

How to marry a billionaire

Sure, the challenge is steep. But this field guide to the mating habits of the ultrarich shows just what it takes to land Mr. or Ms. Big.

By **Marlys Harris, Money Magazine senior editor**
July 3 2007: 9:10 AM EDT



(Money Magazine) -- Work hard, take risks, maybe build your own business. That's the traditional route to financial success. Of course, there's another highly traditional path to acquiring wealth that isn't talked about quite as much these days: Marry money.

Real money. As in not a mere millionaire (a dime a dozen these days) but an honest-to-goodness billionaire - make that 10 figures after the dollar sign, please.

True, it's not politically correct to go hunting for a marital meal ticket (or for that matter, to write about it). But just for a moment imagine the life that could be yours if you did.

Forget the fabulous baubles, designer clothing, cutting-edge electronics and palatial mansions that your golden goose - uh, spouse - might heap upon you.

Quiz: Are you the right match for a billionaire?

Consider the more pragmatic bonuses of the good life. No more scrimping and scraping to make your annual Roth IRA contribution. No more working until you drop to ensure a comfortable retirement. And no more worries about where your children will get into college (or how to pay for it).

A seven-figure donation from your beloved to the school of your choice and your kids are in the door, even if they're no smarter than grapefruit.

Sold? Of course you are. But how realistic is it for you, an ordinary wage slave with no more ties to the jet set than a business trip to Cleveland last month, to even meet, much less marry, a billionaire?

As a matter of scientific inquiry, Money Magazine decided to find out. To that end we analyzed the mating habits of 50 of the mega-mogies to learn how they met their spouses.

We scoured the how-to-marry-rich literature and talked to society watchers, upscale matchmakers and wealth experts. And we pored over divorce news to see how spouse No. 1 was supplanted by spouse No. 2 (or 3).

Unfortunately, those who had already made it to Fat City refused to say how they got there. "I am just not telling," said one billionaire's wife over her cellphone before hanging up.

Nonetheless, our findings were encouraging. Marrying a billionaire is not beyond your grasp, as long as you're willing to work hard toward your goal. (Yes, hard work - albeit of a different kind - is still a requisite for achieving wealth.)

You will first need to identify the billionaires in your area (or their relatives) and learn their marital status. Then you'll have to study their businesses, hangouts, pets, favorite philanthropies, artists, music and vacation spots. (Google is a gold digger's best friend.)

Also required: an investment in the type of home, clothing, grooming and charity events that will help you mix among the high and mighty hoity-toity.

One cautionary note: Before you start making repeated visits to your target's golf club or home, remember that stalking is a crime in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

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Learn to live with less

First, some bad news. Forbes magazine, which has made a cottage industry of compiling lists of wealthy folks, declared this year that there are a paltry 946 billionaires in the entire world. Worse, most of them are currently married (though that does not necessarily discourage the most determined gold diggers).

The picture gets even grimmer for men. A scant 38 women appear on the list of U.S. billionaires. Average age: 63.

Lower your sights. Fortunately, the ranks of those who are filthy rich, if not quite in the billionaire stratosphere, are increasing daily.

According to Merrill Lynch and CapGemini, a consulting company, there were 85,400 ultrahigh net worth individuals (UHNWIs) in 2005, the most recent year for which data were collected. (UHNWIs are defined as those with \$30 million or more.)

Many of them - up-and-coming hedge fund managers, telecom barons and Internet tycoons - may have amassed only a hundred million or so but could easily hit the Big B in a few years.

For male fortune hunters, there are widows and armies of ex-wives with humongous divorce settlements. (Yes, for all of the strides women have made in the workplace, most superrich gals do acquire their wealth through their relationships with men - and stereotypically, many of their husbands dump them when they reach a certain age.)

Take Janet Burkle, ex-wife of Ron, a Los Angeles supermarket mogul (\$2.5 billion). Last year she lost her appeal to nullify a divorce agreement she claimed was unfair. The court forced her to make do with a pitiful \$30 million, plus interest.

