

Do Not Allow Others to Prey on Your Fantasies

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was around 18 years old, I picked up the most fantastic letter I had ever seen. It was atop newspapers and other papers that were scheduled to be recycled at the home of wealthy parents of a friend of mine. The letter discussed a “proprietary” machine invention that the letter’s author had developed that could extract gold from water. Once this machine was “fired up” in various rivers known to have even “micro amounts” of gold in them, there was no telling how much wealth could be earned. Attached to the letter were all sorts of pseudo-scientific studies about the machine and estimates of how much wealth it would produce.

“Can I have this letter?” I asked my friend’s father as I studied the material in awe.

“That’s trash, of course you can. I get that sort of crap in the mail all the time.”

The invention sounded much too good to be true. The only problem was that manufacturing the machine was expensive. The inventor writing the letter was soliciting investments, and he promised “fantastic returns” to investors.

Believing that my lot in life was about to change permanently, I called the “inventor” one afternoon. He discussed his machine and the incredible results people could get from it.

“How much would a \$1,000 investment return?” I asked.

“At least \$100,000 over the next year or so,” he told me.

I am not sure what tipped me off, but there was a point during the call when I realized that the entire scheme was a con. I was young, but none of what I was hearing really made any sense. I hung up the phone and told myself that I was too smart to be taken in by a scheme like this. And I am confident it was a scheme. I saved the letter and material that accompanied it, and years later, when I was more educated and wise in the ways of the world, I reviewed the letter and found so many inconsistencies, I did not understand why I was even motivated to pick up the phone. I wanted success so much that I had simply missed all of this.

Everyone has certain fantasies. The fantasies may involve a better job, more income, better health, more happiness, and so many other things. It is not difficult to find people who are willing to play to our fantasies and lead us to believe that they have the solution—and that what we are seeking can be accomplished quickly, and with very little pain.

- **Want to get rich fast?** There are countless people ready to make you this promise in exchange for your money.
- **Want to lose a ton of weight?** There are countless people marketing pills that they claim will make you lose weight fast.
- **Want to be happy?** There are lots of people out there with seminars, religions, and other plans that cost a ton of money that will promise you instant happiness.
- **Want to meet that special someone?** There are introduction services that will charge you up to \$25,000 to simply arrange three dates that they imply will lead to happiness and marriage.
- **Want to be more successful in business?** I receive at least two e-mails an hour promising me instant business improvement if I will merely invest \$3,000 in a course or seminar.
- **Want to get rid of a terminal disease?** There are people who will charge you hundreds of thousands of dollars for all sorts of fake therapies to get rid of the disease.

The fact is, most of the things we want in life take a lot of time and are not easy to come by. Losing weight requires us to eat less, exercise more, and avoid foods that will lead to weight gain. Getting rich (generally) requires lots of hard work and commitment over years and years. Being happy is the result of all sorts of life choices and other factors.

But everyone has a fantasy that something easy can happen—people want fast change. We are vulnerable to all sorts of fantasies and desires, and instead of being willing to work for them, we often fall victim to people who prey on our fantasies.

A few months ago while I was in India, I decided it might be nice to have \$10 million to invest in one of the businesses I run there. Within one day of declaring this interest to someone I work with, I found myself meeting with someone in the lobby of a posh new hotel who declared that within thirty days I would have a \$10 million investment. Moreover, this money would be at an annual interest rate of 5% and I would not have to pay back the money for five years.

I was astonished by this and proud that such an investment would be so easy to come by. “Yes, *this is how it is done in the big leagues*,” I told myself. I clearly had arrived at a very high level of business to be commanding such massive sums of cash at a moment’s notice.

“For you, no security will be necessary. Just a few signatures,” the man told me. I was bursting at the seams with pride that I was ostensibly held in such high esteem.

This charming man I had met told me the “world was changing” and opportunities were opening up everywhere.

“I have been approached by so many banks just begging that I provide them with a ‘pipeline of loans!’” the man declared.

“The Indian economy is flush with money and needs to make loans. I have investors here, in Nairobi, and all over just clamoring to loan money to good companies like yours.”

As I looked around me, I could not help but believe he was right. In the past few years, the property values in many Indian cities have gone up by more than ten times. Luxury hotels were popping up seemingly overnight. Streets that were once dominated by motor scooters now had chauffeured Bentleys and Mercedes drifting down them. Contrasted with the lack of optimism back home in the United States, the situation in India was positively inspiring.

As quickly as he had appeared, the man disappeared from the meeting stating that he had more urgent matters to attend to.

A week or so later, the man indicated he wanted to come to the United States and do some "due diligence" on the business. In order to do this, he would need a business-class airline ticket (\$7,000+), hotel arrangements, and transportation (more \$\$\$\$).

"The business we are seeking the loan for is in India," he was told. "Why would you need to come to the U.S.?"

I am not sure what his answer was. It had to do with looking over finances or something. Moreover, he wanted to come over the Christmas holiday (which corresponded with when his son was on break from college--across town in California). I also took a week off then. He traveled to Malibu and sat in my kitchen for a few hours meeting with someone who does our company finances. He asked few questions and declared a loan would be forthcoming within days. The entire experience was very odd. He left not really knowing much of anything about the business in India and seemed to have only glossed over the formalities of the business's finances—which were done in India to begin with. Moreover, he never even visited our office in India.

Prior to leaving, he suggested he would like to have an iPad. At the cost of more than \$1,000, I rushed out and bought him two. I could not believe such generosity and my luck at finding such a kind benefactor to make a loan to the company in India.

A day or so later, after he had left his ocean view hotel room overlooking the Pacific and was visiting his son at college, he e-mailed me and told me that he had appreciated all of the hospitality and was planning on coming back in two weeks to finalize the arrangements.

"I thought you had investors in Africa and India?" I asked.

"No, good news! I have now found the perfect investor in San Diego for this!"

A few weeks later, there had been no word from him. He wanted to return and was e-mailing and pressing for another expensive airline ticket. As I listened to this, though, I realized that not a lot of what I was hearing made any sense. The investors were not overseas—now they were in America. There were all sorts of other inconsistencies that I finally saw after I stepped back and simply allowed myself to realize I was being conned. This was no different from the man with the gold machine.

If you look around, you will generally find that there are all sorts of people preying on your fantasies. Life is difficult and anyone who offers the promise of instant help and happiness is a welcome relief for most of us. The reality is that sudden transformations of our bodies, incomes, and happiness almost never occur—instead, what is needed is sacrifice, work, and even a little bit of luck.

People, who are able to arouse in us a desire for painless and quick change generally are able to get lots of followers. People who run Ponzi schemes are only one example. Politicians can speak to this. Religions can speak to this. Self-improvement books and seminars can speak to this. Even recruiters can do this--promising great and instant results that may never come.

When it comes right down to it, though, the only way we can ever get to where we want to go is if we start taking action to go there. Small actions can build momentum over time and take us in the direction we want to go. It is a common fantasy that our lives can change in an instant. Most often this fantasy is perpetuated by others with an interest in preying on our fantasy instead of helping us.

THE LESSON

People all around you prey on common fantasies of wealth, jobs, health, and other things; the prospect of instant gratification is naturally appealing to people frustrated with life's difficulties. The only proven route to success, however, is through personally taking actions and building momentum over time. The idea over instant change is an attractive fantasy, but only that; a fantasy perpetuated by others preying on your desires rather than helping you.

<https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/>