

Interview with The Barefoot Wine Founders (Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey)

Alicia Dunams: Hi, my name is Alicia Dunams and I'm here with [ALL IN: Elevating Your Leadership Game](#). We're talking about leadership here and I have Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey. They're the founders of Barefoot Wine. Hi Michael and Bonnie, how are you?

Bonnie Harvey: Hi!

Michael Houlihan: Hi Alicia!

A: Great! So, are you guys ready to play [ALL IN](#)?

B: Yeah!

M: Let's play!

A: Let's play! So tell me a little bit about yourselves.

B: Well, we are the founders of Barefoot Cellars; we started in 1986 with our first bottling. We knew nothing about the wine industry, and we started without any funds and built a national bestseller in wine. Therefore, that's a little bit about our background. Since then we've written a book, it's called [The Barefoot Spirit](#), and it's about our 20 years of building the Barefoot brand. And now, we're speaking to students of Entrepreneurship across the nation at different universities that are studying entrepreneurship. So that's been very exciting.

A: You've mentioned that it's the New York Time Bestseller, correct?

B: YES!

A: Okay, huge stuff! You're all about creating bestsellers, from bestselling wines, and of course packaging that to sell to a major company, and then writing a book and making that a bestseller as well. So it's all about being bestsellers for you!



B: And company cultures; we've been doing a lot of interviews about company cultures; so that's another thing we discussed. 'Coz obviously, if you don't have a good company culture, you're gonna be a very successful business person.

A: And that's where we're gonna jump in today 'coz we're gonna be talking about leadership. And, specifically when we talk about company culture and how you guys are really standing for leadership in your lives today. So first, with [ALL IN](#), I'd like to get started with a leadership quote. So can you please share with us your quote on leadership?

M: Well my favorite quote is from Wess Roberts who wrote [Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun](#). And if you have an opportunity, you should Google it and download it. And one of his quotes in there is from Attila himself, the guy who sacked Rome; he brought down the Roman Empire after 500 years. He said, "You must lead your Huns from the frontlines."

A: Okay so, "You must lead your Huns from the frontlines." So Michael, what does that meant to you?

M: It means that you've got to show them blood from the beast. You can't just tell them to go in there and make the sale, because you're gonna get turned down, people are gonna say no to them, things are gonna happen. You go in, make the sale, and show them that it can be done! You demonstrate success to your followers and then they'll learn. They'll say, "Wow, he did it, if I he can do it I can do it." It's not like you're asking them to do something that you wouldn't do yourself. I think that's the key to leadership – it's to put yourself in your followers shoes and think about his concerns and show him the way, give him someone to look up to.

A: Excellent! So lead by doing, showing the way. Very powerful! So, let's talk about this. How are you guys both showing up as leaders in your life?

B: Well, I think we're showing up as leaders in our lives by talking to students, by setting a good example. The best thing that anybody can do in their lives is to set an example. And when the students are starting off, they don't have money, they don't have a lot of knowledge in their industry. And because we've produced a very successful product, and because we have a bestselling book, we're able to lead our Huns from the front. In other words, yes, we are leading, we are successful, but we started in the same position and the same place where a lot of these students that we are talking to today are starting off now. So that's how we're leading.



M: The other thing too is you have to remember that the people, who are following you, have to catch some credibility about you. And so many of the groups that we've spoken to say, "Gee, it's so refreshing to hear you and Bonnie talk because you talk about your mistakes, you talk about your misconceptions, you talk about ideas that you had that you had to go back and re-examine." And everybody else comes up and gives us a Cinderella story, and kind of smart talks, you know, "I'm so great, I could kick their butt..." All these kind of talk. That's not what it's all about. What it's all about is starting where your followers are today. And we started in a laundry room with no money and no knowledge of our industry, and a lot of these aspiring young people today who are putting businesses together, they're the same way. And the fact that they can identify with us, gives us an opportunity to have the credibility that we need to help them because they're gonna take our advice.

A: It sounds like you guys are leading with vulnerability and transparency by revealing your story, and the ups and downs, and the mistakes, because therein lies the story, and people learn from stories. That's how your book is - it's sharing stories. It's one thing to lead by telling people what to do, but to lead with stories, vulnerability and transparency, as we just mentioned... Tell us a little bit about that.

