



Your Career Is More Important to You Than Anyone

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I went to high school in an area called Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and lived with my father there during high school. Up until ninth grade I had lived in a city called Grosse Pointe, Michigan, which was about an hour's drive away. Since I had grown up in Grosse Pointe, many of my friends still lived there and I spent many of my weekends there visiting.

One day I received the most amazing telephone call from a friend of mine in Grosse Pointe. A girl who I (and just about every other guy I knew) had been incredibly interested in for a long time had stopped by my buddy's house with his girlfriend and told him that he should call me because she wanted to go out with me that night. She had recently broken up with her boyfriend of five or six years, who was a freshman at the University of Michigan. She was still in high school, as was I.

"Are you kidding?" I asked my friend.

"No. You need to get over here right now. We'll all go out. I do not think you understand ... No one has ever gone out with this girl except for her ex-boyfriend. I have no idea why she picked you, but you need to get over here right now!"

I could hardly believe my luck. This seemed too good to be true. In fact, it hardly made sense. I did not know the girl very well and had only been listening to stories from other kids that were obsessed with her, for as long as I could remember. My friend handed me the phone and the girl got on the line and said she was thinking that it would be fun if we all hung out, and that I should come over right away.

I jumped in my Yugo and started making the one-hour drive from Bloomfield Hills to Grosse Pointe. I was about halfway there when I noticed that my car was slowing down. Then I heard a loud grinding sort of sound and the engine lost all of its power as I steered the car to the side of the road. When I tried to start the car nothing happened and all I could hear was a clicking. The engine would not turn over.

In a panic I popped the hood and checked the oil. There was no oil in the engine, which is apparently why the engine had seized up. I had completely trashed the car by forgetting to check the oil. The car was rendered useless--with only 23,000 miles on it. I remembered back to when I had first [purchased the car](#) and was very proud of it. One time a man approached me as I was pumping gas, and he told me he was from Yugoslavia and used to have the same car when he had lived there.

"This car will not go more than 25,000 miles," he had said.

The Yugo was stopped dead beneath a freeway bridge and I decided that the best thing I could do was to go to a gas station and call a taxi. It must have taken me close to a half hour to find a gas station. I called home, but nobody was there. The taxi showed up within a few minutes.

I was, of course, upset about the incident with the Yugo since it was my only car, but I was not all that worried, since I had a large van that I used for my asphalt seal-coating business. The van was very nice and I had gotten a great deal on it. It was not something I could drive on a daily basis, though, because after having done several asphalt jobs with the van, I had gotten tar all over the interior. I had to be careful where I sat.

I took a taxi back home and it ended up costing me sixty bucks, which was all the money I had had available for going out that night. I called my friend:

"Where are you?" he asked. "We are all waiting for you!"

I explained to him that I did not have any money, that my car had broken down, but I would be leaving in my van right away. My friend sounded annoyed about having to loan me money to go out, but he simply told me to hurry up. I started driving again and, incredibly, halfway into the drive the van started making strange noises, losing power, and so forth. Within a few minutes the van had broken down, started smoking out of its engine, and literally rolled to a stop directly behind the Yugo, alongside the freeway. It made absolutely no sense.

I was extremely depressed about this whole situation and did not know what to do. I had no money to call a taxi and now I had no way to get to my friend's house to go out on my dream date. I hiked again to the gas station and told the people there the incredible story about how I had broken down another car, literally right behind the Yugo. They looked at me as if I were insane and clearly did not believe me. They were kind enough to let me use a phone.

I first called my friend in Grosse Pointe. He could not believe me either. He said they were going out without me--and he did not have a car.

"It would kind of be awkward if your first date was her picking you up at a gas station, eh?" my friend said. He was absolutely right. I did not want that. I never got another chance to go out with the girl. Within a week she had another boyfriend.

Next I called a rich friend of mine, who drove out to pick me up. An hour or so later he pulled up in his brand-new BMW convertible, wearing Ray Bans and looking somewhat stoned. He had been smoking pot with some other friends. I sat down in the convertible and the guy suddenly got agitated:

"Jesus Christ!! Look, you got a speck of tar on the leather! THIS IS NOT THE YUGO!!"

I got out of the car and busily tried to clean his prized leather seat. The mark on it was no larger than a fingernail and it came out quickly. As we drove back toward my house, my friend started telling me that he thought it would be fun to go into partnership with me in the asphalt business. Since I literally had no money, and no truck, to me getting a partner seemed like a good idea. I was at a very low point and felt like I needed help to get out of the hole I was in.

The business at the time was quite small and involved me passing around various flyers, giving estimates, and going out and seal-coating people's driveways, repairing cracks and doing asphalt patches. Apart from the fact that my van had just broken down, the business was going very well and my friend wanted in on it.

For less than a few thousand dollars he bought in to the business and was suddenly a half owner, entitled to half of all the revenue that came into the business (after expenses, of course). I was excited about having a partner, and working with a partner really took a lot of the stress off my back. Now I had someone to talk with about various things that were going on in the business and, most importantly, I had someone with whom to share the workload.

