

Vested Interests: Ask Yourself, "Does This Really Serve Me?"

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One thing you often find is that there seem to be a great number of people out in the world whose chosen business is to make your life and circumstances, whatever they may be, seem much worse than they are. In fact, in your day-to-day life, you are probably already continually surrounded by various people whose personal interests lie in making you feel bad about yourself and the world in general. Your success and ability to get on will in large part be determined by your ability to sift through all of this negative information coming at you.

A few years ago I bought a house, and the [real estate agent](#) who had represented the seller contacted me within a few weeks of the move. I travel a lot for business and would not be occupying the house full time.

"You should be renting it out," the agent told me. This got me thinking and what the agent suggested sounded like a good deal. She went on:

"We could rent it for two and a half times your monthly mortgage. We also could probably even sell it right away for 25% more money than you paid!" she remarked.

The agent was well dressed and very polished, and she really seemed to know what she was talking about. I got very excited about her ideas and quickly started to feel like I was an incredibly gifted buyer of real estate who had managed to secure an amazing deal.

"There's one thing," the real estate agent said. "In order to market the property successfully as a rental property at this price, you are going to need to make it more 'hip' and desirable. If you can do this, you will do very, very well."

Within a few days, the real estate agent came over to my house with a designer, who took one look around the place and decreed that the entire house and all its furniture were dreadful and in urgent need of a makeover. Much of the furniture in the house had been handed down to me by my family and was actually very nice. For example, I inherited some items from a very wealthy family member, who used to be a United States Senator. In addition, the last house I had purchased had been completely vacated by a family of Australians, who moved back to Australia and did not take their furniture with them. I was amazed that the combined value of all the furnishings was upwards of \$1 million--and they simply left it all behind. I personally have never spent more than \$1,000 on a piece of furniture.

I had moved all this "free furniture" into the new house, which the designer was now considering redecorating. Furniture like this was declared "tacky" and "dated," and the designer suggested all sorts of replacement items, such as painted particleboard knock-offs of designer furniture, which she could import from China.

The designer insisted that everything needed to be changed. The real estate agent continued to emphasize that the house would never rent or sell for the outrageous prices she was proposing unless I immediately got to work with her designer. She also told me that she would refuse to show the house to anyone unless I went through with commissioning an incredible amount of work to have everything "updated" as quickly as possible. The designer proceeded to throw around some outrageous price quotes, and I was completely perplexed. After all, I had furnished the house with all kinds of beautiful items, which someone had previously purchased for more than \$1 million.

"Throw it all out!" the designer declared.

I began to feel bad about the furniture we had in our house. I started to believe we were in serious need of a design upgrade. For weeks I looked at things like our hand-carved \$20,000+ chairs, which were adorning various rooms, and I began to feel like we really should replace them all with cheap Chinese furniture.

Since it was not in my budget to redesign the house, I decided the best thing to do would be to sell an old collector's Mercedes that had been sitting in our garage for several years. I would be sad to part with the Benz, but I figured it was the best thing to do if I were going to redecorate the house. I put the old car on a few websites and began taking calls for it. One day, I got a call from a very professional-sounding man who was well versed in collector automobiles. He came over to take a look at the car.

When he walked inside the house, the man immediately started talking about how beautiful the furniture was. He wanted to walk around and just look at everything. He did things like stop and stare at a table for a minute or two and then caress it gently with his hand, then crawl under it and examine the bottom of it.

"A lot of this stuff should be in a museum!" he declared. I was very happy that someone appreciated the furniture because I felt that I had done very well having acquired it all for free. After looking at the car and telling me he would "think about it" he handed me his card. I saw that he was an interior designer.

"I'm actually selling this car so I can get some new furniture," I told him.

"Are you kidding?" he said. "You do not need any new furniture. This place is absolutely magnificent. I ought to send you the background information on some of your pieces. Much of it is original and I am sure worth much more than was paid for it. Someone had to find craftsmen all over the world to make many of those items. You cannot just find pieces like that at the store."

This made me feel pretty good, and after the man had left I got on a computer and checked out his website. To my astonishment, the man had been the personal decorator of Princess Diana and had designed numerous high-profile celebrity homes, a palace for an Egyptian princess, and so forth. Much to my surprise, a lot of the furniture displayed in his designer's portfolio looked almost exactly like the furniture that was in my house.

