

Think twice before you promise to split your Powerball winnings

[Clark Howard Staff](#) Tuesday, January 12th 2016



"Don't make promises you can't keep," we've been told. Whoever ends up winning the biggest Powerball jackpot ever could be haunted by that wise-old saying.

The history of lottery winners is dotted with stories of people claiming they were entitled to a cut of the money. Sometimes, the reason given is a guarantee on the part of the ticket-holder.

"It happens more often than you might think, often based on an alleged oral agreement," tax lawyer Robert W. Wood [writes](#) in Forbes. The circumstances can become messy, involving friends or family. They can also lead to expensive litigation, costing the winner even if it's determined he or she doesn't owe anyone a cent.

A few examples to prove it...

- New York City resident Terry Hollenquest [sued](#) his neighbor over an allegation that he broke a pledge to share lottery winnings. Hollenquest said he and Leonard Owens made a pact in 2014 to play the lotto every day, and if one of them struck it big, they would split the money. Owens won \$1 million from a scratch-off card last June, but Hollenquest claims Owens reneged on the deal.
- Another New Yorker, Barbara Quiles, said her daughter ran off with lottery winnings that came from a ticket Quiles purchased in late 2012. Quiles states that she entrusted the daughter, Linza Ford, to claim the \$1 million of winnings on her behalf and have them deposited incrementally in her bank account over a 20-year period. Ford countered that the winning ticket and bank account are hers, that Quiles is "not entitled to any of it," and that Quiles began raiding the account for increasing sums of money. The case has been full of allegations and litigation, including a court order to freeze Ford's assets -- which was [undone](#) in October after a judge reconsidered.
- A Florida man, Howard Browning, sued his ex-girlfriend for backing out of a pledge to share lottery winnings after she hit on a ticket. According to court documents, the two entered into the agreement way back in 1993; the girlfriend, Lynn Anne Poirier, won a million dollars in June 2007. When Browning sought the money, Poirier refused, and Browning sued for breach of

contract. After being stymied in court, the Florida Supreme Court [ordered](#) last May that Browning receive a new trial.

The lesson from all of this: Be careful what you promise!

It's no secret that lottery winners become the most popular folks in town. People often come beating down the door for their share of the money -- in the case of West Virginia Powerball winner Jack Whittaker, [that's to be taken literally](#) -- and for a lottery grand prize of a billion bucks, there's a lot of cash for others to try grabbing.

Read more: [Is it possible to guarantee a Powerball win?](#)

"Down and dirty disputes can plague lottery winners," Wood, the tax lawyer, writes. "The stakes and tax problems are larger on bigger lottery prizes, and one can only imagine that over a billion dollar win could attract all sorts of creative claims."

So play and have fun, if you wish! But use your words wisely -- or else that jackpot might not all be yours.