



Rap Stars, House Managers, Crystal Meth, Prison, and Your Ego

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago, I was on an airplane that sat on the tarmac for at least an hour due to a screaming rap star. Seated not far from me (in coach) was a very famous rap star, and he was furious. He was upset because he had been seated in coach and there were no first-class seats available.

"You do not understand who I am! I do not travel coach!!" he screamed at the flight attendant. "I am better than this shit!"

He went on and on for a several minutes, and eventually a bunch of "higher-ups" from the airline appeared to calm the man down. They were wearing suits and did not look like flight attendants or airplane captains.

"I'm going to put your fucked-up airline on CNN!" he started screaming.

As he spoke, I realized that he was in coach simply because the seats in first class had been sold out. There was not much the airline could do about it. Apparently, the man had thought he had a first-class seat when he got on the airplane because his ticket said something about "premier" on it.

"How can I be Premier when you are putting me with these people? That guy looks like a fucking factory worker over there!" I heard him tell one of the airline people. I could not believe the audacity of this guy. He really must have thought he was something.

I could tell that the airline did not want to kick him off the airplane. At the time, the rap star was pretty well known and I am guessing the last thing they wanted to do was create a public relations nightmare. I could not hear everything that was going back and forth; however, at some point I heard the rap star say something to the airline personnel about how he was carrying \$5,000 cash and would give it to the first person who gave him his seat in first class.

Everything sort of fell silent after that; the airline personnel huddled and seemed to be discussing something privately. They then went up to the first-class section and—I kid you not—within a few seconds some guy from first class was hustling back to coach. The rap star went and took his seat and a few minutes later I saw a flight attendant hand the guy who had given up his seat something that I assume was the \$5,000. With that, the plane was ready to depart for what would be no more than a ninety-minute flight.

Unless I have a lot of credit card miles I can use, when I travel, I always fly coach. I prefer to sit in the back of the airplane because I will generally be able to get two seats--which gives me room to move around, have a seat next to me to put my stuff on, and generally have just as good experience (for me) as if I were flying business class.

Many people in the business world insist on flying business and first class even if it is a two-hour flight. People like the rap star. Not me.

Money, social standing, [educational degrees](#), cars, houses, clubs, vacations, clothes, children, hobbies, and more are all used as a form of status. So is how we fly on airplanes. In fact, airplanes and the classes people are seated in are one of the greatest status deals out there.

- When I am flying people to see me for business, many insist on flying business class.
- When I meet people and tell them I am going somewhere on a plane, many times they volunteer for no reason at all that they once flew business class on the airline.
- Weeks, months, and years after someone has traveled somewhere, they tell me they flew business or first class.
- When people are going somewhere, they go out of their way to tell me they are going to be traveling business class.

What the hell is going on with "business class" and why do people think it is so important?

Airline food generally all tastes lousy at 35,000 feet. Extra room is good, but you forget you have it after a few minutes. It's cool to get access to movies on some flights, but you can get those on your computer. Getting on and off the airplane first is nice—it saves a few minutes. Nevertheless, none of this is worth the thousands of dollars extra that airlines charge for the privilege of flying business class.

That said, I think business class is about something else entirely. It is not about food, comfort, or convenience. It is about status and being better than other people. It is about being above others and feeling special. It is about our egos and how we see ourselves compared to others. This is the meaning of business class in my opinion—people and their egos want a little status.

- In social standings, it is who you know and who you are friends with.
- In car enthusiasts' circles, it may be how much power your car has.
- In academic circles, it may be the prestige of the journals you were published in.
- In financial circles, it may be how big your bank account is.
- In business circles, it may be how large your company is.

On and on this ego-related posturing seems to go. It is the world we live in and a constant struggle for status and being better than others. You find it everywhere you go. People compare cities, sports teams, and what you have. They are all interested in being the best at this and the best at that.

