



## Winners and Losers

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was 10, I lost a fight that I did not realize I had lost. I went to a public school in Detroit where there were a lot of fights. Some of the fights were frightening to watch. People would hit each other with rocks and even baseball bats. Kids would often end up with broken bones and other serious injuries. Generally, these fights were about absolutely nothing.

One day, I was in a disagreement with a kid my age that as far as I knew, had never won a fight. He was not even really one of the kids who fought--because at the time he did not fight back. Someone would throw a punch (or even just a threat) his way and he would back down. This kid had been hit and intimidated so many times that he skulked around school and came and went to school out of back entrances to avoid other kids. He was a smallish guy for his age and was picked on quite a bit.

During our tiff, I tried kicking him and he managed to grab my leg and throw me to the ground. A second or two later, a teacher appeared and broke it up. I would have easily won the fight but did not have time to.

After this little fight, I noticed that the guy completely changed. He walked differently. He started smiling. He had won a fight in his eyes. I could tell that this little victory, as small as it was, meant a lot to him.

Over the next few weeks, an amazing transformation occurred. He got in a real fight a few days later and won. He fought back this time and hit his much larger opponent in the face, kicked him in the groin, and beat the kid up so badly that several other kids stepped in and pulled him off the other kid. I was not there at the time but heard about it.

Then he fought again and won.

Because he fought his fights in such a brutal way, other kids eventually became afraid to fight him--even much larger kids.

Despite his relatively small size, this kid's social standing in our school changed completely. People began to respect him and he began to respect himself. He looked, walked, and acted differently. He changed from an outcast to someone who was considered part of the "in crowd," and people wanted to be friends with him. He became a well-liked and social guy all throughout the rest of school. Girls liked him. He started participating in athletics. He became a decent student. In fact, he is a well-regarded scientist today. I never would have guessed that he would have achieved this result from his life when he was younger.

What brought about this incredible transformation? I think just one thing: He chose what *he perceived to be* a small victory (throwing me to the ground) and built on this. Building upon this one small victory helped him change his life.

There may be more to this guy's transformation than a small victory, but I am pretty confident it was this moment that made the major difference. My school was a lot about fighting back then and you needed to be tough to stand out. This guy based his self-worth on his ability to fight back, and this one small victory completely changed the way he saw himself. He chose to focus on his success and build from there.

I've often heard people throw around the word "loser"--I've never used the word "loser" too much because it is too dangerous. "Loser" connotes someone who always loses and never wins. More than this, though, the word to me means someone who focuses mainly on their losses and not their wins. If you are going to have a life with any modicum of success, you need to be focused on your wins--no matter how small—and not your losses.

If you think about your losses, you will put your focus there and continually be losing. If you think about your wins, you will be empowered and find yourself looking at the world as a place where you win and not lose. This alone will change your life.

Unfortunately, there seems to be something almost instinctual about focusing on our losses. It's a protective mechanism that keeps us from avoiding pain, but it also prevents us from recognizing our strengths. Because most people focus so much on their losses, their life and experience is mainly about losing.

Drive down the street in a bad neighborhood. Do you think the people you see sitting destitute on the side of the road are focused on their "wins"? Go into a dark bar at 10:00 a.m. Do you think the people sitting on those bar stools are focused on their wins? Call up someone you know who is unhappy and always complaining. Do you think that person is focused on his or her wins?

Nothing is more important for your life and career than focusing on your wins. If you do not focus on your wins, you will have nothing to build on. You absolutely must focus on your wins and not your losses. If you focus on your losses, then you are always going to be unhappy.

If you spend your time thinking about your losses you will be a loser.

Most people have a lot of experience losing, and I am sure you are no different:

- Most people have lost jobs.
- Most people have had relationship losses.
- Most people have had financial losses.
- Most people have had physical losses.

In fact, if you look around, you will see that most people out there have experienced one loss after another. Most people have had so many losses it would take years if they tried to write them all down. If I were to list the failures I have had, they would take up pages and pages--and I am not sure that I would ever get to the end of the list. I am sure I failed at something yesterday, failed the day before, and the day before that. I will fail at stuff today that I do not even know I will fail at.

Everyone is constantly failing. It is what we do with those failures that makes all the difference.

There are, of course, people who have winning streaks. The world is fascinated when people experience periods where they are not losing.

Mike Tyson, one of the greatest boxers of all time, had never lost a fight until he was knocked out by Buster Douglas on February 11, 1990. Prior to this time, Tyson had won his first 19 professional fights by knockout (and 12 of these knockouts occurred in the first round).

I remember when Tyson was on his winning streak and the conversations men used to have about him. People just kept saying over and over again how he was “unbeatable,” spoke about his superhuman fighting ability, and more. The world is attracted to and fascinated by people who do not lose. When Tyson was winning, the world was completely fascinated by him and he had a cultlike status because of his winning.

