy choices related to their inability to face reality. Many people end up dead. Others end up on downward spirals that are nothing short of insane.

The girl who dropped me off on the side of the road was someone who was unable to face reality. I had come out to the East

Coast to visit her and meet her family. She had always told me she grew up in a mansion of some sort. I got there and her mother was living in a retirement community near her old house.

"Let's go see where you grew up!" I told her. I was enthusiastic since I had heard so much about this freaking mansion.

We drove around her neighborhood for at least thirty-five minutes and she pretended to be lost. Eventually, I was like: "C'mon ... you've got to show me the place!"

It was no mansion. It was a regular American house. No big deal. I couldn't have cared less if it was a mansion. It was on a road with a hundred other houses that all looked the same.

I never followed up on that or said anything about it, but I was a bit perplexed why she had felt the need to tell me she had grown up in this giant mansion when nothing could have been further from the truth.

One of the most difficult things to do—in life, in our careers—is to face reality. The reality of what we have failed to accomplish, of what we lack and what we have not done right.

In my own life and career, one of the biggest mistakes I have ever made, is failed to face reality.

Face reality that I am not good at something.

Face reality that something I am doing is not working.

Face reality that I will not be successful in a certain relationship.

Face reality that I cannot be a certain type of person.

Face reality that I will never get along with certain people.

Face reality that I have failed at something.

Face reality that I was no longer good at something.

When I was younger, I was very good at soccer. Sometimes I might score a goal or two in a game, and oftentimes I would score more. It was something I was very good at for several years. I started playing on all of these "special teams" that were organized for the best players out there—traveling around like a college athlete at the age of 12.

Then something happened.

I lost the ability to be good at it when I hit a growth spurt in my early teens. Instead of giving up, I tried playing soccer for four more years. At age 15 I was like a has-been rock star on a sad tour downhill. I no longer had what it took to be great at the game.

When I was 15 years old, I made the varsity high school team but I was no longer a "star" at the sport. I sat on the sidelines the entire season. Incredibly, our team won a championship and the coach gave a speech at our victory dinner stating that "although I had not played, I had tried hard in practices." I could not believe it. The years I spent trying to recapture my former glory were very depressing. I just did not have what it took any longer.

The next year, despite having aged a year and the fact that I should have been better at the sport, I decided to quit once and for all. I finally realized that I was not getting better—I was getting much worse. I decided to concentrate on academics and that sort of thing.

Nothing is better than a cold, hard dose of reality to show us where things stand. Very few people out there, though, are ever willing to truly face reality. Reality is elusive and it is something that we avoid at all costs. We do not want to admit what we are bad at, when we are failing, and what the truth really is.

Why do you need to face reality? Because when you cannot face reality, you will not be able to deal with the people, places, and things that show you that reality. You will continually put yourself in situations you should not be in. You will allow problems to fester without solving them.

A few years ago I was talking with a guy who is about the healthiest and most solid person I know. We were chatting on the phone one day and I asked him how he was doing.

"Not too well," he told me. "I've started smoking after twenty years of not doing so and I'm drinking at least two bottles of wine each night."

I could scarcely believe what I was hearing. The guy confided in me that he thought he was having a nervous breakdown.

"My Lord! What do you think brought all of this on?" I asked.

"I started seeing a therapist because I thought it would be good for me and now all of this old garbage is coming up! It's horrible. I do not know what to do!"

Within a few months, this guy was in better psychological and physical health than he had ever been. His career took off. Facing reality and all of the awful stuff was very hard for him in the short run—but in the long run it paid off. The guy actually ended up becoming quite well-known and even famous in his industry. A wreck to incredibly successful—almost overnight.

This is what happens to everyone who faces reality. They get better. They improve. Their life changes. You too need to face reality of where you are. Only by doing this can you realize where you can go.

THE LESSON

You must face cold, hard reality in order to truly determine your situation; despite the benefits of doing so, facing reality is sometimes one of the most painful and difficult things you can do. People do not like to admit their limitations and failures, but doing so is imperative for facing the people and things that constitute your reality. When you face reality you realize where you can go, and you gain the power to change your situation for the better.