

## Never Go for the “Quick Advantage”

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Once when I was around 12 years old, I was riding my bicycle and a car came out of nowhere, knocked me down, and then ran over the bike. The man who hit me was coming out of a bank and had crossed a sidewalk, not looking where he was going. I was a little banged up and my bike was destroyed. I could tell when I saw the man's face that he was very sorry for what he had done. I was bleeding, having filed down one of my teeth a bit on some concrete in the fall. Some ground tooth was floating around in my mouth. I knew my scabs would heal over in a few weeks. The bike that was ruined was one that I had gotten at a garage sale, and I did not really care too much about it anyway. I could tell even then that the man was terrified that I was going to sue him or something.

He tried to give me several hundred dollars as I sat on the curb bleeding. "Here, please take the money!" he said holding a large stash of bills in front of my face. "It was my fault!"

I told him I would be ok, that the bike was a cheap one anyway, and not to worry about it. He looked perplexed. Then he gave me his business card and told me to call him if I needed any money or any reimbursements for medical bills. As the man got into his car to drive off I could tell he was incredibly worried about the entire thing.

I called him the next day at his office.

"I just want to let you know I am ok," I told him. "You seemed very concerned."

"Can I at least buy you a new bike?" he asked.

"No, I'm fine," I told him. "It was an old bike anyway."

"What did your parents say about the accident?" he asked.

"I did not tell them. I did not want to upset them."

The man sounded really incredulous on the phone. He was nice and I ended the conversation. I threw the bike away and within three weeks or so all of my scabs were gone from the accident. I just had some small scars on my knees.

Around a year later my best friend picked up his Schwinn bicycle from a shop on Mack Avenue in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, after taking it there to get a flat tire changed. As he was riding out of the store he ran over a curb. The tire came off, and my friend fell into the street and hit and scraped his head.

He was fine and walked away, getting a couple of stitches if I remember correctly. However, this was not the end of the story. My friend's mother decided to file a massive lawsuit against the bike shop, which dragged on for at least a year before it was settled out of court. The mother pulled her son out of school a couple of times for depositions and the entire thing turned into a big ordeal. I think she ended up getting something like \$19,000 from the bike shop, which was a lot of money at the time.

The mother then took all that money and spent it on herself. My friend was very upset about this; he ended up moving out of his mother's house and moved in with a relative after a short time.

The worst thing about the incident at the bike store was that after the lawsuit, it was no longer easy to get a bike fixed there. People under 18 were no longer allowed to drop their bikes off, and adults needed to sign all sorts of papers. The shop started charging an "inspection fee" for every bike it looked at. The atmosphere in the store changed from being a very nice, friendly group of people to being a group who were cautious and on guard at all times. I could see this even as a young guy.

This is something I have seen over and over again in one form or another: There are just so many people out there who will do whatever they can to take advantage of everyone and every situation. The problem with this is that life is a long haul. Our efforts should be going toward creating long term value--not taking returns from people every chance we get. When I think about my friend's experience, which was not too dissimilar from my own, I wonder what good that \$19,000 really did any way. My friend became alienated from his mother. He lost some respect for her; I imagine he was probably even forced to "fib a little" in his lawsuit, in order to exaggerate his injuries. He missed school, alienated the owners of a respectable local business, and ultimately became very angry with his mother as a result. He also probably hurt someone and some family in a way that was unjustified. I do not think it is worth taking advantage of others--our efforts should go into providing value and earning the return, not simply taking the return when it is not justified.

Something that is incredibly important in everything you do is to be consistently building for the long haul. However, instead of doing this, many people are looking to get a "quick advantage" here or there. Instead of concentrating on providing value, they concentrate their efforts on taking value. A large proportion of the world seems to operate this way.

I had the most remarkable experience a few months ago. Having flown in from Australia, I checked into an unknown hotel that I found near the airport in Namale, Fiji. The hotel was no more than \$120 a night or so and I planned to stay there just one night while waiting for my wife to arrive from Los Angeles the next morning. I plugged in my computer when I got to my room and began checking my email and so forth. I also signed in to my computer back home and copied over a couple of files. Then, after a few hours of work, I went to bed.

