

Have Trust in Others and Be Ready to Seize Opportunity However It Presents Itself

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Trusting people and being ready to take advantage of opportunity when it presents itself are two of the greatest skills anyone can have. My life has been enriched in so many ways by often trusting people I shouldn't have and by being aware of opportunities. I have always been eager to trust people who don't appear to be trustworthy, because I know that in the act of trusting them I can allow them to see themselves as better people. It also feels good to show people that you trust them. Fundamentally, I have a belief that deep down all people are good. There are also a ton of people out there who society judges to be evil and unworthy of help. Many of these people are good as well. One of the biggest challenges many of us have is realizing that deep down people are in fact good.

When you are taking a job, any job, you have to have faith and trust in your employer. You also have to trust yourself that you have the ability to do the job. The employer may tell you they are [planning](#) on this, or planning on that. You should trust them. Regardless of where you are working, you are putting your trust in an enterprise and the people within it. This is something that is extremely important and that will serve you well if you are in the right organization.

The opposite is most often the case, however. Most people do not trust their employers and, consequently, they paint themselves into a hole.

Several years ago, I came out of work to discover that a car had backed into my car and severely dented the back fender. The person who had hit the car was nice enough to leave a note.

The note read something like:

I'M AT FAULT! I WAS GOING TOO FAST!!

BIG BUMMER!

: (PLEASE CALL ME AND I WILL FIX IT!

A few days later, I called the number the person had left. The person was really chilled out and told me how they didn't look where they were going and were "spaced out" when backing up. It took them like 10 minutes to relate how they did not look where they were going, should have adjusted their rear view mirror, felt horrible about it and how work was "stressful" that day because their boss was "schizo" due to some issues with some bad laser eye surgery. They then told me to go and get a few estimates before seeing whether or not they wanted to report it to their [insurance company](#). The first estimate I received was for around \$5,000. The next estimate was for around \$5,500. I called the person and they were understandably disappointed.

"I guess I'll just report it to my insurance company then!" they told me.

A few days later I was in a shop suggested by the insurance company. The insurance company called me after the estimate and told me that they had determined there was about \$5,000 in damage and would be sending me a check which I could do whatever I wanted with. The check duly arrived and I started to spend it on things other than the car.

At the time, I was living in a house that was no more than 500 square feet in Hollywood Hills. It was a house that was originally built by child star, Ricky Nelson, because he was so popular and girls had been crawling into his parent's home in Beverly Hills. His agents had determined that having a house literally perched on the side of a cliff with no windows facing the street would make this impossible in the future and give him the peace and quiet he wanted. Ironically, Ricky Nelson would die in a private airplane crash years later and it was rumored he had set the plane on fire while smoking cocaine. The house had incredible views of the City of Los Angeles. The only part of the house that was physically touching the ground was the front door and the rest of it was on stilts. When I'd purchased it, I'd saved about \$35,000 because I had the luck of having an [inspector](#) who was insane. He may have been senile, I'm not sure. I am sure he was at least in his late 70s.

"My god! This thing is going down it's not secure!! It also has gas lines going into it. One small earthquake and it's all over. It will fall off the cliff and explode!"

Both the current owner and I were scared out of our pants by the inspector. Even though I didn't have the same issues that made the house so attractive to Ricky Nelson, I was in love with the little house because it was what I could afford. I wasn't at all concerned about this. I figured that if the house really did detach I would have a very easy time making it out the front door before it rolled down the cliff.

I'd found him in the Yellow Pages and didn't even realize what a blessing it would be. I used him on another house a few years later and realized he was insane. I purchased a house that had been owned by a professor from CalTech. He tried the same thing and got called out on the entire situation and this was quite embarrassing for me and the inspector. I think he used the word "liquefaction" which didn't go over well with a world famous [geologist](#). A few weeks later, the inspector sent me a letter saying he was retiring. In this particular instance, however, it actually worked wonders.

"What if I take \$35,000 off and throw in the big screen television?" the owner asked me. The owner was a developer who wasn't really that concerned about the house. The big screen television was huge. It looked like it was from the 1970's. He could have offered me just this and I would have accepted the offer. But that and \$35,000 was too much to pass up.

"Sure, I'll still buy it," I told him. "I just hope there's not an earthquake."

The house must have been directly over a fault line because at least a couple of times a month it would start shaking for no apparent reason, but it never fell off the cliff. One of my neighbor's homes did, however. When I moved into the house in December of 1997 there was a rain storm that seemed to last two straight weeks. One rainy Saturday afternoon I was sitting in the house and I heard a bunch of helicopters and sirens. I turned on the news and learned that one of my neighbor's

homes had fallen right off the cliff. It also made the national news that evening. There was still an abandoned lot there a couple of years ago when I drove by.

