



The Most Important Person You Communicate with Is Yourself

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

“The mind can make a heaven out of hell or a hell out of heaven”

-John Milton

Several years ago, I was home after graduating from college and I met a guy who was friends with my girlfriend's brother. He had graduated from Yale University a year or two before and was driving a truck all around Detroit delivering meat to restaurants. He typically drove this meat truck from 4:00am until noon each day. He got paid in cash at the end of each day by his boss. He'd been the first person from the [public school](#) he had attended to go to Yale in three decades, had been a star football player in high school and college, and was an all-around great guy. What I noticed about this guy was that he was probably one of the happiest guys I've ever encountered. He didn't drink or use drugs and he worked out every day. He had lots of friends and got along with everyone extremely well. When this guy saw people, he beamed a smile at them and made them feel very good about themselves.

As I got to know this guy, I realized most of his friends from college were currently off at [law school or medical school](#), working on Wall Street, or pursuing higher degrees. I found it incredible that this guy was so happy driving a meat truck. He seemed to have absolutely no ambition to do anything else. He loved driving the meat truck. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he were still driving a meat truck to this day. This guy was very interested in other people and seemed to love to sit down with me and discuss my goals and what I wanted to do with my life. He would then offer me very intelligent insights into various [career paths](#) and moves he thought I could benefit from making. Whenever I saw this guy, he beamed. He appeared to love everyone in the world.

What was so amazing to me about this guy was that he was driving a meat truck. A couple of years later when I ran into one of his friends he was still driving the meat truck. He loved driving a meat truck. This is what made him happy. Based on the kind of people he went to college with, I'm confident that no one else in his class ended up driving a meat truck (much less around Detroit). But this guy loved driving the meat truck.

I can imagine what people must have been saying about this guy's career choice of meat truck driver:

1. You have more potential.
2. You are wasting your talent.
3. You should go to [graduate school](#).
4. You should find a normal job.
5. You should at least be a supervisor of meat truck drivers.

This guy was having none of that. He was listening to his heart and doing what he wanted to do. What made him so special in my mind was the way he communicated with himself. For him, driving a meat truck was a huge victory of sorts and something that really represented what he wanted to do and be at that point in his life-or permanently, for all I know. He wasn't allowing what other people undoubtedly thought to influence him. Instead, he was influenced only by what he felt was the best use of his time and what made him happy.

When I look back on this guy and the people I've known who've gone on to do incredibly important things, I think he is probably one of the more successful people I've ever known. The reason I think he is so successful is because of the way he communicated with himself. He communicated with himself in a way that made him happy. I have no idea what was going through his mind; however, I bet his thought processes went something like this:

1. I love being outside when it's cold in the morning and there is no one else out there.
2. I love being able to be at peace with my thoughts when I am driving.
3. I love not having to be involved in office politics.
4. I love getting the opportunity to lift things and exercise.
5. I love the people I work with and talking about simple things.
6. I am so grateful I'm not sitting in an office every day.
7. I cannot believe how much fun this is compared to hanging around with a bunch of boring intellectuals.
8. I am so lucky to be getting paid in cash.
9. Driving a huge truck like this is a blast.
10. I am so lucky to be able to have my entire day free after I finish work each day at noon.

You can see what this guy probably thought about his situation. I am not sure of this because I never did ask him. But the power he had that so many people do not is that he knew how to communicate with himself in a positive way.

One experience that offered one of the most stunning contrasts I can ever remember was when I started operating my asphalt business in college out of the inner city of Detroit. For one summer I had hired all of my workers out of a drug rehabilitation center in Detroit where my mother's boyfriend sat on the board. Through the people I met at this center, I started to meet many other people around Detroit who weren't affiliated with the drug rehabilitation center but who came to work for me. I became so attached to the area that I actually moved down into one of the worst areas of Detroit and lived there for several summers. Incredibly, I actually believed that it was a happier place in many respects than the all-white, middle-class suburb of Grosse Pointe not too far away where I was from. In contrast, Detroit was almost 100 percent black. These were

completely different worlds.

The level of poverty that I saw in these families in Detroit was not extreme--people were just very poor. Most of the houses that poor people around Detroit live in are houses that were probably pretty nice in the 1950s and 1960s but hadn't been painted or worked on since that time. There is a lot of peeling paint and gutters falling down. Inside the house, the carpet is worn through in many spots. Holes are patched in walls. Buckets sit beneath various areas of the room. Window coverings are torn but still there.

When I would meet these families I was always amazed that the people seemed so happy. I worked seven days a week in my asphalt business and spent 12-14 hours a day with the people I worked with from Detroit, and they all seemed very happy for the most part as well. In fact, the people I was meeting around Detroit seemed in most respects a lot happier than the people I was meeting from the suburb of Grosse Pointe.