A few years ago, I decided that, in my home life at least, I did not want to have anything to do with all this status and posturing. I felt that it was too hectic and was not something that would bring me tranquility. I wanted nothing to do with it. I forbade my wife to bring up topics having to do with work or money at home. I tried to spend my free time with people not

concerned about all of these ego-centered pursuits. I did not want to play the materialism game. I tried to deflate my ego in every way I possibly could.

One of the most important people in my life has always been my house manager. A house manager is typically a woman who will manage various workers at the house, do food shopping, do laundry, do cooking, keep a calendar of house events, and so forth. Since this is someone I have contact with several times a day, I want to have someone around who is a calming influence, not all that status conscious, and who seems to have their “ego” under control. This sort of person is much more calming for me than their opposite.

Several years ago, I had a house manager quit after she became very ambitious, grew to be status conscious, and was interested in status and money-oriented people and pursuits. She was from a foreign country and gradually I noticed she started coming to work in designer clothes, became conscious of various status-oriented events and people—and allowed these things to make her suddenly feel that the job she was doing (and even my status) was beneath her. As she became aware of the world around her (she had recently moved here), she came to believe that she needed to be part of the highest status world possible. She is still on this track and the last time I saw her, the conversation was punctuated by mentions of one high-status thing after another, her connection to this and that status-oriented person, place, or thing.

I started interviewing people for her job and my wife and I were very pleased when we met a young woman who had once been a professional dancer and was currently a yoga instructor. She was gorgeous and soft-spoken, and she talked about her dislike of materialism, status, and competition. She also told us that she would prepare vegetarian macrobiotic foods for us each night. Despite not being a vegetarian, that sounded pretty good to me.

Her references were perfect and my wife and I were incredibly glad to have her.

When she started the job, she largely lived up to what she represented she would be. She was missing on some work, because she was winding down her previous job, but not that much. I felt good about having someone like her working in our home, and she was a calming influence.

One day I came home during the work day, and she was sitting on the couch in our television room apparently watching television while she did some laundry. I noticed a haze of thin smoke that was almost odorless hanging in the room but did not think much of it. I am not sure why, but I just ignored it and went about my business.

A few months into the girl’s job with us, my wife and I needed to go to India to attend a wedding. The plan was to take the trip to the wedding in India, spend a few days in Bangkok, then come back to India to work a few more weeks in our company’s office there. During the trip, we asked the house manager to house sit for us, watch our dogs, and take care of things.

About a week into the trip, my wife and I had attended the wedding, gone to Bangkok, and come back to India. I received an e-mail from my office in Los Angeles that there was unusual credit card activity on a few of my credit cards (charges in Phoenix and other places to which I had not been). I did not think very much of it. Then, a few days into our stay in India, my wife became ill from the food for the second time and decided that she could not take it anymore. I went to the gym one morning and when she came back, she was packing her bags to return home. She caught a flight several hours later.

To my wife’s astonishment, when she returned home, my truck was missing. The house manager told her that it had been impounded when she had tried to take it to a car wash (twenty-five miles away from our house in a drug-infested area of Los Angeles). My wife got it out of impound and was told that it had been seized by the police when our house manager’s boyfriend had tried to use it to purchase drugs from an undercover officer.

The bathtub in our bedroom had also been stripped of its enamel, and the entire house smelled like chemicals. We learned later that our bathtub had been used to make crystal meth.

When my wife picked up my car at the police impound, there was all sorts of drug paraphernalia in it. She took it to the car wash and to her astonishment when they were vacuuming it, they handed her a crack pipe and a bag of some sort of drugs, which she immediately got rid of.

Meanwhile, my office called me in India and told me that they had identified over \$10,000 in credit card charges and debits on my ATM card. I called my wife and we shared stories about what was going on.

“Call the police and fire the house manager,” I told her. I was in India at the time so there was not much I could do myself.

The police called the house manager and asked her to come in to the police station and answer some questions about the credit card charges. The house manager told the police she would be right over and came in. For over an hour, the girl admitted to all the theft and was very cooperative with the police. She admitted to turning our house into a meth lab, driving my car to Arizona and back, buying designer clothes with my credit cards, and more.

