

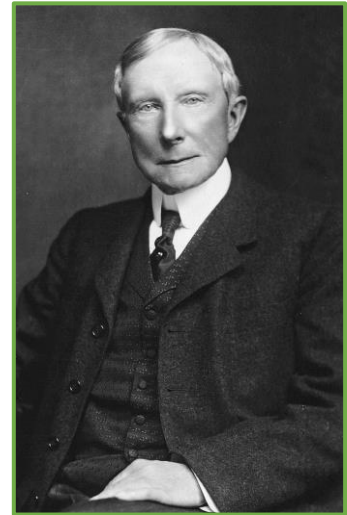
America's First Billionaire

The very first person to reach the status of billionaire was a man who knew how to set goals and follow through.

His name? John D. Rockefeller (1839 – 1937). At the age of 23, he had become a millionaire, by the age of 50, a billionaire. Every decision, attitude and relationship was tailored to create his personal power and wealth.

But three years later, at the age of 53, he became ill. His entire body became racked with pain, and he lost all the hair on his head and much of his body. In complete agony, the world's only billionaire could buy anything he wanted, but he could only digest milk and crackers. His personal, highly skilled physicians predicted he would die within a year.

That year passed agonizingly slow. As he approached death, Rockefeller awoke one morning with the vague remembrances of a dream. He could barely recall the dream, but knew it had something to do with not being able to take any of his successes with him into the next world. The man who could control the business world suddenly realized he was not in control of his own life. He was left with a choice.



He called his attorneys, accountants and managers and announced he wanted to channel his assets to hospitals, research and mission work. On that day, Rockefeller established his foundation. This new direction eventually led to the discovery of penicillin, cures for strains of malaria, tuberculosis and diphtheria. The list of discoveries resulting from his choice is enormous.

But perhaps the most amazing part of Rockefeller's story is that the moment he began to give back a portion of all that he had earned, his body's chemistry was altered so significantly that he got better. It looked as if he would die at 53, but he lived to be 97.

A faithful congregant of the Erie Street Baptist Mission Church, Rockefeller taught Sunday school and served as a trustee, clerk and occasional janitor. Religion was a guiding force throughout his life, and he believed it to be the source of his success. He would read the Bible daily, attend prayer meetings twice a week, and even led his own Bible study with his wife, Laura Spelman Rockefeller. They had five children, and he trusted his wife's advice: "Her judgment was always better than mine. Without her keen advice, I would be a poor man." He sometimes gave tens of thousands of dollars to Christian groups while, at the same time, he was trying to borrow more than a million dollars to expand his business.

(more)

He was the founder of the University of Chicago and Rockefeller University and funded the establishment of Central Philippine University in the Philippines. In 1884, Rockefeller provided major funding for Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary for African-American women. It later became Spelman College, named for Rockefeller's wife's family.

Rockefeller is widely considered the wealthiest American of all time, and the richest person in modern history. By the time of his death in 1937, Rockefeller's remaining fortune, largely tied up in permanent family trusts, was estimated at \$1.4 billion, while the total national Gross Domestic Product (the monetary value of all finished goods and services made within a country) was \$92 billion. As a percentage of the United States' GDP, no other American fortune – including those of Bill Gates or Sam Walton – would even come close.

He truly believed in the biblical principle found in Luke 6:38:

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (NIV).

Rockefeller learned gratitude and gave back from his wealth.

– Beecher Hunter