



You Always Need a Backup Plan

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Being in the asphalt business in Detroit taught me very early on that things frequently go wrong. In fact, things go wrong so frequently, it is difficult to believe:

- Pumps break.
- Tanks break.
- Trucks break.
- People get injured.
- Employees do not show up to work.
- It rains.
- The police give you a hard time for the condition of your equipment.
- People do not pay you for the work you have done for them.
- Suppliers go out of business.
- Customers get incredibly angry with you.
- Accidents occur, and materials get spilled on roadways.
- People rob you.
- People steal your equipment.
- You need to "pay off" certain people in order to operate in certain geographic areas.

The list of things that go wrong in the asphalt business is virtually endless. I will mention this again: *So many things went wrong when I was in the asphalt business, it was difficult to believe.*

I noticed all of this during my first month! The stress and number of things that had gone wrong on a regular basis was absolutely unbelievable. I was **so** stressed out. This was the only time I can remember being physically sick in my entire life. I had bounced a few checks because certain customers did not pay me. Some of my equipment was broken, and I did not have money to fix it. The stress had taken its toll, and one day, I simply could not get out of bed. When I moved, my head just started throbbing. I felt nauseated and sick, but thankfully, not to where I was throwing up; I was just overwhelmed with tremendous stress.

I was staying with my father in his apartment, and after work one Friday around 6:00 p.m. he took me to TGI Fridays for dinner. It was a Friday night, and I did not want to eat. The smell of food made my head throb. The more I heard the festive music in the restaurant, the more ill I felt. It was as if all the activity was removing the energy from my body. I had to ask my father to take me back to the apartment.

To this day, I do not like loud restaurants because it reminds me of the stress I was feeling back then, on that one day. In fact, even writing about this makes me feel the same pressure in my head that I felt at that time. It was not pleasant at all, because I felt out of control and completely backed into a corner. *I just didn't know what to do.* I knew my parents would not give me money, and I knew I had to make do on my own. I had to fight in order to survive, but I did not see any way out:

- I only had one truck and it was broken.
- I only had one bank account and there was no money in it.
- I only had one job and I needed my truck to do the work.

I finally realized one very important thing. That feeling of being cornered, of having no options, was incredibly frightening. *It was an awful thing.* As I lay in bed--not knowing what to do, my head throbbing, I realized that I never wanted to be in this situation again. I learned that having no options and feeling completely alone without any back up plan, whatsoever was absolutely the worst thing possible.

A short time ago, I had a conversation with a woman who did not make enough money after expenses, to eat. She relied on her boyfriend to feed her every single night. I listened to her story, and it brought back memories from when I too felt like I had no options. From what this woman was telling me, unless she relied on her boyfriend, she would never be able to survive.

[pullquote]If you are dependent upon just one person, you are going to be left with a life that does not fulfill you, and a life that you are not happy with.[/pullquote]

"Never be dependent upon a man, or just one person," I told her. "If you are dependent upon just one person, you are going to be left with a life that does not fulfill you, and a life that you are not happy with."

Any time we are completely dependent upon one person, one company, or one anything, we are in real danger. In fact, this is among the most dangerous positions you can put yourself in.

When I got out of law school, I considered working as an attorney in Detroit. However, in Detroit at the time, there was only one law firm that paid a salary competitive with the firms in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. I knew many of the people working in this Detroit law firm, and probably all worked harder than the attorneys in Chicago, a bigger city, because there were no other options in Detroit. If they wanted to earn a big city salary, this was the only law firm for them in Detroit. For me, having no other options but this law firm, was a terrifying prospect. If I did not like the law firm then I would be in a pretty sorry state. I would be stuck in Detroit with no other options. If I wanted to move to a different state I would need to take the bar

exam in that state. These didn't seem like very good options to me. I did not, of course, take a [job in Detroit](#).

I also worked for a year in Bay City, Michigan, which is near Midland, Michigan, where Dow Chemical Company is located. There are hundreds of chemists working at Dow Chemical, and Midland is in the middle of nowhere. Imagine how you would feel if you were a chemist working here and you did not like your job. You would probably have to move. You would have to sell your house. You would have to pull your kids out of school. You would have to leave your friends in the area. You would be without options unless you relocated.