B: Well, people learn better by hearing stories. And our book is not a prescriptive text, and I think that we've heard enough people say that they're bored by that, they don't enjoy reading it and they don't complete the book, they don't learn as well as they do by stories. And that's been throughout history. So I think that just as human beings, that's the best way to learn. And we have so many stories to tell, and the book is full of stories. So the reader takes their own information, their own lessons out of those stories. And it's not only a better way of learning, but it's a better way of teaching because we really enjoy doing it. Telling stories is much better than lecturing on the facts and figures of some things. So it's fun from both sides, and if you're having fun, you're gonna learn more. Our best compliment that we got, I mean yes, we're really happy that got to the New York Times Bestseller, and we're really happy that the esteemed leader like Brian Tracy endorsed our book. But, what really got us on was this 21-year old who said, "Wow! That's the first business book I ever finished!" So what we do, we don't lecture people, we just tell them our stories and then they control their own conclusion. Like for instance, when we started our business, the stores put us in begrudgingly because nobody ever heard of Barefoot, and they thought it was crazy that anybody would ever put a food on a label. They didn't think it would sell so they put it on the bottom shelf, which would have been a recipe for disaster for most people. But we said, "Okay, we're gonna lead them to the bottom shelf." And so this is how we did it, this is one of the images on the book, where you'll see the



shopper, she's shopping on the bottom shelf, and you'll see the footprints on the floor leading up to the display.

A: So right now, Michael is showing a picture of imprinted bare foots that were placed on the grocery store floor that led people in the wine aisle to the bottom shelf. And, really kind of extending that Barefoot brand. So you were using that opportunity essentially... You turned something that might be considered a disappointment, into an opportunity. It's like, "Okay, we're on the bottom shelf, and so let's extend that into our branding and use the barefoot prints along the grocery store floor through the wine aisle, to the bottom shelf."

B: It's what we call picking up the foot traffics.

M: And the philosophy that we'd like to tell people is have fun with whatever you're doing. And you know, you've talked about being [ALL IN](#), well part of all of you is your sense of humor. If you lose that, you're gonna lose a great deal of go power, in terms of the tenacity that you need to do to see things through. So we kinda made a game out of it, you know, when they gave us the bottom shelf, we said, "Okay, we're on the bottom shelf, what are we gonna do?" We started talking and somebody said, "Well maybe we should go after the foot traffic then."

A: I wanna extend on this 'coz this is a really great learning opportunity for everyone who's listening. What does that say about you as leaders? By creating that, what does that say?

M: We created a culture, a fun culture where everybody was allowed to say whatever they want to say, they have permission to speak up. And we respected them as human beings and didn't just look at them as labor, we looked at them as partners, as strategic partners and we would say things, "Oh, look we've got a problem here, we're on the bottom shelf, what do you guys think about this? How do you think we can solve this problem?" And instead of talking to other businesses or leaders in our industry who would say, "Oh, you're gonna stay down there a long time, you gotta work your way up." We just said that we're gonna celebrate. So I think what it says about leadership is that you play the cards you're dealt, you don't complain about them and you look at it as a game and you say, "Okay, these are the cards we're dealt." And then you bring your team in, and you respect your team, and you ask them for their advice, and in the process, they feel more important. I think that Barefoot became such a great brand, such a great American icon in the wine industry... Not so much because of Michael and Bonnie, we didn't come up with all these great ideas. We provided the leadership and the culture that



enable those ideas to come out of the minds of our employees and our colleagues and out associates.

A: I love that! Play the cards you are dealt. Not being a victim, but being fully responsible. Not being a victim of circumstances, but leveraging circumstances and turning them into opportunities. That's absolutely a definition of being a leader.

M: Thank you!

A: I love that! And that shows because really, we are dealt lots of things in life. And do you sit back? Or, do you fully play [ALL IN](#)? Because using the metaphor of the Poker players and ALL IN – putting all your cards on the table, you took that as an opportunity to play all in. How about you look at life as a game, and have fun with it.

M: We actually developed a game called the No Game. All your viewers can really appreciate this game because I'm sure everybody's been told 'no.' Bonnie, why don't you tell them how we discovered the No Game.