During Tyson’s winning streak, he was on a Barbara Walters special with his wife, Robin Givens. At the time it seemed to everyone that he could do no wrong. In the interview, Givens spoke negatively about Tyson and the sort of husband that he was. Tyson was shown in a negative light and the television interview became something that was repeated constantly over the years because it was the first time the public ever saw Tyson portrayed as anything other than an absolute immortal. Suddenly, all the wins, fame, and fortune seemed inconsequential for a man whose own wife said his life was out of control.

A short time later Tyson was divorced. Then he lost a fight. From there, things continued to get worse and worse for Tyson and more stories came out about his troubles. Soon Tyson was in prison on rape charges.

Several weeks ago I was watching *60 Minutes*. One of the stories was about an undefeated racehorse, Zenyatta, and how the horse could not be beaten. Interviews with the horse’s owners, jockey, and others seemingly confirmed the horse had incredible abilities and could not be defeated. Watching the story I was reminded that the horse and its record were similar to what people were saying about Mike Tyson when he too was having a winning streak.

The week after the *60 Minutes* story ran, Zenyatta lost her first race—just like Mike Tyson eventually lost. Prior to Tyson there was the boxer Muhammad Ali’s winning streak (he lost to Leon Spinks in 1978). Horses, boxers, everyone eventually loses.

The greatest athletes, businesspeople, and others eventually lose. Everyone loses. It is just a fact of life. Everyone loses. It is what you do with that loss that matters.

Several years ago, I was in Turkey and there was a young Greek man in his 20s who had become legendary for sleeping with so many women. In fact, the man ended up becoming internationally known and I even read an article about his Casanova abilities in an American magazine more than ten years later. The article I read said the guy had slept with something like 5,000 women by then.

I was staying in a hotel in Turkey where said Casanova worked as a bartender. One day this guy sat down with me and several other guys my age in the bar and had a coffee. The guy had slept with two women the previous day and had been doing the same thing for weeks.

I was fascinated by this guy and his success with the opposite sex and later that day I saw him sitting in a square having lunch alone. I sat down with him and started talking with him about nothing in particular. Then we took about a half mile walk back to the hotel where he lived and I was staying. What should have been a twenty-five minute walk took over two hours.

To my astonishment, he stopped and spoke with just about every mildly attractive female tourist around our age on the walk back. He told them he wanted to play his guitar for them and sing. He told them they were beautiful and he wanted to buy them flowers. The thing about this guy was that he was not particularly attractive. Most of the girls acted flattered by his attention but quickly brushed him off since he was a stranger they had never met. Even some of the girls he had spoken to the day before brushed him off again. A few of the girls were very rude to him and even insulted him—one called him “a midget” from what I remember (he was not all that tall).

In fact, I would estimate that the out of the twenty-plus girls he spoke with, only two or three were even mildly receptive to him. He set a time to meet with one of the girls “to look at the stars” (he was very romantic sounding) after his shift at the bar ended at midnight that night. Another girl he suggested meet him for dinner that evening, and he told her he was going to pick her up with flowers at his hotel.

I did not spend a lot of time getting to know this guy, but I learned a great deal. He looked for success and when failure came, he did not care at all. I had never witnessed one man take so much rejection from women in so little time. This guy did—and in the process he ended up becoming a legendary and internationally famous Casanova. He was famous for his successes and not his failure. He succeeded more than any other man I have ever heard of with the opposite sex.

Have you experienced failure? I have. There are failed relationships, failed business ventures, failed decisions, failed investments, failed philosophies ... just one long list of failures. In fact, if I were to concentrate my efforts on thinking about my failures constantly, I am not really sure what my life would be like. I probably would be depressed most of the time, resentful about the world, afraid to take action, and paralyzed, angry, fearful, self-deprecating, and more.

I would focus on my weaknesses and this would help me continually feel bad about myself. I would look at the world and the people in it in a way that would continually reinforce my negative beliefs.

If this sounds crazy--it is. Nevertheless, this is how most people choose to look at the world. They put their focus on their failures and not their successes. Compare this to our heroes: When people are winning and continually winning, their focus is on their successes. They build up their confidence and see the world in terms of their success and not failure. When Mike Tyson and Muhammad Ali were on their winning streaks, they believed that failure was impossible.

Once they saw failure was possible, though, they started to look at the world much differently I think, and things changed for them. You need to continue thinking about your successes and not your failures.

Being a winner and not a loser is easy. Stay focused on your successes—no matter how small—and do not focus on your losses at all. Forget about your losses and concentrate on what is going right and what you are doing right. Think about this and build upon the things you are doing best.