With the money he invested in the business I bought an old camper to do the work in. While buying the camper I was propositioned in a very strange way and the man selling it made some really crude remarks about other matters, which really freaked me out. Driving away after paying for the camper, I felt sexually violated, just because of the things that were said to me during the purchase. After having owned the camper for some time, one day I picked up an old sleeping mattress in the back of it and found several pairs of little girls' underwear. The event was so bizarre that I had blocked the event out of my mind until just now. Old campers formerly owned by perverts are bad news.

My first day of work with my new partner left us both completely covered in tar. Someone who worked on my partner's estate had recommended that at the end of each day we clean the tar off our skin using Brillo pads (steel wool) and liquid Lysol. I am not sure why this recommendation was made; however, before we started work that day we made sure to buy plenty of Brillo pads and liquid Lysol. I remember it was a particularly hot day and we both got a ton of tar on ourselves, which baked on with the heat. At the end of the day we found a hose on someone's property we were not working on and started cleaning ourselves with steel wool and Lysol. It was so painful I can still feel the sensation of the steel wool digging painfully into my skin and the burn of the alcohol from the Lysol.

We scrubbed the tar off our faces using the steel wool just as we had scrubbed it off our arms. Since the day had been so hot, the tar did not come off easily. The water from the hose we were using was extremely cold. It must have taken us at least 15 minutes of scrubbing to get all of the tar off. What was so funny about this was that my "partner" acted like we had received some really good advice.

"See, I got it all off!" he exclaimed as we drove away. His arms were all scratched up and so was his face. He had small scratches in a few places that were bleeding. In fact, it looked like he was having a severe allergic reaction. His face had turned all red. I dropped him off at his car and he drove off.

The next day he called me and told me that he was breaking out in hives and had all sorts of major scratches all over his face from the steel wool. I saw him that evening and, sure enough, he was having an allergic reaction. We were scheduled to do a job the next day. The next morning, quite early, he called me:

"I do not feel like working today. We're just chilling out today. Natalie got a new horse and I was thinking about going over and seeing it, getting high and drinking some beers later," he said.

We had been friends for several years and, in fact, were good friends. There were several people's driveways that we had scheduled to complete that day and for me this situation was quite serious. I had made promises to complete the work and I needed the money. As these thoughts raced through my head I reacted in a way that, from what I remember, may have been a bit too aggressive.

"How can we run a business if you are only going to work the days you feel like it?" I asked him.

There was a long pause. At that moment I realized that for him the business was simply something fun. It was not a *mission*, not something that was very important to him. He had been discouraged by the Brillo pads and Lysol.

"I'm going out to do the work today," I told him. And I did.

Later in the afternoon, he stopped by and said hello while I was [working on a driveway](#) on his street. He was dressed nicely and I remember he kept his distance from the truck, driveway, and me. He obviously didn't plan to do any work.

"How much are we making on this one?" he asked me as I sweated in the sun and continued working on the driveway.

The next day, a Sunday, he called me looking for his "cut" of the money from the work. I gave him his cut.

In our partnership together, he went out with me once more and then that was it. For some time, until he finally did not ask anymore, I gave him half of the money that I made from going out and completing the jobs. He ended up making much more than his investment and did very little work. We graduated from high school that year and toward the end of the summer, before he was ready to go off to college, he called me on the phone. He had spent his summer hanging out with a very wealthy kid who lived near us, out in the country. He had a quarry near his property. For fun, the two of them had figured out how to rig explosives that they had stolen from a trailer on the quarry site--to blow up Porta Potties. It apparently was very fun and dramatic.

"We want to blow up the camper. I own half of it. Can I come pick it up?" he asked.

"No," I said. The camper was the only way I could complete jobs. It was an awkward conversation and not a particularly pleasant one. I was deeply offended that someone would want to blow up the vehicle I depended on to earn a living. My job was so unimportant to my "partner" that he wanted to blow it up with dynamite.

Since that bad episode when I was in high school with a partner, I have always been very suspicious about people who want to share in my work: I want to make sure they are going to contribute as much as I do. You should be cautious about partnerships too. The fact of the matter is that virtually no one is going to work as hard in your career as *you*. If you depend on others to do your work, you will likely be sorely disappointed.

Throughout the years I have been approached by countless people who want to work with me on an equal basis. Some of these people are people you likely have heard of (most are not); others have been companies that have offered me tens of millions of dollars to share in my work, and still others have been people who are far more skilled or experienced in certain matters than I am. However, whenever I have pushed these people and organizations, and spent a great deal of time with them, I have realized that they never will work as hard or be as committed as I am to what I do.

I do not think that my experience is unique. In fact, I would say that almost everyone out there would never be as committed to your career and your livelihood as you are. You are never going to find the answers to your success and what you need in someone else. It has to come from you. The answers always need to come from you.

I am not saying that there is anything inherently wrong with partners. What I am saying, though, is that you need to protect your ability to earn a living at all costs, and you need to make sure that no one is going to slow you down. Your career is not as important to anyone else as it is to you. The sooner you understand this, the better off you will be. Even if it appears that you have no options (how I felt when my truck and car both broke down) you need to be very careful about the people with whom you cast your lot.

