

## Six winners who beat adversity

*Overcoming adversity early in life can sometimes drive a person to do great things in the world of business.*



**Roman Abramovich was orphaned and raised by his grandparents in the harsh Russian Arctic Circle.**

After his parents died, when he was only three, Abramovich was raised by his grandparents in Komi, a dark and bitterly cold region of Russia. As an adult, he dropped out of college twice, served in the army and even sold plastic ducks in Moscow (his first business venture). Political connections helped him amass a vast fortune in oil, steel and gold, and today he is the 137th wealthiest person in the world and the owner of Chelsea Football Club.



**Shahid Khan moved to the US from Pakistan and washed dishes for \$1.20 an hour.**

On his first night in America, Khan stayed in a \$2 a night room in an Illinois YMCA. He was 16 and had just moved from Lahore, Pakistan to study Mechanical Engineering at the University of Illinois. He landed a job with automotive manufacturing company Flex-N-Gate, which he ended up buying in 1980, just 13 years after he arrived in the country. Khan grew the company into a multi-billion dollar empire. He is now personally worth approximately \$6.5 billion. He is the richest Pakistani-born person in the world.



**Oprah Winfrey was born into poverty and wore dresses made of potato sacks.**

Born to an unmarried teenaged mother, Winfrey spent much of her childhood living in extreme rural poverty with her grandmother, while her mother worked as a maid in the city. She was bullied in school for wearing dresses made of potato sacks. At the age of six, she moved to the city to live with her mother but ran away at 13 following years of abuse. She later became an honours student and won a scholarship to the Tennessee State University. She got a part-time job with a local radio station and began forging her career in the media industry. Today, she is America's first and only black multi-billionaire and considered one of the most influential women in the world.



**JK Rowling was a single mother living on social welfare when she wrote *Harry Potter*.**

Although born into a middle-class family, as an adult Rowling found herself unemployed with an infant daughter to look after. Living off welfare benefits, she considered herself a failure and was diagnosed with depression. However, it was during this period that she finished her first *Harry*

*Potter* book which, following a string of rejections, was finally published by Bloomsbury. The series of books became the best-selling book series ever and spawned one of the highest-grossing movie franchises of all time. She is the first person in history to have become a billionaire through writing books and is one of the richest women in the UK.



**John Paul DeJoria was sent to live in a foster home and was later a member of a street gang.**

A first generation American, born to an Italian father and a Greek mother, DeJoria found himself selling Christmas cards and newspapers at the age of nine after his parents divorced. When it was deemed his mother couldn't support him and his brother, they were sent to a foster home. Following a stint in a street gang, DeJoria had a number of different jobs - from a brief time in the Navy to working as a janitor - before taking out a \$700 loan to co-found John Paul Mitchell Systems. The company made hair care products, and DeJoria initially went door-to-door selling shampoos while sleeping in his car. It was the first of many business ventures for DeJoria, who is now a multi-billionaire.



**Sean O'Sullivan worked as a cleaner at his school to help support his eight siblings and his single mother.**

Originally from Cork, O'Sullivan's mother found herself raising nine children alone in poverty in Albany, New York after her husband walked out. Packed into a tiny, freezing apartment with his eight siblings, [O'Sullivan](#) worked as a janitor in his high school to help keep a roof over his head.

Working to pay his way through college, he studied electronic engineering and started a computer street mapping company called MapInfo. He was worth \$17m in 1994 when that company floated. He has gone on to become a leading [venture capitalist](#) and philanthropist. The multi-millionaire splits his time between New Jersey and Cork.

**READ:** [Success in business](#) is all about planning. [Plan well](#) before you start.

**Article by Peter Flanagan.**

*Images: Oprah Winfrey: DFree / Shutterstock.com; Roman Abramovich : magicinfoto / Shutterstock.com; John Paul Dejoria: s\_bukley /Iurii Osadchi / Shutterstock.com; Shahid Khan: [Forbes](#); JK Rowling: Everett Collection / Shutterstock.com; Sean O'Sullivan: no-repro.*