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THE WORLD'S BILLIONAIRES

Forbes magazine reports that there are 946 billionaires worldwide. Of these, 178 are newcomers to the list, including 19 Russians, 14 Indians, 13 Chinese and 10 Spaniards, as well as the first billionaires from Cyprus, Oman, Romania and Serbia. The list also includes familiar names such as Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Steven Spielberg, David Geffen, Michael Bloomberg, Steve Jobs and Donald Trump.

The men and women on the list made their fortunes in real estate, media, ethanol and coffee, among other things. According to *Forbes*, the average billionaire is only 62 years old. Their combined net worth is \$3.5 trillion. This amount is staggering when one stops and thinks about how many countries' gross national product that figure exceeds.

What doesn't surprise me is that most of them did not become billionaires through inheritance. They earned it from scratch and ingenuity. In fact, more than sixty percent of them are self made – they had little or nothing to begin with. This should also be a lesson to those who are leaving their money outright to their children and grandchildren.

One wealthy client once told me, "Money doesn't help...it hurts. It takes away ambition and drive. It creates a sense of entitlement." I tend to agree, to a point. Sometimes a safety net is needed for unexpected circumstances such as medical needs, divorces or other such situations.

Why doesn't the self made aspect of the list surprise me? Probably from my own background. While I'm no billionaire, I've had a reasonable amount of success in my life, and I never had the benefits of a trust fund.

I grew up in a very modest setting. My parents are college educated and have worked hard in their careers. Unfortunately, they hit "hard times" right around the time that I was heading off to college. So I had to put myself through both the accounting and law programs. I did it with grit, determination and student loans. But I appreciate from where I have come and what I was able to do.

Some of my classmates weren't so lucky. They had it all – or so it seemed. Rich parents, a new car to go to and from campus, and other niceties of money. But do you know what? When push came to shove, a few of them didn't seem to have the drive or ambition to make it on their own. When they had to gut out a class to get a grade, or had to compete with other students on that job interview, they just couldn't "make the cut". Some of them – now in their mid-40s – still rely on handouts from mom and dad to keep them living in the manner to which they became accustomed.

This is a challenge for all parents. How do you provide the "safety net" so that a child isn't left destitute if he or she falls on hard times, or suffers a calamity such as a medical crisis, but still leave that child with ambition and a sense of self worth that gets them through those hard times? There are ways to accomplish that, but it takes more thought than leaving them monies outright in your will or trust.

Ask the billionaires. As my wealthy client once said, "you can take everything away from me. I'm not afraid of that. Because I know that I can make it all back again. It's not the money, it's the knowledge, drive, experience and confidence."

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