B: Well, the No Game is pretty easy to discover but we actually named it when Michael and I would meet at the end of the day, and we'd say, "Well I had a real challenge here because I kept getting No's. How many No's did you get? Well I got 3, I got 5..." We finally realized that the average if somebody's gonna give you more than three, was seven. Now, the thing is you can always ask another day, you can ask another way, you can ask another person. And so we will go about doing that, so we created the No Game. So at the end of the day, we could get together, not only with ourselves, and say, "Well, how many No's did you get today?" And it became kind of a challenge... So once you got to 7, you knew that the odds were on your side, so you're gonna get to a YES at some point. So that kind of... takes the real doom and gloom off your shoulders if you make a game out of it. And another way, that we took responsibility and used the cards that we were dealt, as we said. When we found the mistake that was made, no matter who had made the mistake... If I had made the mistake in the communication or something, so if I'm to blame somebody else, so I'm giving up my own power. And you don't wanna do that, you don't wanna be the victim and give up your power. But by taking charge and seeing what you can do about a mistake, which is, first of all, admitting that it happened, realizing how it happened, and changing whatever documents need to be changed - a sign on the wall, a job description, a clause on the contract. By doing these kind of things, you keep the control in yourself and you're in charge of the situation, which is really what we wanna do, as



much as possible. You're not the victim when you do that, so that's just another way of handling the situation.

M: We call that game Don't Blame. So here's the game, you put your finger at someone else, so we just take the hand and turn it around and face it towards yourself like this. And what you're saying is, how can I clean up my own backyard, so that this situation is less likely to happen? And yes, you can't change the way other people behave, but maybe you can change the signs of the contract, or the way you communicate with them, the checklist, and the job description. There's something you can change, and you can improve, and I know we made a game out of that, and one of our employees came to us one day and said, "You know, you guys are trying to make this idiot-proof." And we said, "No, we're just trying to make it idiot-resistant."

A: So aim, don't blame. I love that! And it really comes back down to everything in life, it is feedback. So for example, the successes that you've had, becoming New York Times bestsellers, that is feedback on what you put in. And I know, I saw you guys do the work, you were playing [ALL IN](#). You weren't waiting for someone else to make it happen - you did it yourselves. So the feedback for Barefoot Wine, it's now an international bestselling wine, it's owned by Galo, but you created the foundation of that. And so when you're looking at your life, and if your life is doom and gloom, and you're a victim and nothing is happening, it's feedback of your intentions.

M: Absolutely!

B: That's a good way of putting it.

M: That's an excellent way of putting it.

A: So, yes! That's what I wanna talk about now. And in terms of leadership, we talked a lot about doing. So as leaders, we're going out there, we're speaking, and we're doing a lot. What, in terms of leadership, who do you get to be? And I ask that question in a way of just really getting deep and grounded in who you are. Who you are being, versus what you are doing. What are some of the characteristics or some of the adjectives you would use, and the type of person you get to be when you are a leader? What are your thoughts around that?

B: Well, first of all, for me, I really see myself as a messenger. With all the things that I've learned in business, I wanna share these messages with others. So, first of all, when I hear you ask that question, that's what comes to my mind strongest. It's not really about me, the



individual; it's about the message that I have to share. And I've gotten enough feedback again, from others to realize that the message that I'm giving to these students is something that they're not getting elsewhere. And that makes it really important, it makes me understand that what I have, the education that I've learned, all the hard knocks and all the troubles and challenges that I've had. And that by sharing these with the students, it encourages them, and it's something that they haven't heard elsewhere. So I really feel a messenger; if I'm gonna sum it up to one word, that would be mine.

A: Great, Bonnie! What about you Michael?

