

You Need Connections to Make the Most of Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago I went to a seminar on public speaking and publishing held at a hotel near the Los Angeles Airport. From what I remember, there were two ticket levels for the seminar—a "standard" level and a "VIP" level. The second level, a VIP level, allowed you to sit up front and go to lunches with "important people" in the publishing industry.

When I go to these sorts of seminars I generally could care less where I sit; however, in the case of this particular seminar my assistant signed me up for a VIP ticket. The extra cost for the lunches and front row seating was no more than a few hundred dollars and all things considered it was well worth it - especially the lunches I attended.

These lunches were arranged in a small dining room in the hotel and had signs on the doors that said things like "VIP's ONLY!" Everyone walking in proudly flashed their concert badges that said "VIP!" and took a seat at the various tables. There was nothing really all that "VIP" about the lunches but the big treat was that the seminar organizers had arranged for publishing people from New York to come to the seminar and sit down and have lunch with the VIP participants.

I was not concerned whether I had lunch with someone in the publishing industry or not. As we were getting seated for lunch, the seminar participants told us that the publishing representatives were limited and only a few people per day would get to have lunch with one and we would not know if it was a publishing representative we were having lunch with until we sat down.

On the first day of lunch I sat next to a man who was from a small island in some body of water in Northern Canada, lived in a cabin and was writing a book about fishing. I could scarcely believe it. He had a beard, smelled like a glacier and had come to Los Angeles. The man was so stereotypical I thought it might actually be a joke. He had a beard and spoke in a gruff voice. He was wearing a work shirt and boots. When he realized that I was not in the publishing industry, had no interest in publishing anything and was not even interested in fishing ... he seemed extremely disappointed.

The woman sitting on the other side of me was writing a book about learning about past lives during a near death experience she had (she apparently was reincarnated from someone — but I do not remember whom). The lunch was incredibly interesting listening to her because her stories and information were so "far out" and engrossing that I found myself becoming very, very relaxed. She talked about "visions", meeting dead relatives and all sorts of stuff and I became so completely engrossed in her story that I did not remember much else in the lunch. I hope she ended up publishing a book because I certainly would read it. She had some really interesting stuff to say.

During the lunch, all sorts of other people at the "VIP lunch" came by our table, gave us their cards and subtly inquired whether we were in the publishing industry. These people were all "networking" and trying to learn about whether or not we were "contacts" that could help them with their publishing career. Since we had no such people at our table, they would generally quickly move on after learning that we could not be of any assistance to them. I found these "networkers" quite interesting and watched them closely. When they did find someone in publishing at one of the tables they immediately "beamed" and quickly segued into a "pitch" about whatever it is they were writing. These networkers were all doing an exceptional job in my estimation and really seemed serious about meeting people in order to get ahead.

When I was a full time legal recruiter, I generally tried to meet my candidates if they were in the Los Angeles area. If they were in the San Francisco area, I sometimes would go to meet them. Other times I might drive down to San Diego to meet them, or meet them if I was in New York. In my first several months of being a legal recruiter I did not meet all of my candidates; however, I soon realized that if I met my candidate I would generally almost always place them. Conversely, if I did not meet the candidate personally then I would have a much more difficult time placing them.

What was it about meeting a candidate that was so powerful? I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that if I met the candidate personally I would feel some sort of "bond" or connection with them and be able to act on this. In addition, I believe that meeting the candidate also set up a "clear" obligation between me and the candidate. I felt more inclined to not want to give them bad news, to put more work into what I was doing, to be more attentive to them, to speak of them in a more personal and engaging way to law firms.

I honestly never found myself doing much different when I met with candidates, but it really seemed to me that something was much different when I met with them. The "connection" established clearly had something to do with the outcome that ended up happening with their careers and job search. There is something to be said for meeting people and forming this bond.

For the longest time, off and on, I have taken flight lessons. Every time I go and take flight lessons at a local airport I am amazed at the number of small jets and multimillion dollar airplanes on the tarmac. I just do not understand why anyone needs a \$10,000,000 airplane. It does not make a lot of sense to me. I also cannot understand how these airplanes can possibly be considered "business tools"—but they are.

The people who own these airplanes are generally people who use them for "business purposes." They use the airplanes to fly around and meet with clients and prospects for business. Is it necessary to spend this much money to meet with potential clients? I cannot imagine it is—but many people certainly think so. People want to have a connection and plenty of business people seem to believe that this connection merits spending millions of dollars (and their time) to maintain it.

Personal relationships and connections are incredibly useful.

The second day of the seminar I could scarcely believe it. I sat down and was seated directly next to an important executive from Wiley & Sons, a very important business publishing company. She was actually quite nice and asked me if I had any ideas about books I would like to publish. When I told her I did not, she seemed pretty disappointed because I think she was looking forward to a "book pitch". Instead of speaking about publishing, we ended up speaking about how she lived in an

apartment in New York with a dog and what a hassle it was walking the dog in the winters. She was a nice lady and at the end of lunch gave me her card.