My girlfriend at the time was working at home and it tended to get pretty loud listening to her type away and talk to clients. The home had a small driveway and I figured the best thing I could do for her was to build her a little office on the driveway. I went to a local paint store where I met a guy named "Carlos." I brought him over to the house. He had been standing in front of the paint store looking for work. I hired Carlos because he had a truck and most of the guys had paint on them. I didn't want them riding in my damaged Porsche with paint all over them. When I got back to the house, Carlos explained to me that he was a painter and wasn't too experienced with building offices on driveways. I told him that sounded good to me and I could probably save some money then. We negotiated a rate for his work and then I took Carlos to Home Depot and we bought a bunch of stuff for the job.

Over the next week or so, I had Carlos build a box on the driveway that doubled as an office. Normally, it would have been cheaper to put a ready-made shed there but there were severe space limitations which is the reason for the small box. It was the most amateur piece of construction imaginable. It had windows going sideways, a roof made of tin, was painted crudely and more. What's worse, I spent money on ridiculous things like special lighting, little paintings to go in the office and a sunroof! The office wasn't more than 5x5. My girlfriend told me that I had built her "a box on the driveway." At one point I realized that the office I had built her actually had a smaller footprint than my big screen television. The thing was that it worked. Moreover, *it was on the driveway*. Since she worked so much, we agreed that in the event the house fell off the cliff as our neighbor's home had, she would be perfectly safe.

I'm sure I found other uses for the money from the accident as well. Within a few weeks, however, I had spent all of my insurance money destined for the repair of my beloved Porsche. I was very disappointed in myself. I had accomplished something of significance, though. I put my girlfriend on the driveway and freed up over the half the house. It was probably a little dangerous putting her there but I figured she would be okay.

The first night I moved into the house I heard someone pounding on my door at around 7:00 am. There had been a lot of loud noise outside for several minutes before the pounding began. I opened the door and a girl with an incredible amount of facial piercings looked at me directly in the eye and said "I'm seriously fucked the fuck up." She appeared to be swaying on her feet. She was dressed in a jean jacket with patches from various rock bands on it. Her eyes were half closed as she spoke.

I was very calm. "I see that," I said calmly. "I will be right back." Very slowly I closed the door and ever so lightly locked it and walked towards the phone inside the house.

I called 911. I was one of the few people who had a cell phone in 1997. I had originally started using one in 1990 when I was doing asphalt work. Back then, it used to cost like \$500 a month to use one. It was expensive. I liked having one back then because no one had one and I had one for several years at that point. I stopped using one in 2000 when everyone started talking on them everywhere. Now I prefer not having a cell phone. That day I had to use a cell phone to call 911.

I spent the first couple minutes of the call explaining to the operator that I was calling from a cell phone and that was why the number I was calling from was Michigan (where I got the cell phone). If you have ever called 911 in Los Angeles it is really something. A recording comes on and tells you, "Your call is important to us! We will be with you in just a minute! We're currently serving another caller and will be with you in just a moment!" The recording then proceeds to play happy music like little ballerinas or something are dancing in the background.

A friend of mine, Eric, who was from Scotland had recently moved to the United States and was staying with my girlfriend and I. Eric had purchased a brand new little BMW convertible when he got here that I think I may have co-signed for it since he didn't have any credit in the United States. The first night he had the car someone took a knife and cut the top off and carved up the paint to destroy the car. He was living in Venice at the time. It was really an outrageous thing to do to the car. I felt really sorry for the guy. He had gone to Harvard [Law School](#) and never had any money. The first thing he ever purchased for himself ended up getting destroyed. He had a huge deductible on his insurance and didn't get the car fixed for over 18 months.

Eric's father was from Africa and had very white skin. He didn't look black at all.

"This attack was racially motivated," he told me. At that point, I didn't even realize that his father was from Africa because he didn't look the least bit black. He started wearing lots of African clothes and stuff after the attack and had become very sensitive to any perceived racial slight.

"They are messing with my car again!!" Eric shouted when he heard the girl banging on the door. He got up ready to fight for racial justice.

"Do not go out there!" It's just a messed up girl, I told him.

Less than 3 minutes after I got done arguing with the 911 operator there were at least 5 or 6 police cars in front of my house. I walked outside in my bathrobe to explain to them what was going on and several of the police drew their guns and told me to put my face down on the ground. I wasn't sure what was going on.

"Don't you move pal!!" a police officer started screaming at me as he was frisking me in my bathrobe. I was lying face down in the street. I cannot imagine what my new neighbors must have been thinking.

Eventually, the entire situation worked itself out. A woman showed up who was a "rape counselor" who looked very concerned for a few minutes and rushed towards the girl with a blanket. About 5 minutes into the intervention the rape counselor suddenly became very emotionally unavailable and walked away in disgust. Apparently, they thought the girl had been raped. Instead, she was just on some pretty powerful drugs.

