



[How to Be Indicted on 57 Felony Counts Without Even Trying](#)

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In 2002 Attorney General John Ashcroft personally indicted me on 57 federal felony counts relating to conspiracy and fraud. He alleged that my company made fake transactions to shell companies in order to boost our balance sheet.

Ashcroft's action was after two grand juries voted not to indict. I didn't know if it was a slow news week at the Justice Department or whether he hoped to find the next Enron-type scandal. All I knew was that I faced a cumulative 600 years in prison if convicted.

I went into survival mode and considered what was most important to me. The first key step I took was to tell my family exactly what was going on. The natural inclination is to attempt to shield the ones you love, but your desire to protect will produce the opposite result. Silence allows them to conjure up the most dreaded of possibilities.

My wife and two young daughters attended all 89 days of my trial. It was painful to have them watch the government produce more than 1,000 exhibits and call 53 witnesses in an effort to show how bad I was. I produced zero exhibits and called no witnesses, because I had not broken the law. My family also got to hear first-hand when the jury found me not guilty on all 57 counts. The government later publicly stated that my company had not committed a fraud.

I was not guilty, but devastated all the same. My life was ripped apart. The lifeblood of my company consisted of credit lines, and those lines vanished at the mere hint of wrongdoing—never mind that later I was exonerated. One day I had been a billionaire and the 25th richest person in America. Virtually the next day I was bankrupt, my protection detail of former Secret Service agents was gone, and the repo man flew away with my Gulfstream IV jet.

My next key step was to accept responsibility for my own actions. People like winners, not whiners. I might not have been guilty of any crime, but I had been head of a company employing 3,900 people, all of whom lost their jobs. I made a point of not leaving town when it would have been so much more comfortable to start over somewhere else. Accepting responsibility for a failure didn't make me a bad human being—it instead made me a real human being.

It gets "better": The bankruptcy judge had a crew come to my house on Christmas week to chainsaw a hunk off my pool house: It was a few feet over the one acre of land she would allow me to keep in bankruptcy.

What did I do after things first fell apart, then went to hell in a hand basket, and then got even worse? I took the third key step, which was to end that chapter of my life and start writing the next one.

I couldn't do that if I forever re-lived the episode long after I had derived any lessons from it. I flung myself into building what is now a thriving business of teaching entrepreneurs how to remove obstacles in their way. I just had my book, *Bailout Riches*, reach Amazon #1 world-wide best-seller status. It's about how regular people can capitalize on the current banking bailout.

There was one last step to getting fully back on my feet: I needed to practice strategic forgiveness. I'm not making a spiritual point here. Instead, I discovered that when I harbored anger and wanted revenge against others, I dissipated my body's own regenerative abilities. I therefore wanted to forgive out of enlightened self-interest.

I found out that Attorney General John Ashcroft would be at a book signing in Chicago while I was in town there. I wore a "Hi My Name is Bill" name tag and stood in line. When I came up to the table, he looked at the tag, figured I was just another customer and said "Hi Bill, where are you from?"

"I'm from Tulsa."

"Oh really? We had a big case there a couple of years ago."

"Yes, I know. It was mine." The color drained from his face.

"Mr. Ashcroft, you know now—and you knew then—that I was innocent. Your actions cost 3,900 people their jobs, and cost me \$3.5 billion, not to mention enormous anguish on the part of my family. Mr. Ashcroft, I came here for one reason—to forgive you."

I turned around and walked away before he had a chance to react. I didn't really care about his reaction. I did it for myself, not for him.

The next time your world comes crashing down around you, remember that your attitude toward failure will very much determine how—or if—you later succeed. Nature is all about regeneration, and you're the most developed product of evolution up until this moment. You have that capacity for renewal.

Don't make your next setback worse with the typical mental self-destructive behavior we've all gotten so good at. Instead, take the simple steps I outlined and calmly focus on the new day that inevitably will dawn. Your own mind and body will know what to do next.