Don't forget the kids. The scions of billionaires are also numerous. While marrying less pecunious offspring may look like you're just making do, it's not a bad deal (and think about the scads they'll inherit).

New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman, for example, when berated by Bill O'Reilly from the right and the Washington Monthly from the left, can sob into a pillow at the \$9.5 million, 11,400-square-foot house he owns with his wife Ann Bucksbaum, a shopping-center heiress.

Get down to business - his

Next step: Land the right job - one that allows you to circulate among the wealthy, of course. Just over half of the billionaires in our study met their spouses at work.

Examples: Melinda Gates was a Microsoft manager when she met Bill at a company press event. Both Anna Torv (wife No. 2) and Wendy Deng (No. 3) worked for companies owned by Rupert Murdoch (\$7.7 billion), the first as a reporter, the second as a TV executive. And corporate raider Carl Icahn (\$9.7 billion) made Gail Golden, his longtime assistant, wife numero dos.

The reason is obvious. Ambitious Type A+ billionaires rarely leave their offices long enough to chat up women at bars or to attend a mature singles hayride at their local church or temple.

Get an M.B.A. ASAP. To worm your way into a billionaire's business, and eventually his heart, you need the right career. An M.B.A. will give you the most flexibility. Since people think that it qualifies you to do just about anything, you can get hired just about anywhere.

Focus on industries with the most billionaires: finance (52), investments (51), service (42), media and entertainment (38), real estate (33) and oil and gas (30).

Show off your brain... Ultrarich men once gravitated toward women with the showiest plumage - or plastic surgery. That has changed, says Richard Conniff, author of *The Natural History of the Rich: A Field Guide*.

"Arm candy is now seen as déclassé," he notes. These days, the more prestigious your credentials and the brainier you are, the better.

Consider Anne Wojcicki, who only this May sealed the deal with Sergey Brin, Google's co-founder (\$14.1 billion). She graduated with a B.S. in biology from Yale, conducted molecular biology research at the National Institutes of Health and the Weizmann Institute, and recently founded 23andMe, a genetic-research company. She met Brin through her sister Susan, a Google marketing exec with - see, we told you! - an M.B.A. from UCLA.

Women too seem to favor the brainy over the muscle-bound. Ebay's Meg Whitman (\$1.2 billion), for example, is married to a neurosurgeon.

...Or make consumption your career. If you (or your close relatives) have little aptitude for Excel spreadsheets and turned in unimpressive GRE scores, you'll have to select a career that focuses on a billionaire's second-greatest preoccupation after his business: spending.

While alpha overearnings may not visit their mother for months, they will gladly leave their corner office and computer screen to lavish money on pet luxuries.

Among the careers that will put you in contact with them at this vulnerable moment: real estate (with a specialty in mansions); luxury-car, private-jet or yacht sales; work at museums, galleries or high-end

antique shops; interior design or architecture (again, specialize in mansions); and race-horse training.

Timeworn but still good: personal trainer or golf or tennis pro.

Join the leisure class

Don't despair if your job takes you no closer to wealth than the dollar store. There are plenty of other activities that the resolute billionaire hunter can pursue to mix with the excessively prosperous during evenings or on weekends.

Move close to where they live. "You need to move into a rich environment," says Ginie Sayles, a Houston marital consultant and author of *How to Marry the Rich*. "If you want to be rich, you must live where the rich live, even if it's in an attic."

She claims that no matter what your budget, you can find a hidey-hole "within 16 blocks of the big money."

By hanging out in a ritzy neighborhood, you'll get comfortable with wealthy people and attuned to what they like. And you'll greatly increase your chances of running into a billionaire at, say, the local Starbucks.

Get thee to a gallery. Billionaires' expansive estates, urban pieds-à-terre and quaint 30,000-square-foot country homes confront them with the task of covering vast stretches of empty walls and filling echoing foyers with something. That means they are constantly on the prowl for paintings, sculptures and other objets d'art that will do the job. So prowl where they prowl.