Faced with the girl’s admissions, the police told her that they would be booking her and putting her in jail immediately. When they frisked the girl, they found giant bags of crystal meth in her purse and on her person that had a street value of tens of thousands of dollars.

Apparently, the police asked her something like “Why on earth would you bring this into a police station?” and the girl told them that she was afraid it would get stolen if she left it in the car. She told the police she was manufacturing all this crystal meth because she wanted to be a famous musician and needed money to do so.

She wanted to be famous ...

The girl, of course, went to prison for several years and I think is still there. First, however, she was sent to court-ordered rehab for her crystal meth addiction. We received numerous calls from her father and others begging us not to press charges for the theft. We did not press charges, but the crystal meth she had been caught with was another matter entirely.

From what the police, prosecutors, and others told me, the problem was not the theft (that was not that serious and would have gotten her minor jail time). The real problem was that she had been manufacturing crystal meth and was caught with a large amount of it that made her more of a “distributor” than a “dealer.” She got into a lot of trouble.

What does all this mean? I point this out for whatever it may be worth to you to look closely at everyone in your life—and even yourself. Everyone I have ever encountered seems to be looking for some sort of status. Whether it is the yogi-house manager, the recent immigrant house manager, or the rap star—most people crave status. So many people have a high need for status. Some commit crimes for status. Some quit jobs and seek status out with material goods or otherwise. Most people’s lives and existences are all about that draw for status.

I got to thinking about this search for status, the ego, and the importance of it on a trip not too long ago. I was riding at the very back of an airplane with a woman a few years older than me. I was traveling from Los Angeles to Chicago for a

conference. The woman I was sitting next to lived in Malibu, like myself, and was into things like yoga, proper eating, exercise, and so forth. In addition, she told me that she had previously owned a few yoga studios around Los Angeles.

During the trip, she started talking to me about the importance of not having an ego, the importance of not being attached to material goods and so forth. She told me that, like me, she never travels business class. I asked her some personal questions about her life and learned that her husband is one of the more famous attorneys in Los Angeles—and even the nation. To be clear, this woman was extremely wealthy, but looking at her you would not know it. I was impressed and felt that I had found someone I could learn from in terms of getting rid of the ego, being centered without it, and so forth.

Soon the woman started telling me how she grew her own food and why this was better than even buying organic food. She told me that my diet was all wrong and criticized me for having a few Diet Cokes. She told me how she does not drink any caffeinated beverages and why they are bad. She started telling me about how the way she exercises is better than how others exercise. She criticized various yogic philosophies and told me why hers was better than that.

As I listened to her speak, I realized that she was no different from anyone—like the house managers, like the rap star, she was simply using her diet, her philosophy, and so forth as a method to strengthen her ego, to be better than others and stand apart. For her it was not about money, it was about something else—she was using all of this other stuff to grab a little status.

And so it goes, with endless variations—my philosophy is better than your philosophy, my car is better than your car, my diet is better than your diet, my seat on the airplane is better than your seat, I am better than you because I do not fly business class, I am better than you because I do fly business class.

My belief is that one of the most important things you can have is nonattachment. Detachment means not continually striving to get somewhere or get something. Detachment means giving up desire because desire is the ego driving your ego. In the Bhagavad Gita (the Hindu Bible of sorts) it is written: “Perform every action with your heart fixed on God. Renounce attachments to the fruits. Be even-tempered in success and failure, for it is this evenness of temper that is meant by yoga”—yoga meaning “union” with divinity.

In your life and career, doing your best to renounce attachment, seeking, and the ego can provide tremendous and profound results. It will focus you more on the work for the work’s sake and you will do better at what you are doing. It will focus you on the people around you for reasons not having to do with your ego. Your life will change and you will become everything you are capable of becoming.

THE LESSON

People are naturally interested in being the best, or at least better than those around them, at the things in which they are interested. You must develop a sense on nonattachment, in which you are not continually to get something or somewhere; profound results come your way when you renounce attachment and ego. Focus on work for work’s sake, and you will do noticeably better in your chosen profession, and you will focus on the people around you for reasons not pertaining to your ego.

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