This morning I walked into my office and looked at my computer and it had a big error message on the screen. I was understandably a little upset with this and screwed around for about an hour trying to get the computer to start. I do have two computers hooked up near my desk for these sorts of eventualities. In fact, I also keep two Internet connections available at all times, in case one fails. In addition, I also have a laptop that operates with a cellular connection in case my two internet connections fail. Since a lot of my job is done online, it is crucial that I always have a backup plan in case anything goes wrong. You always need backups in case something goes wrong.

I operate numerous companies. A couple of years ago my most successful company was a student loan company. In fact, this company was so incredibly successful that at one point, it seemed like a good idea to drop everything and concentrate on just this. However, I never did. In fact, I focused on my other companies at that time period, such as my job search engines. Back then, I would have gotten a much higher return had I plowed all of my profits into student loans. But something incredible happened: The student loan market and credit markets collapsed completely. Almost overnight our entire student loan business lost over 95% of its revenue because the market froze up. Had I relied on this business exclusively, our company might have gone out of business altogether. Fortunately, we had numerous other businesses to pick up the slack. You always need to keep many fish in the water.

The existence of back up plans is not just confined to the computers I use, or to my businesses. It is something that I employ in virtually every area of my career. I have back up offices, back up servers, back up employees, backup power, back up this, and back up that, and virtually every form of *back up* you can think of. I learned from the asphalt business. I learned that I always needed several different backup systems. You too, need to have backup systems in everything you do. They are crucial in all respects.

One of my favorite movies is Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. The movie revolves around a group of airplanes headed towards Russia to release nuclear bombs. As one of the airplanes prepares to drop a nuclear bomb, the following exchange occurs between the pilot and the man operating the switches to open the bomb bay:

Kong:

Check bomb door circuits one through four.

Bombardier:

Ah... bomb door circuits, negative function. Lights red.

Kong:

Switch in backup circuits.

Bombardier:

Roger. Backup circuits switched in, still negative function.

Kong:

Engage emergency power.

Bombardier:

Roger. Emergency power on. Still negative function.

Kong:

Operate manual override!

Bombardier:

Roger. Ah... still negative function. The teleflex drive cable must be sheared away.

Kong:

Fire the explosive bolts!

Bombardier:

Roger. Um... still negative, sir. The operating circuits are dead, sir.

Kong:

Stay on the bomb run, Ace. I'm going down below to see what I can do.

Copilot:

Roger.

Kong:

(to DSO and Bombardier) Stay on the bomb run boys. I'm goin' to get them doors open if it hure lips everybody on Bear Creek. (Proceeds through hatch to bomb bay. Kong studies a sparking tangle of wires above a suspended bomb, and then climbs atop, fanning the sparks with his stetson.)

I love this exchange because it shows a number of backup systems on airplanes so that if one system fails, another will be available to replace it. In an airplane, there are multiple backup systems. *No backup system means that people will die if everything does not function properly.* Backup systems are incredibly important in airplanes.

I have been reading about the recent Air France crash over the Atlantic Ocean for the past week or so and I was very interested to see the following story in Saturday's *Wall Street Journal* titled *Computer Failures are Probed in Jet Crash*:

An international team of experts is building a scenario in which it believes a cascade of system failures, seemingly beginning with malfunctioning airspeed sensors, rapidly progressed to what appeared to be sweeping computer outages, according to people familiar with the probe. The Airbus A330, en route from Rio de Janeiro to Paris, crashed into the Atlantic Ocean during a storm 26 days ago, killing all 228 aboard.

Based on initial physical evidence and information from automatic maintenance messages sent by the aircraft, these people said, the plane bucked through heavy turbulence created by a thunderstorm without the full protection of its flight-control systems -- safeguards that experts say pilots now often take for granted.

Relying on backup instruments, the Air France pilots apparently struggled to restart flight-management computers even as their plane may have begun breaking up from excessive speed, according to theories developed by investigators.

The investigators stress it is too early to pinpoint specific causes. But whatever the eventual findings, the crash already is prompting questions about how thoroughly aviators are trained to cope with widespread computer glitches midflight.

If such emergencies do occur on today's increasingly automated jetliners, many industry safety experts wonder how proficient the average crew may be in trying to rely on less-sophisticated backup systems.