The next day when I was checking out of the hotel I got the surprise of my life. Instead of charging me \$20 a day to use the Internet, for example, the hotel had charged me for bandwidth. The total charge for using the Internet in the hotel came close to \$400. I did what anyone else would do. I asked to speak with the manager. I was incredibly angry and could not believe the charge. There was, of course, a card or something near the Internet jack in the room, which explained that the hotel charged for bandwidth; however, I did not notice, let alone take the time to read the little posting. Prior to staying in this hotel I had stayed in numerous hotels in Fiji, and never come across a situation where the hotel charged for bandwidth like this. It

appeared as if the hotel had figured out a *scam* and in order to get lots of money from unsuspecting tourists like myself, by not clearly disclosing what the charge would be in advance.

As my wife and I were being driven by the hotel bus to the airport, the driver volunteered to us that every day several tourists, pilots, and others made a scene in the hotel lobby when they got their final bills. He said he felt the owners of the hotel were "criminals," and he did not understand how they could get away with it. He said that since the hotel had started "charging for bandwidth," a big part of his job had turned into counseling people who were angry, as he took them to the airport each day.

I am sure that throughout your life you have met numerous people who tricked you and tried to take advantage of you in some way. There is a mentality that many people have that says "I need to get as much as I can from this person right now or else I might not get anything at all." This attitude comes from a sense of weakness, and it is something that continually holds people back. Not taking into account the long term, and always going in for the quick fix can be very dangerous. Over time the disadvantages of this philosophy and behavior far outweigh any immediate returns.

The long term is very important, but often overlooked. See, in this case, each day the hotel is alienating various patrons, who will never come back to them. While being near an airport is a good business strategy, alienating the people who stay there is not. Over the long term the hotel will suffer. At some point the lost business will be enough that the hotel will probably go out of business, or have to be sold for less than its worth.

Several years ago, when I was in college, I got into a bad argument with my girlfriend. The two of us had not seen each other in a few days and I was completing an asphalt [job in a small farming](#) community outside of Detroit. I was covered in tar, which was burning my skin, and it was late at night. My girlfriend and I had had an argument that afternoon before I had gone out to work, and I felt like I needed to call her. I knew that I would not be getting back to Detroit until after 1:00 am at which point, if I called, I would probably wake up my girlfriend's family.

So I pulled over my asphalt truck and trailer into the large and empty parking lot of a small convenience store in the middle of nowhere. It was late and the store was just closing. I went inside and grabbed a Diet Coke as the store was shutting down. There were no other customers around. I used the pay phone in the parking lot. A lamp post towered above the pay phone, providing the only light I could see for miles. Mosquitoes and other bugs were slamming up against the post one by one. The entire time I was there only a few cars passed by. The convenience store was the sort of shop that does not stock a large inventory, and the items it sells are mostly by brands you have never heard of: off name deodorants, generic foods, and all kinds of stuff that you might find at a dollar store.

I remember standing there in that parking lot speaking with my girlfriend for a little over an hour, and by the end of the conversation everything was fine again. In order to make the telephone call I had needed to give the operator a credit card number. The operator worked for the pay phone company, which was a company I had never heard of. After having made up with my girlfriend yet again, I drove home and fell asleep after taking a long, hot shower and scrubbing all the tar off my body.

A few weeks later I got a phone bill for the call to my girlfriend and I nearly jumped out of my socks. The call had cost over \$350. She had not been overseas, she had been in Washington, DC, and I was in Detroit. The phone company had some weird name and the charge seemed completely out of line. The call had lasted around 80 minutes. I was really disgusted by having to pay the bill, and at that point in my life it was a real financial hit. I had been saving all my money for college.

A few years later I was in France with my wife and we were outside Paris, trying to make a phone call from a pay phone to call our travel agent. The phone we were calling from wanted \$35.00 for three minutes and they refused to let us make a collect call. Again, it was a phone company I had never heard of. Calls from France in my experience had never cost more than \$1.00 per minute at that time.

That experience left a bad taste in my mouth because I understood right then and there that there are so many people and organizations all over the world, motivated by an attitude of scarcity. They will try, every chance they get, to take as much as possible from us. Instead of trying to give what they have to people--and with fairness, over time, they try to ruthlessly take everything they possibly can from people, all at once. These people do not focus on providing long term value, which can result in sustainable returns.

You need to provide long term value in everything you do. Long term value is among the most important things you can provide to others. When you look at the people who have the most, achieve the most, and *live* the most, it is always the people who contribute and *give* the most. This is where the power lies, and understanding this will change your career and life for the better.

### **THE LESSON**

Direct your efforts to creating the most long-term value in everything you do, rather than taking from people every chance you get. The people who have and achieve the most are those who contribute and give the most; true power and success lies in doing so, and will forever change your life and career for the better.