For starters, cultivate a taste for museums and become a member, not a visitor. At the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, for example, you can become a supporting member for \$250 a year. That entitles you to attend hosted exhibition previews and receptions where you can elbow your way into the elite.

If you're willing to go without dinner for a few months, invest in a \$1,500 membership in the Artist's Circle, which provides much greater mingling opportunities, including evening receptions, private viewings for major exhibitions and priority invitations to special events such as the biennial art auction.

Christopher London, editor of the website *ManhattanSociety.com*, which covers cultural and philanthropic events in New York City, recommends that you attend as many gallery openings as possible.

"A chance encounter could easily lead to dinner," he says.

Every major city has a Web site that lists openings. For instance, if you visit *ArtSceneCal.com*, which covers galleries in Southern California, you'd find that you could view a new artist almost any night of the week. Better yet, you'll avoid another Chinese takeout dinner by scarfing the wine and hors d'oeuvres that galleries serve to ease buyers' grip on their wallets.

Show them the Monet. If you can't tell the difference between Jasper Johns and Johns Hopkins, study up so you can converse. It doesn't matter what you say specifically as long as you sound knowledgeable.

Even though he collected Impressionist works, hedge fund biggie Ken Griffin (\$1.7 billion) didn't get mad when his date, Anne Dias, dismissed the movement as something she'd outgrown. Instead, he married her.

Money Magazine suggests that you specialize in the eras that interest the greatest number of billionaires. For example, Milt Esterow, editor and publisher of *ARTnews*, counsels that you focus on modern (late 19th century to 1970 or so) and contemporary art (post-1970), which are what le tout billionairage have been buying. Indeed, 85% of *ARTnews*' annual list of the 200 top collectors listed those two periods among their specialties.

Change the world

Getting and spending might be enough to fill your life with satisfaction, but for those who are loaded, there's a greater joy - and an even bigger tax deduction: giving money to others.

What other tasteful way is there to prove that you are truly a moneybags than to fork over a few mil to the Nature Conservancy, your alma mater or the hospital that performed Granny's hip replacement?

Look for good benefits. The fervor to give fuels an endless round of charity balls, silent auctions and golf tournaments in every town. There aggressive overachievers compete with one another to donate the most in what Milton Pedraza, head of the Luxury Institute, a market research company that studies the wealthy, calls the "alms race."

Now thanks to the Internet, you can ferret out those shindigs. Just type "charity events" and your city's name into a search engine and press "Go."

Not all charities are created equal in the hearts and wallets of the superrich. To figure out which nonprofits are most likely to put you in touch with people of ultrahigh net worth, peruse the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* to see what causes top givers favor.

You would learn, for example, that Veronica Atkins, widow of low-carb diet guru Robert, has a \$400 million fortune to share. Her philanthropic cause: obesity research (duh). She is bound to visit - even be honored by - the hospitals and universities to which she has given dough.

Cultivate dowagers. In some cities there's an unspoken hierarchy of charities, says Richard Conniff.

Newcomers to Palm Beach usually join the Opera Guild, which, he says, accepts anybody whose check doesn't bounce.

But it may take a few years to learn that the Preservation Foundation and the Rehabilitation Center for Children and Adults are considered the most prestigious and are more likely to win you invitations to private parties. Study the society pages and ask around to learn which charities are best for your purpose.

Shelby Hodge, society columnist for the Houston Chronicle, likes the American Heart Association and the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center's Board of Visitors, among other charities.

She recommends that you attend the annual gala or dinner. That usually costs about \$1,000, but doing so is worthwhile. Even if you wind up seated with a group of dowagers instead of wealthy bachelors, Hodge says, "those women can be your entry point."

There's no way the average Joe or Jane can cough up \$1,000 every night or even every week, but Christopher London suggests that you can cut your costs by as much as 75% if you attend the so-called junior events - cocktail parties and dances that occur before and after the big charity dinner. Don't let the word junior put you off; most who attend are in their late thirties and forties, London says.