The difficulty is, they're rare enough that pilots can be unprepared, but likely enough to pose a real threat," according to Bill Voss, president of the Flight Safety Foundation, an industry-supported group based in Alexandria, Va. "We need to examine how to deal with automation anomalies."

Unlike jetliners built in previous decades -- which required pilots to frequently manipulate controls and often manually fly the planes for long stretches -- newer computer-centric aircraft such as the A330 and Boeing's 777 are designed to operate almost entirely on automated systems. From choosing engine settings and routes to smoothing out the ride during turbulence and landing in low visibility, pilots essentially monitor instruments and seldom interfere with computerized commands. So when those electronic brains begin to act weirdly at 35,000 feet, the latest crop of aviators may be less comfortable stepping in and grabbing control of the airplane.

Here it looks like there were serious issues with the backup systems on the airplane. The issues with the backup systems are the likely cause of the crash.

Just as a backup systems failure can cause a plane to crash, the absence of adequate backup systems in your life can cause tremendous problems. It is crucial that you always have backup systems in your life and, more importantly, in your career. I have dedicated a large part of my career encouraging people to use backup systems and have access to them at all times. *You need backup systems in your career and there is nothing more important than this.*

When stock investors are investing in stocks, they almost never invest their entire savings or portfolio in one stock. Putting an investment in just one stock is usually a real mistake. For example, many people had their entire life savings invested with Bernie Madoff, and they lost everything. Very few investment advisors would ever advise you to invest your entire life savings with just one stock, or just one fund, but this is still what many people do, and the results are often disastrous. Your career is like a stock. There is a real danger in investing in just one person, one location, or one relationship. You need to be aware of where you can invest at all times, and understand the market.

A good stock trader is likely going to review the stock pages in the paper on a daily basis to understand what is going on in the market. They want to know what is increasing in value and what is decreasing in value. They want to know which sectors are hot and which sectors are not hot. They want to understand what they should sell and what they should buy. They are always going to have various ideas of where to invest and they are almost always going to be diversified in multiple sectors so if something goes wrong in one area, they can be ready to invest in another.

Your career is no different than a stock. You should always be aware of where you can invest and what you can do if things go wrong in any area of your career. I recommend that people be aware of what is going on in the market and keep track of [job openings](#) that match their areas of interest-- not only within their geographic sector, but also in other locations. You need to know how marketable you are at all times and you should always be mindful of where you can seek employment if things go wrong.

I have been reading a lot of stories about attorneys losing their jobs lately in various law firms around the United States. What typically happens is someone shows up at their office door unannounced, walks in, and lays them off. Most of the attorneys never see it coming. The job sites I operate like [LawCrossing.com](#), [EmploymentCrossing.com](#), and [Hound.com](#) are sites that consolidate jobs in various industries. Visitors to the websites can see which firms are hiring at different points in time, and can help people keep track of what is going on in the market.

The time to start [looking for a job](#), or to become aware of what is going on in the market is not when you have lost a job, or have quit a job. In my opinion, one of the smartest things you can do is to monitor the market at all times. This means using sites like [EmploymentCrossing.com](#) even when you are not looking for a job, just to understand what it is going on in the market. This way you can formulate options. You always need options within your career, and a backup system in place. There are numerous advantages to monitoring the market at all times:

- You will know if you are being paid fairly.
- You will know if you can make more elsewhere.
- You will know if there are a lot of openings in your field at present.
- You will learn what the job market is like for your geographic area.
- You will get a sense of how much job security you may have in your area.
- You will be ready to start looking for a job if things get bad or if you lose your job.
- You will learn that you might need to develop new skills.
- You will learn (it has happened!) if your own employer is trying to replace you, or is hiring in other divisions.

I could list numerous other reasons to constantly monitor the job market. But the main point is that you can learn a tremendous amount from doing so.

I meet people who have lost their jobs all the time. Many of these people have had the same employers for 30 years or more. When they lose their jobs, they do not know what to do. They are completely confused, and angry. Remember: you never want to feel trapped by one person, job, or employer. A backup system for your career and an awareness of the market at all times will provide you with the options you need in case something fails. The secret to your success lies in making the most of all available options, and being able to do so, even when things go wrong. And make no mistake; there are always things that will go wrong.