What was interesting to me about this "VIP" event was that the entire purpose of it seemed to be to allow people to simply meet other people. To me this did not sound like a big deal, but if you were trying to publish a book, getting your story "heard" through the masses of people trying to publish books I imagine would be a very attractive thing.

I was in a meeting with our recruiters the other day and a couple of the recruiters said that for every legal job opening there is now at major law firms, over 500 people are generally applying. Day in and day out, the law firms are inundated with applications for each opening that they have. How hard do you think it is to get a job if you are competing with 500+ people for a job? One way to stand apart from the herd is by making personal connections.

When you are looking for a job, it is effective if you are applying to a variety of places and really getting your message out there. You need to be seen in order to be hired. The more you get your information out there, the more likely you are to get hired. This is extremely important and something that is crucial to understand: The more places you apply to, the better.

Since the employment market is not that strong, many people believe that there is nothing that they can do to find a job. I read three newspapers each day and each day I am just amazed when I read the stories about people looking for jobs. A story may say something like the person has been sending out at least one or two applications per week and is amazed that they are not having any luck in the job market. A few applications per week? You need to send out far more than that. In fact, were I aggressively looking for a job I would send out one or two applications per hour—at a minimum—and do this 8+ hours per day. How else do you expect to beat the odds if you are competing with 500+ other people applying for the same job?

But there is far more than just "beating the odds" when looking for a job by sending out a large number of applications. An equally important component is getting your applications reviewed and taken seriously. This is far more important than sending out an application. In fact, this is really the "name of the game" when it comes right down to it. You need to get your application reviewed.

In the publishing seminar I went to, people were paying more money to be part of the "VIP" section due to the fact that they wanted "access" to the people in the publishing industry. Writing a book and getting it published is really no different than looking for a job. Publishers, agents and others receive thousands (if not tens of thousands) of book proposals from people looking to publish books. There is so much "noise" and people competing for their attention that it probably seems almost impossible for an individual writer to stick out ...

- Unless they know someone
- Unless they have "an in"
- Unless they make a connection

This, then, is the "crux" of why people are paying for "VIP" access at an event like this. Meeting someone helps open the channels of communication. It makes it easier for the person with a book to get noticed. They have a "contact" and someone they can speak with who can help them, or potentially refer them to someone who can. This is incredibly valuable and it is something that makes a giant difference when someone is trying to get something done—"it is who you know."

All around us there are tons of advertisers and other people competing for our attention. Most people are bombarded with thousands of advertisements on a daily basis. You see ads on buses, in bathrooms in restaurants, on peoples' clothes and pretty much everywhere you look. These advertisements just keep coming and they do not ever stop. Wherever you turn, people are trying to sell you something.

- You receive email trying to sell you something.
- You receive phone calls trying to sell you something.
- You receive letters trying to sell you something.
- The websites you visit try to sell you something.
- You receive text messages trying to sell you something.
- You sit at the beach and an airplane flies by trying to sell you something.
- You watch television and someone tries to sell you something.
- You listen to the radio and someone tries to sell you something.
- You drive down the road and a billboard tries to sell you something.
- You sit down to eat at a restaurant and the placemat tries to sell you something.

I certainly do not need to go on and keep going on. You get the idea—all around you and us people are trying to sell you something. It simply does not end. People are trying to interrupt you with advertising messages constantly.

- These people do not want to be your friend.
- These people do not want to learn about your family.
- These people do not care if you have anything in common with them.
- These people are not interested in how your day was.

The only thing these people want is your money. And you know it.

How often does someone try and be your friend each day? How often does someone take a legitimate interest and concern in you and your life? How often does someone express interest in learning more about you? How often does someone do any of these things without wanting anything from you—like money, sex, or something similar?

My guess is they do not do this very often.

In fact, most people rarely are confronted and meet people who have any interest whatsoever in them and their lives. When is the last time you met someone like this?

Can you remember the people of the opposite sex who took a very strong and genuine interest in you in the past? Can you remember people who just wanted to be your friend who took a very strong interest in you in the past? Can you remember all of the people whom you severely disappointed when you did not reciprocate their interest in being your friend?

I can also remember a lot of the people I chose to be friends with and keep a long-term bond going. We remember the people who take an interest in us and it is this connection that makes a huge difference. We want people to take an interest in us and when they do, this interest helps give our lives meaning. It makes us feel wanted and appreciated. It makes life feel that much more interesting and better for us.

These sorts of connections are the most important things out there.

In terms of the few hundred dollars that people were paying to have lunch with "VIPs" in the publishing industry, they could not possibly have used their money any more intelligently if they wanted to publish a book. Those people were paying for access and the potential to create relationships with people in the publishing industry that would enable them to "stick out" and be on the radar of publishing executives if they ever really wanted to publish a book. They were paying for the ability to make a connection.

