



The Greatest Secret of Billionaires, 95-Year-Old Attorneys and the Retirement Myth

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I have been in Las Vegas this week, and a good five or six times, I have heard various people talk about how Steve Wynn does this, or Steve Wynn does that. There is absolutely no question that Wynn is a successful guy, and I would love to go over and see his new casino to see what it is all about. From what I understand, it is incredible. Everywhere I go, I am hearing stories about different people who have reached the pinnacle of success. Because a really good biography just came out about Warren Buffet, I have been hearing a tremendous amount about him lately, as well.

- There are surely lots of stories in Omaha about Warren Buffet.
- There are stories in Los Angeles about various tycoons like Kirk Kerkorian, David Geffen, and Summer Redstone.
- There are stories in New York about tycoons like Donald Trump, George Soros, and Michael Bloomberg.
- There are stories in Detroit about Mike Illich and Bill Davidson.
- There are stories in Chicago about William Wrigley Jr. and Oprah Winfrey.
- There are stories in Seattle about Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Paul Allen.
- There are stories in all of Arkansas about the Waltons.
- There are stories in San Francisco about Segey Brin and Larry Page.
- There are stories in Dallas about Ross Perot.

What is it that all of these people have in common?

I am sure one of the first things you are likely to say--and that anyone would say--is that they are rich. Yes, every single one of these people is extraordinarily rich and among the wealthiest people in the world. Conventional wisdom would say that these people are so wealthy they now have "the good life"--and can do whatever they want, whenever they want to do it. For example, they could certainly spend their time relaxing on a beach if they wanted to for the rest of their lives with no care in the world.

When observing the lifestyles of these people, one might be inclined to feel a tad jealous or envious. However, this is not how I feel when I look at these people.

What I observe about these men and women is that they are all still working.

That's right, each of these people is still working. They have not stopped working, and I am sure they never will stop working. Summer Redstone looks 100 years old and is still working. I cannot believe Donald Trump's hair is still real, and he is still working. Warren Buffet does not appear to even have a succession strategy according to many observers. Perhaps he thinks he will never die and will be able to work forever. None of these people stopped working when they got their first 10, 20, 50, 100, or 250 million dollars, and you had better believe that they never will. When we look at these people, we can tell that they love working and are committed to what they do.

All of these people are still working day after day, as successful as they are. Each day, these people get up and work and face various problems. The market may change and they might lose millions of dollars. Donald Trump, for example, has been sued a lot recently over condo deals gone bad and one of his casinos just filed for bankruptcy. In fact, it seems that as these people get older, we hear more and more about them. They keep showing up in the papers, and they continue to undertake more and more projects. Bill Gates is now working on eradicating disease in Africa. Bezos is busy expanding Amazon.com. Bloomberg was rumored to be interested in running for president during the last election.

Do you think these people do not have problems in their lives and careers?

Of course they do. They have huge problems, which they must deal with day after day. These people are the subjects of rumors and all sorts of other issues in the media. People question their judgment, call them washed up--and worse. But they keep charging forward.

Kirk Kerkorian is 92 years old. A couple of years ago, he purchased a huge part of General Motors and tried to get the company to merge with Nissan. He still plays tennis all the time.

Do you think a guy like Kerkorian was worried about retiring 37 years ago when he was in his mid-50s? I am sure he was not. Kerkorian is still working.

In order for these tycoons to continue working, it is essential and perhaps obvious that they absolutely love what they do. They could not continue working for so long unless they did.

Several years ago, I got divorced after a very short marriage in which my wife had lived at home for not more than six months. I remember that when I found out that my wife was divorcing me, she hired the meanest and most brutal lawyer possible in Los Angeles. Her lawyer's Web page talked about how she had crushed various other sides in divorces and so forth. The lawyer even sent a process server right into my office to serve me with papers in front of all of my employees, despite being asked by my wife not to. The attorney had a giant list of celebrity divorces and so forth that she had done, and it was really remarkable.

I was only 31 years old, had been married a very short time, and did not have a lot of money. I did have some businesses, though, and my wife's lawyer had gotten the ball rolling to freeze various assets and so forth. I did not know what was going on; however, I will confess to you that my wife's lawyer scared the heck out of me--and I am an attorney. This was several years ago, and everything I had read about this woman made me want to crawl under a rock and disappear.

At first, I decided that I would respond in kind and I found my own lawyer on CNN. I was watching the news channel one day

and I saw a woman who had represented Meg Ryan and all of these other famous people. She seemed to really know what she was doing. I called her and she told me to come by her office and bring with me \$50,000, or something like that. She was equally vicious toward my wife's lawyer and promised a long and drawn-out fight.

"We're going to stick up to these sons of bitches!" she told me on the phone, sounding like she was salivating for the fight. "I'll claw her eyes out personally if they try to freeze your assets!" she told me, referring to my wife's lawyer.