M: I like the term authority because now, you know after all these years of hitting our heads against the bricks, and building this bestselling product, and successfully selling it, and even writing the book... We become an authority on this whole business of company culture. When you read the book [The Barefoot Spirit](#), it's really about the attitude behind the business; it's not really about the business. So that's why we called it the Spirit, the Barefoot Spirit. You know when they say this guy's got a lot of spirit, well that's the spirit, or this person is showing a lot of spirit. What they mean is, they mean the will, they mean the drive that makes that person tick, and so we get to know that really wonderful human aspect of life that I think is trapped in so many businesses. And we're so excited to be able to talk to young aspiring entrepreneurs who haven't made a lot of mistakes yet, and who maybe are starting their businesses with a lot of preconceived notions and out and out prejudices because of the way they were raised or the community they grew up in, or people telling them that they can't do this, and they can't do that. And so we're out there debunking those myths, and we're doing it with some degree of authority. You know, if somebody can build a brand that becomes the number one wine brand in the United States, starting with no money and no knowledge of their industry, then what the heck did they have going for them? You know, it was humility, it was the sense of humor, it was the thrill of the games, these making up games, and it was building the game that's sharing in all the fun. So that's how we crossed the line at the finish and won the race.

B: It really wasn't just us, it was really teamwork. So, I think that's a big part of our message. And I wanna take this opportunity also to say that although the story in [The Barefoot Spirit](#) is ours, we gave it to Rick Kushman, and he is the one that authored the book. He's an award-winning journalist and he was also a wine writer and for the 20:01_____ for a number of years. So, we went to someone who knew more about writing than we did, and this is something else that we've done frequently. We seek the consulting services of those who know more than we do.



M: I think it's really important to realize that you don't have to be a success in everything; you only have to be a success at what you're good at. And there are people out there that can help you with the rest. I know that when we wanted to write this book in the first place, we hired Alicia to help us get organized and to give us some idea on the landscape, and even writing the book or what was involved in selling the book, and it was fantastically advantageous to us, and she's still our consultant, and we appreciate that Alicia. And the point is that we are humble enough to realize that there are people out there who are experts and they can help us. We just have to know where we wanna go, there are people out there that will help us get there. We don't have to do everything ourselves, our ego is not involved in executing every part of the job or being an expert in every part of the job. That's just crazy. So be aware of your shortcomings.

A: That's an excellent, excellent advice. What I heard there is humility, I heard teamwork, I heard tenacity, I heard commitment, and those are your ways of being. And that's why you've created the success you've had over years and years, decades even. And now, extending that out and being the messenger, and really being present with people who deserve to hear your message. I mean, let's face it, a lot of these people are in universities, and they're not getting the hands on in the trenches experience required to be a business owner, or entrepreneur. So you're filling in the gap there, and that's very important.

M: With connecting to that... we'd like to think that we speak to them in plain English about terms that have been complicated, and I think the six sigma's have given them too many different definitions of... It seems like a lot of people go to college, and they learn big terms to put on situations that really don't require that much complication. You know, there's a lot of common sense that is lost, I think somewhere between the books of all those texts in the colleges. That's why when we wrote our book, we needed to put one list in the book. Everybody said, "You gotta tell us the 3 things to do, the 5 things to never do, the 28 things your customer wants to do..." We out a hundred books on the shelf and we lie about it. Here's the lie, "We've read those!" We read two chapters, we fell asleep, we weren't counting sheep, we were counting items. So we said okay, what's gonna make us finish the book? And we said, "How about the scene of your parents' adventure story where the proponents looked like they're facing disaster and bankruptcy on every page?" And they have to get out of it, and what's their attitude that drives them and how did they enlist the help of other to get out of some of these messes that they get into. It's a lot of fun.

A: Powerful! So we're going to specifically talk to Bonnie on this one, in terms of women in leadership. Obviously, that's a big topic now; the world is lacking female leaders. It's hard to



find – women. Someone was asking me like, who are the top business leaders, women business leaders. And I was thinking of a few and it's like, you know, it's usually a handful, like half a dozen. So what advice would you give to women in terms of being a source of leadership?

B: Women lead in a lot of different ways. And they aren't necessarily the Attila the Hun, leading their Huns from the front. But, they're taking care of so many of the details all along the way. For a woman to really be seen in the leadership position, I think the easiest way that can take place is if a woman is an entrepreneur. There's no glass ceiling as everyone's talked about for so long that women have. There's no glass ceiling if you're an entrepreneur. You're your own boss, you make your own rules, and you hire your own staff, and I don't think there's anything better for a woman to really show that she is a leader, other than being an entrepreneur. I think that's the talk, at least in my book, it is.