I realize that this may seem a little difficult to believe; however, I largely felt this was true. The people I was meeting in Detroit lived in neighborhoods where everyone seemed to know one another and socialized a lot. They weren't ashamed of being poor, and they typically moved around from family members' houses to friends' houses at night. It was a completely different culture. Everyone knew who the bad people were--the drug dealers and the gangsters--and most people were removed from that. This is a different story and not something that is important, but I would say that I believe the people that I met there were more connected in many respects than the people I met in the suburbs. They didn't seem to worry about stuff as much.

What I saw in Detroit was that, like the guy I met from Yale, people weren't looking to assign a negative meaning to everything. They didn't have as many rules about how life should be, and they didn't judge themselves by those rules. Surrounded by poverty and a lifestyle that most people in America would abhor, the people I met were happy, always laughing, and close with each other. I think the people who had the fewest rules about how they should be living life, were the happiest. People became unhappiest on the street when they started believing they needed to be powerful or exceptional. The people who did this are the ones who became drug dealers and gangsters. In the area I was working in, the people who had ambitions like this were also the ones who almost always ended up either being killed or going to prison. Accordingly for many, a lifestyle of simplicity was far more preferable.

When you spend your days working with people who socialize with those who make their living on the street, you start to pick up ways new ways of thinking. One of the things I heard and learned was when you start trying to be a big deal, you often get smacked down (i.e., killed) or sent away. The drug rehabilitation centers, community groups, and other organizations around Detroit were in many cases telling people how to communicate with themselves in the most effective ways in order to be happy. I think the people I saw who stayed out of the gang and drug culture had learned the way to really communicate with themselves most effectively.

What I learned back then was a lot of the quality of our life is a product of how we communicate with ourselves. The quality of our life and our happiness is largely the result of the meanings we give our lives and the things that happen to us. The more rules we have about the way things should be, the more unhappy we are likely to be. Rules are often our enemy.

The most unhappy people I've ever met in my life have most often been the most intelligent people. They see the world around them in a way which isn't helpful to their happiness. If someone says something to them, instead of taking it as a positive comment, they will take it as a negative comment and get extremely angry and flustered. If they hear a piece of news that doesn't sound important one way or another, instead of not reacting to the news they hear, they allow themselves to get flustered. All around them the world looks like a complete war zone and they are taking in people's comments, looks, and so forth and interpreting them in dangerous, harmful ways.

One time when I was in law school I took a course called Psychiatry and the Law, and I had the opportunity to work inside of a psychiatric institute where murderers and others were evaluated by a state psychiatrist to see if the State should put them on death row. I would sit behind mirrored glass and a psychiatrist or team of psychiatrists interviewed a given murderer about his crime. What I noticed in my limited exposure to this was that when a murder was committed, the person often committed the murder for reasons that made no sense but were, instead, related to how they interpreted things.

For example, in one murder, two men were sitting around the home of one of their girlfriends. They needed money to buy drugs so they went out and robbed a liquor store. When they got back from robbing the liquor store and buying drugs the girlfriend asked them where they had been and they told her they had been out buying liquor. Later that evening, the three watched the news and there were details about the liquor store robbery. The woman watched with the men (not knowing they had been the ones who robbed the liquor store) and then went to bed. After she went to bed the two men continued to drink and do drugs and decided that the reason she went to bed was because the woman must suspect them both of the robbery. They believed she would report them to the police in the morning. They convinced themselves of this and then went and killed her with a baseball bat and bedpost, put her dead body in the trunk of her car, and drove her car into a lake.

The murderer I saw interviewed, had an exceptionally high, near genius level IQ. He admitted in the interview that what he believed at the time didn't make sense. He was simply misinterpreting what something represented. This is craziness, but it's also the exact same type of craziness that many of us communicate to ourselves on a daily basis. We tell ourselves that something represents something that it doesn't. This is a serious issue that holds us back to an incredible and profound degree. It's our communication with ourselves about what something represents that often makes us unhappy and prevents us from making the absolute most of our potential.

Imagine what your life would be like if you took every slight (imagined or otherwise) and, instead of getting upset, interpreted it in a positive way. The way we feel about our lives and the world is 100% due to the meaning we give to what is happening to us. If you master your communication with yourself, you master your life. You need to know how to communicate with yourself. People who don't communicate with themselves properly are continually in a stressed state.

You need to communicate with yourself in a way that makes you feel good about yourself, not bad. The reason I think the most intelligent people are most often the most unhappy is that they can see so much meaning in everything and they continually interpret this meaning in a way that works against them. Communication most often breaks down due to differing perceptions of what precisely is meant by someone.

In your job, it is exceptionally important that you're consistently interpreting things in a positive manner and not a negative matter. And if you're having a difficult time finding a job, you need to do the same thing. Positive energy begets more positive energy. I want so much for you to be happy and have the life you are entitled to and deserve. Your life begins and ends in your mind and how you communicate with yourself.

THE LESSON

Your happiness and quality of life depend largely on the meanings that you ascribe to the things around you, so you must communicate with yourself in a way that makes you feel positive, not negative. You must interpret your life's events in a way that makes you feel good about yourself.

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