It was starting to dawn on me how much money this was going to cost me. \$50,000? At that point in my life, I had never even seen a check that large!

I canceled my first couple of visits with this woman and decided I needed to pursue a different tack. I needed a different sort of lawyer. I am not sure how I did it, but it was the best decision that I ever made.

I [found an attorney](#) who must have been in his mid-90s.

I'm not kidding. A week or so later, I was sitting in his office and he was taking notes. He had a hearing aide. His office had not been decorated in over 40 years. When he took notes, his hand shook. He had someone helping him around the office. He blew his nose every few minutes. His office smelled like mold. I had to repeat everything that I said at least twice.

Now, I must confess, I have practiced law with some of the best and biggest [law firms](#) in the world. When I read the *Wall Street Journal* every morning, I am always reading about attorneys I used to work with personally, who are exceptional in their work. Here, in my own divorce, I was up against someone who was trying to destroy me on the other side and take away my companies--my livelihood. However, I decided the best solution to this was to approach the situation with an apparent weakness. Sometimes it is in one's best interest to appear weak.

In this situation, had I gone with the cutthroat attorney, all that would have happened is that the lawyers on both sides would have taken everything. My wife would have been left with nothing, and everything would have been consumed in the fight. I married my ex-wife for many reasons, and the last thing I wanted was for her to be harmed emotionally and financially by a divorce. I also knew that fighting this thing would create a lifetime enemy, costing me very dearly financially and emotionally.

I realized that no one in his or her right mind would want to fight against a 95-year-old man in court. It would be like kicking a baby.

The entire divorce, from start to finish, ended up costing me a couple of thousand dollars. Everything was done out of court and was fair to both sides. No fighting, nothing. When my ex-wife met my attorney, she started crying. He was the sweetest elderly man you can imagine. A few weeks after the divorce was finalized, I think he died. I drove by, and his office was abandoned, and there was a sign up announcing an auction of the contents of the office, so I am assuming he died. Maybe he is still around--I do not know.

Why am I telling you about all this? Because the attorney I hired is yet another example of someone who worked into his nineties. People continue working because work gives their lives meaning. Even in your nineties you will have a purpose in the world and will have the ability to do great work. This particular attorney was working for a reason, namely because he loved what he did. He was not working for the money at that point--just as all of the tycoons I discussed above could have retired a long, long time ago.

The most successful people out there, in whom everyone seems so interested, are successful not because they are smarter than you. In fact, the chances are probably very good that you are smarter than many of these people. The reason these people are so successful is that they love what they are doing, and their work is a part of their lives and who they are. There is no separation for them between work and pleasure. They are, instead, people who live their work and in the process of living their work, they also enjoy what they do immensely. They will be working at what they do as long as they are around.

I want nothing more than for you to be incredibly successful and to [get the career](#) and life that you deserve. Your life can change when your job becomes part of who you are and when you start to love what you do. If you are not doing something that you can imagine yourself still doing in your nineties, then you are probably in the wrong profession.

Let me repeat this: *If you are not doing something that you can imagine yourself still doing in your nineties, then you are probably in the wrong profession.*

If you are a professional athlete, you should love your sport. You could imagine yourself as a coach. Can you imagine yourself continuing your life in your current career? You should be able to. If you cannot imagine yourself doing something forever, this is extremely problematical, and you need to consider making some changes or doing some serious self-exploration.

I remember when I was younger I worked in New York City, and during that time, I got to meet a lot of bankers and other people who were very interested in becoming incredibly wealthy. That was around 15 years ago. I can honestly say that the people I can remember being so interested in becoming wealthy and retiring with a bunch of money at an early age never did. They also never made it in banking. In my experience, the people who make it in every profession are the people who really seem to love what they are doing. They do not think about getting in and getting out. They fall in love with their work and cannot imagine doing anything else with their lives.

This brings me back to all of these tycoons. Do you think a guy like Warren Buffet wanted to make a couple of million dollars and then [retire in Omaha](#)? Can you imagine this guy just standing around on Wall Street, saying how much he wanted to make money and having incredible enthusiasm for this? Absolutely not. He was passionate about investing and really, really interested in this, starting at a young age. He loved the work the most-- not what came after it. It is the same thing with everyone who is good at anything. They love their job, and they can never imagine giving it up for good. Donald Trump's father was in real estate and Trump Jr. loved real estate from a young age. He will always love it.

The people society respects, the ones who are achieving the most out there, are the people who love what they are doing to such an extent that they will never retire. If you can do one thing with your life that will make the greatest difference in the quality of your life between today and the future, it is this: Do something you will never want to retire from doing.

THE LESSON

Do work that you love, and make it part of your life and identity. Success comes to people who love what they are doing, because their work becomes part of their lives, and there ceases to be a separation between work and pleasure for them. If you are not doing something that you could not imagine yourself doing into your old age, then you are probably in the wrong profession.

