



## The Richest Man in Bay City

By *Harrison Barnes*

When I graduated from law school, I worked in Bay City, Michigan, for a federal judge for a year. Bay City is a former lumber town whose fortunes had long gone down the tubes when the lumber industry went away some 100 years ago. After lumber went away, some prosperity came to the town for 30 years or so with auto manufacturers—but they closed down as well and left in their wake a city that was completely devastated. By the time I got there, the city had the distinction of having the most bars per capita of any city in the United States.

In addition to the most bars per capita, it also had the distinction of having one of the worst unemployment rates in the United States!

While most people considered Bay City a horrible place to live, I couldn't believe I'd been lucky enough to get a job in a city that had more going on than in New Orleans! Its main street was a giant party at least three nights a week. There must have been 50 bars on the main street. The city was absolutely incredible and had a lot going on inside all of its small bars including karaoke, dancing, and more.

The only problem was the bars weren't necessarily occupied by the most interesting people. In fact, the people in them were mostly the chronically unemployed and the children of the chronically unemployed.

After a few months, I realized the only things to do in Bay City were to drink and fight.

On my first night out with fellow clerks in the town, someone pulled out a "Rambo sized" hunting knife and vowed to kill me in front of a crowd of astonished onlookers. He then fled the bar when a group tackled him. The police were called and the man freed himself and ran off. I never saw the man again.

When I grew tired of all of the drinking and fighting, I stopped going out on Friday and Saturday nights. A life of partying can get old after a while.

I soon discovered, however, that the best thing about all of the bars was they had pretty good food and specials during my lunch hour. If you could stand the stench of beer and mildew, for example, you could get a good lunch in these bars for less than \$4.00.

One day, I was sitting in one of these bars having lunch with my girlfriend and a man pulled up in a \$100,000 car dressed in an expensive suit. Since this wasn't the sort of thing we were used to seeing in Bay City, we sort of watched with awe as he got out of the car and walked into the restaurant. In all the time I'd been living in Bay City, you certainly never saw people like this walking into the bars.

Instead of getting something to eat, however, the man walked into the back of the restaurant as if he knew exactly what he was doing. It seemed odd at the time, but I filed it away in my memory.

Then a few weeks later I was having lunch in another bar and I saw the man sitting at a table in the bar counting out what appeared to be thousands of dollars in cash.

"Who the heck is that?" I asked the waiter. The situation just seemed so strange.

"That's the richest man in Bay City," the waiter told me. "He moved here from England less than five years ago to be near his wife and has been buying up all the bars. He came here with nothing."

I questioned the waiter some more and quickly learned that the man who moved here had been a carpenter in London and had been unable to find a job in Bay City. He'd gotten a job in a bar then managed to figure out how to take over the bar with very little money when the owner told him he was going to close it. The man had been opening bars and had been building up his empire ever since. In fact, he'd been buying up all of the bars in Bay City and apparently now owned most of the bars in town.

I found the story of this man positively inspirational. The reason it was so incredible to me was because the man had come to the United States with nothing and moved to a town with no jobs. In less than five years, he'd managed to build a little empire.

In my year in Bay City, I met countless people who told me how bad the economy was and how there were no jobs. I met people from Ivy League schools who told me this. When I went to the bars and met people my age they told me this. When I talked to people I knew in the courthouse they told me this. All around me people told me how bad things were.

Make no mistake about that—things there were bad. Things in Bay City were so bad that if you drove down some of the main streets people would have taken soap and written the price of their house on their windows: "FIRST \$5,000!" You could literally pick up a house there for \$5,000.

Despite all the talk about gloom and doom though, the guy who owned all the bars seemed to feel differently. Instead of making excuses, he found out what was doing well in the area, took action and created his own destiny.

One of the most interesting things to me about people who do not achieve what they want is that they are always making excuses. I cannot tell you how many excuses I have heard throughout the years. In fact, the majority of people out there are experts in creating "alibis" as to why they did not succeed. Every lack of success they experience has an alibi of some sort and the alibi is something that is carefully crafted to make sure there are concrete explanations for the person not reaching their full potential and succeeding.

I've heard every alibi I can think of throughout the years. Alibis never take into account every single reason you can think of to explain lack of achievement.

Think about the man with all the bars. Most men would have moved to Bay City from London and said to themselves:

"What's the use? There are no carpenter jobs here! I am from another country anyway!"

The carpenter didn't do this, though. He said: "I'll make a go of it working in a bar!"