Become a charity yourself. Usually you can just buy a ticket - after all, it is a benefit. But some events admit only those with invitations. A person of your humble means is not likely to be included unless you are a regular volunteer - "but not stuffing envelopes," says Hodge.

Instead, she advises, you should set your sights on more highfalutin activities that will vault you into the upper echelons of the philanthropy - say, fund raising. Unfortunately, to sit on a committee you may have to donate \$10,000 or so to the cause.

Another possibility: Become a grantee yourself. Pedraza suggests that you develop your own do-gooder project, such as a documentary on the environment, and take it around to charities, foundations and arts councils that might fund it. You may not meet a billionaire, but who knows, maybe you'll become the next Al Gore.

Hire a professional

Not everybody wants to deal with the hassle and expense of sussing out an appropriate ultrahigh net worthy. For such people there are experts who, for a fee, will help you.

Ginie Sayles offers seminars around the country on marrying rich (\$50 to \$150 a person), as well as \$500-an-hour private sessions. Using a 14-point system to help hoi polloi ramp up their classiness, she says, her clients have married several multimillionaires in her 20 years in business. (If you can't afford her, study her books or buy the seminar on DVD.)

Patti Stanger, founder and CEO of MillionairesClub123.com, with offices in California, Florida, Canada and the United Kingdom, charges nothing for women aspiring to marry well to be part of her pool of eligibles.

But rich clients looking for love pay from \$10,000 to \$150,000, depending on the amount of territory the zillionaire expects her and her staff to cover in their search. (The top charge is for a worldwide hunt.)

Stanger counsels customers to "date for love, just in a rich pond. You do not marry for money because, at the end of the day, he could lose his money, and you end up with a toad."

Janis Spindel, owner of Serious Matchmaking in New York City, charges her clients, all of them affluent men, \$20,000 for introductions to the right kind of marriageable women.

To get on her list of eligibles, you'll have to fill out a 14-page questionnaire (available in her book *Get Serious About Getting Married: 365 Proven Ways to Find Love in Less Than a Year*) or meet privately with her (charge: \$1,000) or an assistant (\$500) for half an hour. But there's no guarantee you'll be accepted.

Become a status faker

You'll never be able to close the deal, however, unless you look and act the part of a suitable spouse to serious money.

Be a class act. To attract the attention of the wealthy guys and gals who pique your interest, you have to dress appropriately. Montgomery Frazier, a New York image consultant who says he revamped Katie Couric for CBS, recommends taking your inspiration from designers Calvin Klein and Carolina Herrera, whose clothes, he says, "are sexy but with some sophistication."

Marc Jacobs, Christian LouBoutin and Dior are his favorites for shoes, but good-looking knockoffs are available from Banana Republic and Zara.

Pearls are "too preppy," Frazier says. "Wear small diamond earrings."

Men, as you might guess, need less: Good hygiene, a black suit, a tux and some gray slacks are enough, says Christopher London.

Be into what he's into. Once you zero in on a prospect, you'll have to look as if you're interested in what he or she likes. So spend some time boning up on thoroughbred horses, JAR jewelry, Modigliani and your billionaire's business.

Should you play hard to get or hop into the sack on the first date? Those are questions better left to Cosmo and Esquire. But Money Magazine is confident in advising this: If you do make it to the altar, hire a smart lawyer to negotiate the best terms on your prenup.

Despite all the luxuries that marriage ultimately heaps upon you, don't expect the proverbial bed of roses, counsels David Patrick Columbia, editor of NewYorkSocialDiary.com, a Web site devoted to the doings of the fabulously classy.

Having observed many who married for money over the years, he says, "The rich person can be a pain in the ass," adding that he or she often demands to be waited on hand and foot, arm and toe.

But no matter how difficult things get, hang in there. The longer you stay, the more the court will award you if the marriage fails. There's no reason, after all, that your divorce shouldn't be every bit as lucrative as your marriage.

Amanda Gengler contributed to this article. ■

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