



Phony Accident Scenes, Internal Affairs, Racial Discrimination, and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One Friday evening in 2002, I decided to take a couple of our company's prized employees out for dinner. We had had an excellent week and morale was pretty high within the company. We typically worked very hard and quite late every night of the week, and Fridays were a day when we often did things together as a group, to unwind.

I had recently leased a new Toyota Land Cruiser for a very good price because it was the previous year's model. The truck looked brand-new and before we went out to eat I wanted to take the employees for a quick drive in the new truck to show it off. Our office at the time was in a building known as the Oviatt Building, which is in an area of Los Angeles that is right next to skid row. There are a lot of bad neighborhoods around downtown Los Angeles, and turning out of the office forced me to go right through one of them.

After a minute or two of driving, I was sitting at a stop light behind a late model Honda Accord. It was dark outside and we were on a side street. There was no one else around or close by. When the light turned green, the Accord accelerated and then slammed on its breaks in the middle of the intersection. I slammed on my breaks as well and the truck came to a stop about a foot and a half away from the Accord. Before I had a chance to do anything, a large woman got out of the car and started screaming at me:

"Did you hit my car? Did you hit my car?"

I got out and pointed out to her that the truck was stopped a fair distance from her car. I also showed her that there was not a single scratch on the back of her vehicle or the front of mine. Finally, I asked her why she had suddenly slammed on her breaks in the middle of the intersection when there was clearly no reason for her to have done so. She kept screaming: "I think you hit my car!!"

She told me that she was going to call the police to do an investigation of the "accident scene" and she got on her cell phone and called 911. Within a few minutes, a police car showed up and the woman explained to them that she thought I had hit her car.

The police officers took out their flashlights and walked around both of our cars. Of course, there were no scratches whatsoever.

The woman kept insisting that the officers make a detailed report about the "accident," and the officers told the woman that there did not appear to be any damage to the cars, that no one appeared hurt, and that they did not see why she felt like she needed a police report.

"You never know...," she told the police, and thus the police began to take down statements from me, the two passengers in my car, the woman who had been driving the Accord, and her passenger.

The area where the "accident" had happened was like something out of a post-apocalyptic movie. It was horrifying and scary. As the police were taking down statements, we witnessed the police stop and arrest a pedestrian across the way. The people on the street all looked worn down, and the area had a really bad vibe. I felt sorry for the people on the street.

I remembered having been in the vicinity once before this incident. I had been heading home during a terrible rain storm. There was a man who was sitting in a wheelchair along the side of the road, sleeping in the rain. He was under a store awning but it was not covering him and he was drenched. There was a bottle of liquor resting on his lap as he slept. I got out of my car and walked toward him and put the only money I had on me, a \$20 bill, in his hand while he slept. The bad areas of downtown Los Angeles are so tragic and sad; the people need help. It seemed crazy to me that bums, drug addicts, and others were walking by and were up to God-knows-what, while the police were sitting here writing a report about an accident that never happened.

From what I recall, there was a bit of an argument between the woman and the police. The police kept telling the woman there had been no accident and the woman told them that "there might have been" an accident. The entire thing did not make a lot of sense. We must have been there on the side of the road for at least thirty minutes while the woman was forcing the police to prepare information about an accident that hadn't occurred.

After this bizarre episode, I forgot completely about it until a couple of weeks later, when I was sitting in my office and received a telephone call from my insurance agent. I had never liked my insurance agent all that much. He was a really good-looking guy who dressed very well and drove around in a Chevy Suburban. He looked like Ken from the Barbie set my daughter plays with.

The reason I did not like this guy was that he kept looking for excuses and reasons to stop by my house to speak with my wife when I was not home; for instance, he once paid a visit to make sure that the water heater was strapped down properly, and another time, to write down the VIN number of one of the cars. It was really annoying and one day I decided to be there when he stopped by for some "important reason" or another. Of course, he thought I was not going to be home. After he saw that I was home, the guy went into a little tool kit in his car, pulled out one of those tire pressure gauges, and measured the pressure in my wife's and my tires. It was a strange and really uncomfortable situation. I have no idea what tire pressure could possibly have to do with insurance rates. Then, after some time, my now ex-wife totaled her ten-year-old Alfa Romeo Spider and the insurance agent gave her a settlement that was at least three times what the car must have been worth. That was very strange.

A few years later his assistant told me he was going through a divorce, and I remember hearing something about him cheating on his wife. I think it must have been a really tough divorce because when I spoke to the agent while he was going through it, he sounded really upset. But he was a real dog.

"The passenger is still in the hospital," he told me. "And the Honda Accord was totaled in the accident," he said. He never thought I was very alarmed.

"Accident?" I said. "There was no accident."

"Well both of the women are claiming serious injuries, and I just got a report from the dealership that says the frame of the woman's car was bent beyond repair."

I was a little confused by this whole thing since there had not been any accident at all.

"There's another thing," he said. "The driver of the Accord is an officer with the California Highway Patrol. She has a lot of credibility here. She is currently out on disability due to the accident and is wearing a neck brace."

I was very surprised by this entire thing. The woman had never mentioned she was a state officer, and for a CHP officer she was a really lousy driver. Needless to say, I was very confused by what was going on. Obviously, the woman had staged some sort of accident.

When I explained that the accident appeared to have been staged, the insurance agent did not seem to believe me.

A month or so later I came home from work and someone had nailed a lawsuit notice to my front door. I learned I was being sued for medical bills, a new car, pain and suffering, and other damages. I forwarded this to my insurance agent and started getting calls from lawyers about this strange lawsuit every week or so.