This was my first taste of living in the Hollywood Hills. It was my first night. Over the next year or so, I would have many incredible experiences that would culminate in the sale of the house 18 months later. We would find needles and syringes on the street while walking our dog. On another occasion, my girlfriend and I were getting in the car to go out to dinner and a couple of men in their 30's, who looked like bikers, walked by our house without shirts on, in dirty jeans, carrying baseball bats. When my next door neighbor was getting ready to move he put his house on the market and we went and toured it. He was a journalist from Germany. Left out in the open in a small walk in closet was an industrial size package of latex gloves with 4 or 5 large bottles of Astro Glide next to it. I cannot even imagine what was going on. When I sold the house, I sold it to an 19 year old kid who was a famous actor; he purchased it for his 30 year old boyfriend.

One day, I was at a bank in the Hollywood Hills area taking out some money and there was a man sitting in the parking lot in a late model, blue GM pick up truck with his wife. In the rear window of the pick up truck he had curtains which looked

Indian. He was looking at the severe damage to my Porsche outside the window of his truck. Next to him was his wife, who was very large and looked pretty mysterious. The man had skin which appeared to have suffered an incredible amount of sun damage throughout the years. You couldn't see much of his skin, however, because he had a ton of facial hair.

"I can fix that massive dent you have in your car in 15 minutes," he told me leaning out the window as I walked back from the ATM to the car.

"Really, how would you do that?" I asked.

The man started telling me how he and his ancestors were from Romania and had traveled throughout Europe as skilled metal workers for hundreds of years. He said that since he had been a young boy he had been a "miracle worker" with shaping metal and could fix anything. In between talking with me he would speak back and forth to his wife in some strange mother tongue I had never heard anyone speak before.

I had spent the \$5,000 from the insurance company and wanted to get my Porsche fixed. It was my prized possession. I also knew that this might be the only chance I had to get it fixed.

"How much will you charge?" I asked the man.

"No more than what you just took out of that machine," he said smiling and picking his teeth with a toothpick.

I love people who take advantage of opportunity wherever it presents itself. This man was a hustler but sometimes you can really benefit from being a hustler. If you can make a couple of hundred dollars doing nothing then all the power to you. Since I had spent a good portion of my life knocking on doors asking people if they wanted asphalt work, I knew how to hustle. I was enjoying meeting this man. Far too few people out there are always on the look out for opportunity. You need to be on the look out for every potential opportunity that presents itself to you. Just as this man was on the look out for opportunity, so too was I.

"How about \$200?" I asked. "I took out \$300 but need to take my wife out for dinner tonight. I can only take out \$300 a day and my credit cards are maxed out."

"Sure friend," the man said.

He wanted to follow me back to my house because he said it was not good for him to be working in public. I didn't ask a lot of questions. The man did not look all that trustworthy. I have lived in Europe before and this man reminded me of the Gypsies I had gotten to know a bit while living in Spain. Come to think of it, it occurred to me while I was driving back to my house, this man and his wife were most likely Gypsies.

When we got back to my house, the man reached into the bed of his pick up truck and grabbed a brick. He started rounding the edge of the brick by scraping it along the street. I had no idea what was going on.

"Are you sure you know what you are doing?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am a master metal smith ..." he said.

Within a few minutes he had shaped the brick and was now busy pounding away at the car with a hammer and had the brick positioned behind the metal. A couple of doors down I saw one of my neighbors come out of his house and start walking towards me. This neighbor of mine was pretty funny. He was a guy with a beard in his mid-50s who lived in a house similar to mine, but it was perched over a ravine and not a cliff. He was someone who did some sort of work for the music industry that involved him sitting in front of a bunch of equalizers he had set up in his living room (all over his entire living room) and mixing music into television shows. He was also about 350 pounds and had a massive beard. As far as I could tell, he smoked pot constantly. He would walk his dog down the street at 8:00 am smoking a joint. He was a really nice guy. A few months previously he had taken an illegal trip to Cuba (it was illegal for Americans to go there at the time) as a vacation. Since he had returned, he had decided that he had some sort of solidarity with Fidel Castro and the Cuban people. So he wore these military green t-shirts constantly.

He walked up to me and my car.

"What the hell are you doing?" he asked as he watched the man pounding away at the car.

"I'm getting my car fixed," I told him proudly. There was also a touch of humor to my voice since the situation looked so strange.

"Are you out of your mind? That is an expensive, exotic car. This guy is a Gypsy. He has no idea what he is doing." He looked upset.

As I looked at the car the dent had actually almost magically disappeared. In fact, with a little paint it would probably be as good as new. I couldn't believe my eyes. He had been working on the car for only a few minutes. Maybe he really did have a magical touch.