A: Wow! That's gonna be your next signature talk. There's no glass ceiling if you're an entrepreneur. I can see that going around the world. In my business, I think about that as well. I create my own rules, my own hours, I can make as much money as I wanna make, and that's powerful Bonnie, thank you for sharing that. Okay, so let's talk about... what does playing ALL IN mean to you? Like ALL IN. Have you, when you look back at your life, have you been ALL IN? Or, is there a gap there? And what would that look like? I mean I'd like to see... there's some powerful people out there, both of you are powerful. Sometimes I feel like I'm just scratching the surface of how powerful I am. So what does [ALL IN](#) mean to you?

B: We're all in a constant state of improvement Alicia, that's the exciting part. We have been ALL IN. All in means you give it all of your time, your project whatever it is, you give it all of your attention. We didn't take any draws out of our company more than just to pay our bills. We spent our weekends going out doing tastings in addition to working all week. And, it was a lot of energy that you put in as an entrepreneur to get your business started. And, [ALL IN](#) is everything that you're feeling, whatever your attention goes to; it's going to just one direction. And certainly, you've got to take care of yourself along the way. So being all in also means caring for yourself, making sure that you're eating right, you're sleeping enough, you're getting some exercise. You've gotta take care of, number 1, as they say, because that's who you're relying on. That's your basis for everything else that you do. You've gotta take care of yourself so you're healthy enough to go out there and take care of the business. So yes, we were ALL IN; still are.

A: Still are! Michael, do you have anything to add?



M: Well the only thing I would say is that when you play Poker and you say you're [ALL IN](#), what you're really doing is pushing all your chips out there, into the center. And, we've all seen this on the Poker games in the Western movies, you know, James Bond, you name it, that's the point where you you'll know that the players are committed. And so, it's believing in what you have in your hand and how you can play it. And like we said earlier, you get dealt cards, they could be random, but it's how you play them. And, once you get it in your hand and you know how to play these cards, and you understand how to win, then you're ALL IN. Being all in means that there's no yes and no, there's just now and later. You'll know what you're gonna get when you stop asking for a yes, you're the only one that can tell yourself no. So, now and later. So that's the attitude that I would say is ALL IN. And the last thing I'd say is... if you get into business and you have this idea about what that business is, you think oh this is a such and such business, I'll do such and such. You get into the business and you find out after a year or two that what is required of you, the type of labor that is required, the thing that is taking up your 8 to 5 is the dream and kind of work that you have planned on, but it is what is required for you to be a success with your product or service. You know, some guy decides that he's gonna open a some kind of a print shop and then he finds out that he can open 5 or 10 print shops, and the next thing you know he's in distribution management, cash loan management, and personal management. He hasn't touched a printer in years, but he owns his big printing network. So, that's an example. Certainly, when Bonnie and I got into Barefoot, we thought it was the wine business. After we've been in it for about a year, we realized it didn't have anything to do with win. It had to do with distribution, it had to do with marketing, it had to do with community outreach, it had to do with personnel management, it had to do with company culture. These things, you noticed that I haven't been telling you about grapes... This is being ALL IN means; it means I'm in, no matter what. You don't swim halfway across the English channel, get tired and swim back.

A: You go to the other side, fully all in, leaning in. Wow. Okay, so I want you both to use this podcast as a platform and really be ALL IN right now. Put some skin in the game, and make a commitment, something that you are going to be ALL IN. So whether it's something you're gonna create in your life, in your business, in relationships. So, what do you have coming down the pike that will maybe be complete, and you're fully committed to in the next days, weeks or months.

B: Well, I'm fully committed to being an excellent speaker. And I haven't had enough experience yet; I'm getting better all the time. As I've said, I'm in a constant state of improvement, but there's so much more that I could learn. I want to understand how to be an



excellent presence on the stage, how to get my point across so the audience will appreciate it and make the best use of it. I'm committed to being an excellent speaker.

A: Nice, nice! I mean I'll hold that intention for you.

M: What she didn't tell you that in her first public speech in March, and she's given like 20 since then, or 30, standing ovations and full houses, maybe more than 30. But she's a pro now, I mean obviously we can all stand some improvement, but she's committed, she was committed. The first time she saw herself on video she says, "I'm gonna be great!"

