Take Responsibility

By *Harrison Barnes*

A few months ago, a famous businessman came to visit me in my office. This man is quite well-known and was a high-profile politician at one point in his career. He is the sort of executive you may read about on the cover of the Wall Street Journal, and someone who may receive a bonus at his company of $50+ million in a good year. This person had worked inside of a large company and had started out at the bottom, rising all the way to the very top.

I do not know a lot of people like this, and I do not travel in these sorts of circles. The companies I run are not that large. We have about 300 employees and operate primarily in the career space, recruiting and running job sites. While these are successful companies, they are not the sort of companies that are worth hundreds of millions of dollars, or tens of billions of dollars, like the company this man had run.

I am not sure why, but sitting in my conference room with such an imposing figure, I felt the need to share that I had not achieved as much as this man had by any stretch of the imagination.

"Why aren't you more successful?" the man asked me after we chatted for a few minutes.

Success to this man meant running a huge company that took up several floors of a giant office building, having thousands of employees, high-profile politicians constantly calling and knocking at your door asking for favors, major universities asking you to give commencement speeches, publishing companies offering you multi-million dollar book deals to tell your story, Architectural Digest writing articles and doing spreads about your homes, large sized jets at your disposal, flying to an auction in New York on that jet to purchase a $15,000,000 painting, sitting on the boards of major corporations to offer your opinions about various matters, spending a few hours a day in front of a computer leisurely deciding what causes to support with your time and money.

"Because I do not measure advertising and its effectiveness well enough," I told him. "The most successful companies and people in my space know how to buy and measure their advertising spend so they can increase it and make as much money as possible. That holds me back."

The man simply said to me, "Then you need to take responsibility and do that."

He was right. The next day I started recruiting someone to head a department of our company to do nothing but this. I started dedicating teams of people to develop models to do this – and the company has been growing as this is all implemented.

I do not necessarily want the sort of life this man has, but, in reality, there is no excuse for not having it. By critically looking at myself, the way to this life is a clear path that requires certain actions I have not done. Anyone can achieve anything once they step up and take responsibility.

I do not care who you speak with, everyone has excuses for their lack of success that revolve around not taking responsibility for where they are in their lives, in relationships, in business and in taking care of their health.

The difference between the most successful people and the least successful people are their number of excuses. Most people have all sorts of reasons for not being successful:

• I'm a woman.
• I'm a minority.
• I'm too fat.
• I'm too short.
• I do not have enough education.
• I do not have enough money.
• I am too old.
• I'm too young.
• If only I knew the right people…
• If I lived in a big city…
• If I had been given a chance…
• If I did not have a bad history…

The list is endless. However, when you meet the most successful people out there, they typically have few excuses because they always take responsibility and succeed regardless of perceived weaknesses.

In reality, the most successful people have a lot of stuff wrong with them. They may be too short, too young, too uneducated, too fat – but they succeed anyway. They do not use alibies and excuses for not being successful.

Too Short to Be Successful?

• Gary Coleman (very short actor)
• Dolly Parton (only five feet tall)
• The artist Prince (only 5"2)

Not Enough Education to Be Successful?

• John D. Rockefeller (one of richest men in history with no education)
• Ralph Lauren (fashion mogul, no education)
• Peter Jennings (famous newscaster, no education)

Too Fat to Be Successful?

• Chris Christie (governor of New Jersey)
• Steve Balmer (founder of Microsoft)
• Dick Cheney (former Vice President of United States)

The difference between those who succeed and those who do not is that some people let perceived weaknesses hold them back.

Yesterday,I spoke with someone who is very interested in getting ahead in their job. They were just offered a promotion and were trying to decide whether or not to take it. They told me that the job paid more and had a lot more responsibility.

"Anytime someone offers you more responsibility, you need to step up and take the job," I told her. "Responsibility is more important than money."

Being the head of an organization, or even a country, is all about taking on more responsibility. The more responsibility someone has, the more successful they are likely to become.

The person who goes around picking up garbage in a town has a job, and they go home every night and can relax. The mayor of the town, however, is going to be responsible for:

• Ensuring all the trash is picked up.
• Making sure all of the utilities are kept on.
• Making sure the city council is working.
• Making sure taxes are collected.
• Overseeing the police department and making sure it is working.
• Making sure the fire department has proper equipment.
• Making sure the city is contributing to pensions.
• Ensuring the city is not breaking any law.
• Keeping the city's lawns mowed and streets swept.
• Doing a good enough job to get re-elected.
• Organizing the Fourth of July parade.
• Addressing issues of homelessness in the city.

In contrast, the garbage man goes home every night and does not have to worry about any of this at all. This is how it always works. The more successful someone is,the more willing they are to take on more responsibility… and when they do take on more responsibilities, they do not make excuses.

The business tycoon I spent time with, who rose to the top of one of the largest companies in the world, is an example of someone who took on a lot of responsibility. He was attacked in the papers every time the stock price of the company went down. If the company was involved in a lawsuit, he was charged with responding to it and held accountable.

If you are going to get ahead in any job, the most important thing you can do is take responsibility and seek out as much responsibility as possible. The people who have the least responsibility typically have the easiest jobs and earn the least amount of money. Responsibility is an honor and something you should try and get a lot of.

• When you are offered the opportunity to work on an important project, take it.
• When a crisis happens and you can help solve it, do it.
• When you are offered more work, do it.

Never avoid responsibility and get as much of it as you can if you want to succeed. Success comes to those who take responsibility. It is a willingness to take on great responsibility that will bring you great wealth and success.

I've been in a lot of leadership roles in my life and career, and I can tell you there are drawbacks to taking on a lot of responsibility. Instead of someone who lives life in the background and in the shadows, you suddenly become someone that people talk about and hold accountable. It is very easy to be a critic and gossip about others and criticize others while not doing anything. In contrast, it is much more difficult to be the person that is visible and doing things in the world.

People talk about and criticize people who take responsibility in the world.

The benefit of taking responsibility, though, is that the more you take, the more rewards you become eligible for.

The easiest way to identify anyone who is going places is their lack of excuses and willingness to take responsibility. The most talented people, the wealthiest people and the happiest people generally have no excuses. They are 100% accountable and take responsibility for everything. You never hear excuses.

You get power from taking responsibility and weakness from disavowing it. The best things in the world flow to those who take on more and more responsibility. The weakest people in the world avoid taking responsibility.

• It is your responsibility to be happy.
• It is your responsibility to be opportunistic.
• It is your responsibility to be fulfilled.
• It is your responsibility to live a life that others would envy.

You need to take responsibility.