When the bar went out of business, most men would have said: "That's just my luck! The bar is closing now!"

Instead, the carpenter decided he would make the bar work and got the owner to give it to him for very little money instead of closing it.

With one bar, most men would have said: "There's not a lot of opportunity in this town! I should be happy I am holding on!"

Instead, the carpenter said: "Not only am I going to make this bar successful, I'm going to take over the other bars and make them successful, too!"

The carpenter was a man who didn't make excuses, and not making excuses and not creating alibis is something that's going to change your life. In fact, the more you learn to simply take action wherever you are, the more you will get out of life.

- The world doesn't care if there are "no opportunities" where you are.
- The world doesn't care if the economy is in bad shape.
- The world doesn't care if your skills aren't a match for where you work.

In fact, all the world cares about is results. Nothing but results matter and the more you understand this, the better you will be. There are no alibis for failure.

When I was in high school, I wanted to attend a certain college. After having reviewed my grades and my SAT scores, I was told if I achieved a certain score on something called "achievement tests" I would pretty much be guaranteed admission to this college. The tests were held on a Saturday in another part of Detroit. I waited until the very last test date to take them. On my way to the test, there was an accident and I had to go a different route because the freeway was closed. When I got to the test, I'd missed almost 45 minutes of it. Needless to say, I didn't do well on the test and didn't get into the school.

That was a bad experience. But I have no alibi. No one cares that I didn't get to the test on time. The only thing that matters is that I didn't go to that certain school. That's all that matters. An alibi is worthless.

You need to put yourself in a position where you have no alibis. How could I have done this? I could have gotten up earlier. I could have taken the test earlier. I could have studied more, even if I was 45 minutes late I would have done well. Whatever ... the alibi doesn't matter.

I interview people for jobs all the time. When people get fired, they always have an alibi. The reasons they lost their job can vary from the quality of their boss, to the economy, and more.

No one cares. All that matters is that you lost your job. The world doesn't care.

When a company reports poor earnings, their stock almost always goes down. No one cares that the earnings may have been down because of the weather, the economy, and so forth. All that matters is they are down. That is the cold hard reality.

How many alibis are you using?

When I was around 16 years old, I was living in Bangkok, Thailand, and I had a girlfriend from Israel. I was attending an international school and she was in the process of undergoing a "total immersion" program where they were teaching her to speak English immediately. One day, I remember the two of us were having a snack after school and I did something and apologized to her for it. I'd apologized for little things to her before and each time I apologized she would look at me a little funny.

"There's no word for 'I'm sorry' in Hebrew," she told me. "The idea is that if you do something wrong, you can't simply get rid of it with words. Your actions are what speak, not your words."

I don't know enough about the Hebrew language to know if what she told me was completely true; however, what she said really stuck with me for a long time. What she was saying was that you shouldn't be using alibis.

Not too long ago, I was sitting with some people in their early 80s and I was listening to one woman talk in some depth about how because of her mother, she'd always been unhappy and had lived a bad life. After the conversation was over, I remember my wife saying: "That's so sad that she believes it's her mother who made her unhappy."

I remember when my wife said that, I thought about how she'd phrased it. What my wife was saying sounded like: "*That is so sad that she is using her mother as an alibi for her unhappiness and not accepting responsibility for her own emotions...*"

All around you, you will find people that are using other people and other circumstances as an alibi. Creating alibis is one of the oldest tricks in the book and people all over use them to explain and justify away one lack of success after another.

Are you in the habit of building alibis? If you are, then you are certainly not alone. Most people are in the habit of this and do so their entire lives—until they're alive no more.

I always love hearing the stories of people who have created great successes of themselves despite all the odds.

Biographies of successful people are fascinating and they are something that's always illuminating. In most instances, you will find the most successful people came out of bad backgrounds and the sorts of backgrounds most other people would create alibis for. They might have had a handicap, bad parents, lack of education, and more. Regardless, the most successful people have overcome circumstances for which others would create alibis.

You simply cannot create alibis constantly for your life and expect to achieve anything. Use the time you would spend creating alibis to address the reasons you haven't reached your full potential. This is the most important possible thing you can do with your time and your life.

## THE LESSON

You cannot create alibis for your life and hope to achieve anything. Rather than spend your time creating alibis, use this time to address the reasons you haven't yet reached your full potential. Interestingly, people who fail to achieve what they want are always making excuses as to why they don't succeed. The world doesn't care about your reasons for failure, it only cares about results.