B: Still working on it.

M: So, my commitment is to build a platform in this next year that would enable Bonnie and me to be go-to thought leaders in this whole area of entrepreneurship and company culture. And we are doing this, doing something that we didn't think we were gonna do. Like I said, you get into business; you don't know what the real work is. Well the real work for us has shown itself in the last 6 months, and the real work for us is going to colleges and universities and teach entrepreneurship from coast to coast. And speaking to the students; there's also speaking in conventions and conferences across the country where they are bringing entrepreneurs together; whether it's the women's group or whether it's disabled veterans groups. And, these are the people that we're working with, we're building a platform of credibility so that 4 or 5 years from now, we can have 5 or 6 companies that are relying on us to be at their boards of directors, to guide them to the point of success and acquisition. So that's what we're committed to doing, we're committed to helping people and establishing our credibility, and we're gonna do what it takes to get there.

A: And I believe you, fully committed! The track record is there. So, right now, we got your book, [The Barefoot Spirit](#). Are there any other books that you recommend for people who want to really dig deep into leadership?

B: I don't know about a single book, but Brian Tracy had a big influence on us. We studied Brian Tracy, just about everything that he'd written, and we were listening to his audio tapes all the time when Michael and I started Barefoot Cellars, and it had a huge impact on us. He is very positive, he really has a win-win attitude, he's easy to listen to, and there was so much excellent information about business, about how to communicate with people. He was a huge influence in our lives; I would say anything by Brian Tracy.



M: And of course, the 3 books that everybody should have on their shelves which is the [As a Man Thinketh](#), [Think and Grow Rich](#) and [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#). Those 3 books are the foundation of all the go to leaders that you hear speaking today. I don't care if it's _____, I don't care if it's Tony Robbins, and everything they're saying is in those 3 books. And they were all written by Americans, they were written after the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. So, these books have been around for over a hundred years, and they were written during the Industrial Revolution when America was really flexing its muscle on becoming the world power. And so, these guys actually wanted to define what success is. And one guy in As a Man Thinketh, he goes around the world - he is Gandhi, Henry Ford, all these great people. And he asked them, what is it about your style, what is it about your spirit that kept you going, how did you know this was gonna be a success? So, he writes it all down. I highly recommend those 3 books – [As a Man Thinketh](#), [Think and Grow Rich](#) and [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#).

A: Excellent, those are great! I've read those and one that's also really powerful is the Science of Getting Rich. Now, I want you to share... How can people know more about you?

B: We have 2 websites. We write weekly blogs on 2 sites. One is www.thebrandauthority.net, it's all things brand. And the other one is [Barefoot Wine Founders](#). These are fun business blogs, about 600 words, and they really do kind of take a little different take on the subject matter. I think anybody that wants to learn more about business can go there.

M: These are great free resources. Each one of them has over a hundred 600-word posts, everything from how to build a brand to how to get distribution of your product, to how to improve your service business, everything about leadership, you name it. How to start a business with no money, all that stuff. It's TheBrandAuthority.net and BarefootWineFounders.com.

A: And we'll have all the information plus your recommended reading on the blog. Now, for our ALL IN audience, I want you to leave one word of advice, what you would really want to impart as we get wrapped up here.

B: Well, before talking about people in business, which I assume is what we're talking about specifically in the audience. I think when you're starting a business, you really need to go out and ask a lot of questions. And you ask these questions to everybody that touches your product - the producer, the distributor, the inducer, the retailer and whoever is in between. Find out



what it is that they're challenged with and see how it is you can help them. So ask questions to everyone that touches your product.

M: And I would add, don't forget to make mistakes right... and I don't mean R-I-G-H-T, I mean W-R-I-T-E. Write them down and write down the documents that need to be changed. You will make mistakes so start your business in a small place, make mistakes in an area where you can run around, apologize to everybody, and make everything right. And write it down so that you get your act together, before you take your show on the road.

A: Excellent! Well, I want to thank you both Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey for playing [ALL IN: Elevating Their Leadership Game](#) with is today. Thank you so much for being here.

B: Thanks for inviting us Alicia; it's always fun to talk with you.

M: Thanks a lot!

A: Absolutely!