"You better get out here," the man said to the guy working on my car. "You have no business taking advantage of this kid!"

What happened over the next few minutes was all a blur. The two men started arguing and they were screaming at each other for several minutes. My fat neighbor was telling the guy who had been working on my car that he was going to call the police. They were starting to scream at each other so loud several neighbors had gathered on the street. It was sort of a comical thing until the wife of the Romanian man got involved.

At some point she had gotten out of the truck and came running towards my neighbor. She ran towards him and threw the contents of a pouch at him which appeared to be some sort of dust. My neighbor looked astonished and the argument stopped.

"GOD WILL STRIKE YOU DOWN!!!" she screamed at him. She then fell to her knees in the middle of the street and started screaming "GOD STRIKE THIS EVIL MAN DOWN!! STRIKE HIM DOWN!!!" She then started mumbling and rocking back and forth, and side to side with her eyes closed while screaming in whatever language she was speaking.

My neighbor looked a little frightened but was smiling.

"I guess you're on your own!" he said to me and began walking back to his house. Both the man and his wife were now screaming at him in their native language. Within a few minutes, they had gotten into their truck and taken off. I think they were worried they might be about to be imprisoned.

Strangely enough, a few weeks later I heard that my neighbor ended up in the hospital. I never saw him again because I moved out of the neighborhood a short time later. I never found out what happened to him.

After I had gotten my center back and my neighbors had all gone back to their homes, I went out and looked at the car. While it needed some paint where the work had been done, the dent looked entirely gone. The next week I took the car around to the shops I had taken it to initially and I was amazed. None of the estimates to complete the repair on my car were more than \$350. It just required simply some sanding and paint. It was as if a miracle had been worked by the man who I met in the parking lot.

I ended up [getting a job](#) that should have cost \$5000 done for about one tenth that, and it turned out fantastically well. None of this would have happened if I had not been willing to trust someone and take advantage of an opportunity when it presented itself. So many of us are afraid to trust others and cannot take advantage of opportunity when it presents itself. You need to be ready for opportunity when it appears, and trust others. This is one of the most important skills anyone can have.

I have spoken to the early employees of Google before. Some of the earliest employees reported it as a company with no business model for making money and zero revenue. It was disorganized and had leaders with zero management experience. But they trusted the company and ended up very, very rich. The same thing with Ebay and other great companies. Someone out of a patrician background looking for a stable company where they would be guaranteed a certain salary and have a massive level of stability would never have accepted one of these jobs. People did, and it paid off for them.

Opportunity presents itself in strange ways. Generally, if there is a risk, there is going to be a reward to compensate for this. Every risk we take has a potential reward at the other side. Generally, the greater the risk you take, the greater the reward. Here, I made \$4500 from taking a risk. I also took a risk when I purchased the house on a cliff. It was actually "okay" I found out later and I made over \$70,000 when I sold it 18 months later. For someone my age, that was an incredible amount of money--especially since it was tax free. I took the risk of potential death and also destroying my prized car, but my risks ultimately paid off.

So, too, is it with your life. You will generally only get ahead if you are taking risks. The greater the risk, the greater the reward. I grew up in a city called Grosse Pointe, Michigan. The way most of the city is organized is that there are streets that run from Lake St. Clair and directly away from it. The farther away you get from the lake, the smaller and closer together the homes get, until eventually the homes are less than 1,000 square feet. On the lake, the houses might be up to 20,000 square feet a have yards that are several acres large. The goal of most people in Grosse Pointe was always to live on the lake. When I was around 18, I started an asphalt business where I would do work for people in the small houses and also in the largest homes. One thing I quickly noticed that was unmistakable was that the people in the giant mansions overlooking the Lake had always taken huge risks with their careers. They had done things like stake their life savings on buying a piece of land that they later turned into a cemetery, and then had taken risks like this again and again. A block or so from the Lake you might find successful doctors or lawyers. The farther away from the Lake you got, the less risk peoples' jobs would have. When you got really far away, you would see people living in the smallest homes, having very predictable jobs, like working as janitors in the Post Office.

None of this is to say it is bad to be a janitor. My point to you is that the more risk you are able to tolerate, and the more faith you are able to have when taking risks, the greater results you will have in your career. You need to be very aware that in the end you will have to take some risks and trust in the outcome in order to succeed at the highest level possible.

THE LESSON

Trust people, and take advantage of opportunities however and wherever they present themselves. These are the two greatest skills that anyone can possess. You must have faith and trust in your employer when taking a job, and recognize that opportunities will frequently present themselves in strange ways. Every risk has a corresponding potential reward, and you generally will only succeed if you are taking risks to get to those awards. Have faith in others and take as many risks as you can, because greater risks tend to offer greater rewards.