

## Practice Makes Perfect

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A year or so ago I was at a wedding, and a very successful doctor started talking to me. I was very impressed with this doctor and already knew of him through several people before our meeting. He was involved in some fascinating and cutting-edge research I found quite interesting.

I love meeting people who are passionate about their careers because they give off so much energy. People who achieve amazing and significant success in any profession always have a lot of passion for what they do. If you allow them to, these people will talk your head off about what they are doing. They will show you their collection of books about the subject, debate various philosophies about what they are doing, and more. People who commit to something are the most exciting people in the world. They provide me with an incredible education. I wish everyone was committed to what they do.

In speaking to this doctor, however, I realized despite his incredible knowledge of what he was doing, he was not satisfied. "What I really want to do is start a business," he told me. "That is what being successful is to me. I have a friend who is doing very well in the [manufacturing industry](#) now that steel prices are up."

The manufacturing industry? Steel? Why would someone spend years going to [medical school](#) and becoming a successful researcher only to go into steel manufacturing? I am not saying this is the wrong thing to do. But when you are an expert in something, it is not always in your best interest to switch jobs completely.

I spent many hours of my career going to various [law firms](#) and meeting with successful attorneys. I would say in at least 25% of these meetings, the attorneys I met did the same thing as this doctor--they started talking about how they wanted to pursue careers in completely different professions. One memorable meeting was with a famous [attorney in Los Angeles](#) who told me about opening a chain of ice cream parlors on the other side of the country only to see them fail miserably. Of course they failed miserably! The man running them was a famous attorney involved in all sorts of high profile cases. How on earth could he be expected to also run a chain of ice cream parlors?

At this particular point in history, I know many people who've lost all their money and life savings by investing in real estate. They bought homes in Arizona, condominiums in Florida, and other properties for little or no money down. They jumped face first into the real estate game because they believed they would get rich. Most of these people taught high school, sold cars, or were accountants, for example. Of course they lost money in real estate! This was not their expertise and they knew nothing about it. I saw the same thing back in 2000 with the Internet stock crash. Back then, all sorts of people aggressively invested in these stocks and lost their shirts. These people did things like sell insurance, or own auto repair shops. Of course they lost their shirts! None of them had expertise in the stock market.

The point I am trying to make is you can never be in two places at the same time. You need to choose who you want to be and what you want to do. You can never become an expert in multiple things. You need to concentrate on doing one thing.

An excellent book I recently read is called "Outliers" by Malcom Gladwell. Gladwell examines the people who are able to achieve incredible and massive success in various callings. He looks at people like Bill Gates, the best lawyers in the United States, chess grandmasters, Mozart, Steve Jobs, the Beatles, professional hockey players, and others. Gladwell cites study after study describing the fact that people do not get really good at anything, at a world class level, until they have been doing it at least 10,000 hours. According to Gladwell:

"The idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise. In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours."

"The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert--in anything," writes neurologist David Levitin. "In study after study, of composers, of basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master criminals, and what have you, this number comes up again and again. Of course, this doesn't address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do. But no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery."

I get very concerned when I think about people vacillating back and forth between various skill paths. Instead of choosing to do one thing, so many people spend their careers floating from job to job – each one different than the one before and requiring a completely different set of skills. There is nothing wrong with changing careers, of course, but the most important thing anyone can do is ensure they choose something and then focus on it completely. If you continue to change your mind, you will never develop true mastery.

One of the most amazing things I have seen in my life is people who become incredibly happy, successful, and rich by seeking out and doing simple jobs to which they have committed. The universe rewards commitment. Warren Buffet has become incredibly rich committing to one form of investing. Some people make their fortunes doing simple things you would not expect.

When I was an asphalt contractor, I knew a man who'd built a giant company putting hot tar in the cracks in roads all over Michigan. I know of another man who became very wealthy building pallets for the [automotive industry](#). In college admissions, people with stand-out interests always do the best. I remember a high school teacher who talked about his students who'd gone to schools like Yale and Harvard, and how those students all had incredibly focused interests. Some were interested in bug collecting, another liked translating Japanese poetry, etc. The world rewards people with specialized interests who nurture that interest and continue to get better at those interests year after year.

One of the most unusual things I've witnessed is that most people are flirting with life and their careers. Instead of committing

to a career and something, these people continue to dissipate their energies in many different directions. As a consequence, they never achieve anything near what they are capable of achieving. What are your capabilities? How much do you think you can achieve? The sky is the limit if you focus and continue to improve at something.

Why do I call focus "a law of the universe"? In the family unit, marriages, children and so forth typically only occur when two people decide to commit to one another and get married. People choose to focus on one another. This is a rule in virtually every culture in the world. It is almost as if the rule is saying life cannot begin until two people choose to focus. In your life, your career will never really begin until you choose to focus.

As a [legal recruiter](#), I very quickly get a sense after looking at an [attorney's resume](#) of how long it is likely to take for the person to [get a job](#), and where. The most important factor determining an attorney's future employability is his or her focus, beyond where they went to [law school](#), their previous employer, or specialty. If the person has had several jobs in a short period of time, then employers will stay away (they know the person is unlikely to commit). If the person has flirted with other jobs in addition to practicing law, a smart employer will stay away. Employers are looking for commitment, and they want to make sure people accepting jobs with them are going to be committed to their company. Employers want their employees to use their commitment to help the company grow. The level of commitment [legal employers](#) look for is the same as in other professions. People want to hire people who are likely to do a job long-term.

Your life and career will change when you learn to commit to something over the long term.

### **THE LESSON**

Rather than committing to a career, many people switch jobs and take positions that require completely different skill sets; consequently, they never truly master their primary skills. While there is nothing wrong with changing careers, you must find something and devote yourself to it; many people have succeeded in relatively simple jobs, because they have committed to and mastered their craft. Develop a specialized interest, nurture it, and continually improve at it, and you will find the universe rewarding you.

### **Read More About Ask Your Superiors What They Think You Need to Improve at and Perfect It:**

- [Never Stop Improving: The Secret to Career and Life Success](#)
- [Never Stop Growing](#)
- [Making Others Aware of Your Weaknesses Can Make You More Trusted](#)

---

<https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/>