In the publishing business and in your career, the connections you form are priceless and can make a giant difference in your ultimate success or failure in your job search.

I know people who have had more jobs than I possibly can count. When someone has been switching jobs every 12-18 months for 15 years you have to start wondering if they are doing something wrong. The person I am thinking of has done this in good economies and in bad. How does he do it? He is a master at forming these connections. He goes out probably 3-4 nights a week meeting all sorts of people. He stays in contact with the people he has met in the past. This is what it takes to be extremely effective at finding jobs. If you do this you will do very well in the employment market.

This should give you some idea of the power of making a connection. A connection gives you access to people.

A few years ago I was purchasing some advertisements on satellite radio for one of our companies. A salesman came out to my house and spent some time with me and asked me a bunch of questions about my family. He expressed genuine interest in me and in my life. I found this quite unusual and ended up purchasing a bunch of advertisements from him.

"We are so much alike and need to get together some time!" he kept telling me. He really seemed like he wanted to be my friend.

Later, he called me on the phone and told me that his brother was looking for a job and asked me if I could help his brother out. I met with his brother and ended up hiring him. I think he worked for our company for around three years.

What the guy selling satellite radio advertisements had done was get "access" for his brother. He had that access because he did his best to develop and cultivate a really good relationship with me personally. Had the guy selling satellite radio been looking for a job, I might have been able to help him as well.

When you develop relationships with people, that helps you stick out when you are looking for a job. Instead of being one of the 500+ resumes, your resume goes to the top of the pile due to that connection. Instead of being one of the 500+ anonymous people, you become someone that "has a relationship" with the employer that becomes valued. It becomes much harder to reject you because if you are rejected that relationship with someone inside of the employer is harmed.

Most Ivy League schools and other exceptional universities are made up of a disproportionate number of children of alumni of these schools. However, it is not enough for someone to simply be a child of an alumnus. More often than not, they are a "child of an active alumni" who is giving money, volunteering and has all sorts of other sorts of connections with the school. These connections are strong enough that when it comes time for the student to apply to the school, the school has to consider its relationship with the parent before rejecting the student.

This is how it is everywhere. Connections matter. Connections cut through the clutter of advertisements and other interruptions that decision makers are faced with throughout the day. When a connection is at issue then things can really get done.

Several years ago I had a candidate who was really outstanding but had, for whatever reason, a very difficult time finding a job. I ended up getting him a job with an exceptional law firm in Los Angeles. A few months after taking up the job he came to me and told me that he was very unhappy and wanted to leave. He asked me for my help in finding a new job.

I told him that he should stick it out with the law firm and that since he had a difficult time finding a job originally the same thing was likely to play itself out again. I also told him many reasons why I thought the law firm was a good law firm. I told him that I did not feel it would be ethical for me to help him since the law firm had paid me when I placed him there. In short, I told him that I could not help him and would not do so. I urged him to stay with the firm.

A short time later he quit the law firm and went to a smaller law firm in Los Angeles that I felt was a bit beneath him. As he was leaving the firm, he went by the office of the hiring partner and told the hiring partner the story about how I refused to help him and did not feel it was ethical. He told the firm that I valued my relationship with them and did not want to risk it by helping him.

I am sorry to say this, but the legal recruiting industry does not have a good reputation and recruiters are generally thought of as being a little unethical. My behavior was not the norm but it was something that I felt and believed in.

To my surprise, a few days after this episode I received a call from the law firm telling me that they had heard about what I had done and appreciated my honesty. They then told me they wanted to bring in two people I had submitted to them for interviews. Within one week they hired these two individuals and a month later I received two checks from the firm totaling over \$100,000 for hiring these two individuals.

The thing was that the people the firm hired, normally would not have been hired by the law firm. I am almost 100% confident of this. Both were unemployed and had been for some time and did not have the sort of stellar backgrounds that people who went to work in the firm typically have. The firm had hired them and brought them in because of their relationship with me and goodwill that had been established. I know this and feel it from the bottom of my heart. This is why they did it.

Relationships and connections cut through the clutter and they are going to change your career. You need to get out there and do everything you can to meet people, form alliances and establish connections with people. Whether it is Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, or more — these and other tools that help you connect can make a giant difference. You need connections to make the most of your career.

THE LESSON

In this article Harrison explains how personal relationships and connections are incredibly useful. You need to get out there and do everything you can to meet people, form alliances and establish connections with people. Whether it is Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, or more — these and other tools that help you connect can make a giant difference. You need

connections to make the most of your career. When you are looking for a job, it is effective if you are applying to a variety of places and really getting your message out there. You need to be seen in order to be hired. The more you get your information out there, the more likely you are to get hired. Connections matter. Connections cut through the clutter of advertisements and other interruptions that decision makers are faced with throughout the day. When a connection is at issue then things can really get done.

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