Then one day I was sitting in my office and one of the best-looking and best-dressed couples I had ever seen in my life walked right into my office without even knocking. The people looked like movie stars. They were incredibly fit and carried themselves with a great deal of composure. Both the man and the woman had slight but perfect tans.

"Hello, we are from Internal Affairs of the Los Angeles Police Department. Do you have a moment to discuss something?" the man asked. He showed me his badge.

The couple sat down in my office and put a small tape recorder on the desk, and started asking all sorts of questions about the accident. They asked the same questions about fifteen different ways, but seemed mostly concerned about the officers who had showed up at the accident scene.

"Did they call the woman driving the car by any racial epithets like *spook* or *nigger*?" they asked.

"What are you talking about?" I said. "Of course they did not. The officers who showed up were very courteous."

"Did they tell the woman: *Sit your fat black Aunt Jemima ass back in the car. We're giving orders here?*"

"No, of course they did not," I told them.

"Did you ever get a sense that the police officers were not going to be honest about the details of the accident because they hated African Americans?" one of the officers asked me.

"This is insane. There was no accident!" I said. "In fact, from what I remember, the two officers who showed up were both Hispanic and pretty nice guys. They were pretty confused about the entire thing, but acted like real gentlemen. They did not seem to me to be racists at all."

The Internal Affairs officers then took my two employees, who had also been in the truck with me, into a conference room, where the officers proceeded to ask them a bunch of questions individually. Each interview took well over an hour and was recorded. It was the same sort of interview that I had had, with each person being asked questions about the alleged racist remarks and so forth.

The next day, the officers had some special group of people come to take my Land Cruiser away for the better part of a day, in order to photograph and run tests on it, to determine if there had really been an accident.

A few days after they had interrogated me and my two employees, the Internal Affairs officers showed up again and asked all the same questions in a different way. Then, a week or so later, they called me on the phone and asked me all the same questions yet again. Some weeks later, they showed up at the office one morning with their recorders again and took me and the two employees into private conference rooms and started asking us questions all over again--as if it were the first time.

I called my insurance agent after the last round of interviews by the Internal Affairs officers and asked him what was going on. The guy from Internal Affairs had just called me with some strange stuff:

"We're going to run paint tests to see if the chemical composition of the current bumper matches the paint on the truck, but to save all of us time, I am sure you would tell us if you replaced the bumper after the accident, right?"

This entire situation was among the strangest I had ever encountered in my life. THERE HAD BEEN NO ACCIDENT, yet this was turning into one of the most outrageous series of events with which I had ever been involved.

"Those two women have a huge lawsuit going against LAPD for racial discrimination. They are claiming that the officers wrote up that there was no accident, ignored the damage to their car, and refused to call any ambulances--because they hated African Americans. This entire thing is a real mess. From what I hear, the driver may have to go back into the hospital again shortly."

I am not sure what ever happened with the lawsuit against the LAPD. What I do know, however, was that this *accident that never was* ended up costing a tremendous amount of money for my insurance company, it cost me a ton of time, and my insurance company ultimately settled the entire thing out of court for a lot of money. The reason that the insurance company settled for so much money was that the woman who filed the phony lawsuit was a California Highway Patrolwoman, and they felt that she would have made a very convincing plaintiff.

This entire episode made me incredibly angry.

- I had read about staged accidents, but I certainly never thought I would be part of one.
- I had heard about phony racial discrimination lawsuits, but I certainly never thought I would be part of one.
- I had heard about people abusing the judicial system, but I certainly never thought I would witness it firsthand.
- I had heard about people telling horrible lies to make money, but I certainly never thought I would witness it firsthand.
- I had heard about corrupt state officers, but I certainly never thought I would witness it firsthand.
- I had heard about people abusing the medical system, getting doctors and others to give phony diagnoses--but I certainly never thought I would witness it firsthand.
- I had heard about people making up lies about other people to try to destroy their careers, but I certainly never thought I

would witness it firsthand.

Why would one person and her friend feel the need to stage a phony accident? Why would one person and her friend lie and create all sorts of problems for others? Why would one person and her friend feel the need to accuse people of racial epithets and so forth, *when none of this ever actually happened?*

I was simply accused of hitting a car. The officers involved were accused of something much more serious, however, which could very well have ruined their careers and tarnished their reputations forever. The driver and her friend had created this giant story about racial discrimination for nothing other than to extract money from the Los Angeles Police Department. I know how deceptive these women were because I was there the entire time the event was unfolding.

What does this story say about the world that we live in? And how is this story relevant to your career and your life?

What this episode made crystal clear for me is that there are a lot of people out there who want to try shortcuts to get ahead--at any and all costs. A fraudulent lawsuit, or damaging someone's reputation, an insurance company, or others in some unethical manner is a real cheap shortcut and a pathetic attempt to get ahead. Any sort of short-term gains these actions may bring forth will never produce any long-term results or success on any level.

I have heard of many people who have filed phony lawsuits and who have done other unethical things in the past. I do not respect these people and never trust them. Creating a life of meaning and having a profitable career and life cannot be created at a traffic light in downtown Los Angeles by creating a fake accident. It requires work and lots of it.

You can never cut corners and have a valuable career and life.

The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus once stated: "Never esteem anything as of advantage to thee that shall make thee break thy word and lose thy self-respect."

You need to build your life and career upon doing good, and through doing things the right way. In this you will find the path to sustaining real success and a happy life.

THE LESSON

Identify and uphold your values, and live your life in an ethical manner rather than trying short cuts to get ahead at any cost. A meaningful life and profitable career simply requires work, and lots of it. While some attain success through shortcuts, this success is always short-lived; instead, you must base your life and career on doing things the right way for sustained, long-term success.

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