I have thought about this episode so many times throughout the past few years. I had been manipulated to such a massive degree by the real estate agent and her designer that I had almost sold my car--to pay for a completely unnecessary

overhaul of the interior of the house.

Why did this happen? The decorator had had an interest in making me think there was something wrong with the interior: If there were nothing at all wrong with the interior of the house, then there would have been no reason for me to hire her. The real estate agent would likely have been expecting a cut from the transaction, in which case she too would have had a vested interest. So, essentially, the objective had been to make me insecure about the house, and then--reap the profits.

How many times have people made you insecure about something so they could profit from you in some way? There are so many people out there who will try to sell you on the idea that they can benefit you in some way--after they subtly put you down. Insecurity is the primary currency of their game, and they thrive on creating it for you.

Let's take an unscrupulous lawyer as an example. If people did not get themselves into trouble and have serious problems to solve, lawyers would essentially be out of a job. Therefore an unscrupulous lawyer may convince a client that he or she is at much greater risk than reality dictates, in order to create more billable hours.

A couple of years ago, I had an employee whose wife was a chiropractor. One day, I went over to her house and she hit me a few times with a small hammer. She told me that it was important that I come back--and often--for treatments, because I was an as-of-yet-undiagnosed diabetic who was on the verge of potentially dying from my affliction. This concerned me a great deal, so I eventually went to a medical doctor and got the proper tests done. Lo and behold, I found out that not only am I not dying from diabetes, but I actually have excellent blood sugar and overall health.

My wife had started visiting the chiropractor at the same time that I had. Within a few months, the chiropractor had her visiting at least twice a week, and had prescribed her all sorts of expensive herbs and various tonics. Of course, after my visit with the medical doctor, I made sure my wife understood that nothing whatsoever was wrong with her, by making her consult with a medical doctor. Needless to say, my wife is--and always was--perfectly fine. Had I not intervened, we would have been going to the chiropractor forever.

I had a similar experience when I was in [law school](#). A veterinarian took a look at my Labrador retriever and told me that the dog needed a hip transplant for several thousand dollars. I got a couple of other opinions and found out that the dog had perfectly healthy hips. The dog lived a long, healthy life and never had any health problems until he died of old age.

It is important to understand that all around you there are people and forces that want you to feel weak, vulnerable, and inadequate. The best thing you can do to control and fight back against these forces is to sniff out and identify these people for what they are--and then avoid them.

Similarly, anytime someone attempts to rise above their peers and become better than others, they are likely to face people who have a vested interest in *keeping them down*. People will continually strive to keep the person at a certain level, for fear of being left alone, or of feeling bad about their own lack of progress.

My wife and I have been in Las Vegas all week. Yesterday, she related to me that she saw two men walking down the street who looked to be in their 20s and each had only one tooth. She stated that they appeared to be hobbling down the street, their faces looked pockmarked, and they appeared to be strung out on drugs. Their clothes were dirty and their faces looked terrified. They were gasping as they walked. It was like something out of a horror movie. This is not an uncommon sight on Las Vegas Boulevard. The two people were almost certainly crystal meth addicts, also known as *tweakers*.

"I wonder how these two people found each other!" my wife exclaimed.

They found each other because they are both alike and share an interest in drugs. However, a more interesting question to me is what would happen if one of them suddenly decided to stop using drugs and get better. *What do you think would happen?*

I know exactly what would happen. The user would try to discourage the person who was trying to get sober. The addict would not want his buddy to get better, for fear of losing a friend. It is possible that this might not occur, but in most cases it would.

For the most part, there are people in our lives who want us to do well no matter what. Then there are those who may not necessarily want us to improve--our neighbors, friends, coworkers, and others. However directly or subtly, they will try and tell us that we are incapable of the change we seek or the improvement we want from our lives:

- "You'll never be able to do that."
- "That's for other people, not people like us."

We receive these sorts of messages again and again.

Whether someone is trying to get you to buy something or is afraid of you improving because it will illuminate his or her own inadequacies, it is important that you are aware that others around you may be trying to keep you down, make you insecure, or control how you feel about your life. Do not allow others to control or influence you negatively, and be aware of this kind of behavior. If you allow others to influence how you think or feel, you will be in service of them and not in service of yourself.

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