

## Good Things Only Happen When You Are Moving

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Probably the low point of my life was the summer I decided I needed to get ready for eleventh grade. Since I was young, I had been told that if I wanted to get into a good college, I would have to earn excellent grades in eleventh grade. My father had gone to Harvard and had told me since the time I was old enough to understand about how he earned all As in his junior year of high school, and how this had helped him get into this great college. I intended to do the same. Some of the stress of this was elevated due to the fact that my father also did some admissions work for Harvard, so I had some pretty good insights as to how my current application would be viewed. In a word, I needed to do really well in eleventh grade. Eleventh grade is typically the most important year because it is the last year of grades that colleges see before you are enrolled.

Since my grades had not been all that fantastic in the years leading up to eleventh grade, I told myself that I would brush up on various subjects that summer before school started. I went around speaking with the teachers I would be having the next year and declared my intention to do work over the summer to get ready for their classes the following year. I remember the look of astonishment on their faces as I related my desire to do my best to get ready for their classes the following year.

I do not think they thought I was serious.

Nevertheless, they were happy to give me work to do and they must have been humored by it. I think one teacher might have told me to read *Paradise Lost* and a few other books including the *Old Testament* as a joke (but I took him seriously). My [math teacher](#) gave me a copy of the math book his class would be using the following year. Because I planned on spending the summer getting ready for eleventh grade, I did not even [look for a job](#). My parents are divorced and I decided to move in with my mother on the other side of town because I thought this was the only place I could conceivably get any work done.

At my father's house, my room was right next to my stepsister's room. My sister had dropped out of school at age 14. She was a few years older than me and had recently gotten her [dream job](#) working in a record store. She had also used her money from this job to invest in stereo equipment that was so powerful it shook the walls of my room. Her mother was fiercely protective of her, and try as I might, I could not get her to turn down the music. She had recently started listening to nothing but hip-hop. I was beginning to think she fancied herself a hip-hop artist. She started dressing and talking differently. The worst thing about her new job was that they gave her free hip-hop records. Many of these records would start out with machine gun fire sounds that would shake the walls of my room, and it was very hard for me to read when I was hearing expletives pour out in surround sound every few seconds. So I decided to move in with my mother to escape the hip-hop music.

I was very excited about spending the summer getting ready for school so I could go to a top college. I have no idea what was wrong with me to this day. It was like I was going on a nerd mission. My friends at that point were all pretty wild and I am not sure what they thought of me going across town to study at my mother's house. I told myself I had made a good decision, though, especially after visiting my friend Steve a few weeks into the summer. Steve lived on my father's side of town in Birmingham, Michigan, about an hour away from my mother's in Grosse Pointe.

I drove my Volkswagen Rabbit Diesel over to Steve's house and arrived there at about 6:00 in the afternoon. I was with my friend Joe, whom I did not see very much anymore. Joe had become very good at football and was being recruited by colleges at that point. We had grown apart. Steve loved my Volkswagen Rabbit Diesel and always used to say "Diesel!!!" whenever he saw me. When we got to Steve's house, he was smashed. Steve's parents were in the middle of a divorce and he was not handling it well. Steve proceeded to take us to a party. The party was in a neighborhood called Wabeek that, at the time, was inhabited almost exclusively by people who had recently immigrated from the Middle East and owned convenience stores and gas stations throughout Detroit. The homes were really nice and gold plated lions sat on many of their front lawns. I think there was also a small replica of the White House somewhere in this neighborhood.

We were not at the party for longer than 15 minutes when Steve got kicked out. He had been talking to a girl and something bad had happened. I have no idea what.

We were standing at the curb and Steve was still shouting stuff at the girl. It was a bad situation. There were spectators (at least 15 of them) standing in front of this giant, gaudy house, listening to the insults being hurled back and forth. I realized at this point that the girl's entire family was also standing on the front lawn witnessing this--apparently, this was her house. Even her grandparents were there.

"The worst thing is that you're fat and you smoke!" Steve screamed at her.

This was too much. The men in the group, including the grandfather, started running towards the car. I fired up the Diesel and barely got away. Volkswagen Rabbit Diesels from the early 1980s were not fast. They were embarrassingly slow and I was lucky to have made it out of there. I looked over at Joe (the football player) and even he looked very frightened.

"Those guys are going to kill us," he said. "They are not messing around."

I was frightened, too. I continued to drive. A few moments later, I saw a Lincoln Continental swing around a curve and realized it was headed right towards us. Then I saw another car swing around the curve. The cars caught up to us in no time. They proceeded to cut me off and I drove my car into a ditch. The men then raced up to the car, pulled Steve out, and started punching and kicking him. Steve was laughing the whole time. The men then said something about treating women with respect.

My friend Joe got involved and explained that Steve was a drunk and his parents were going through a divorce. Joe was a huge guy and I can imagine he felt the three to four hours a day he lifted weights was going to help him break up this bizarre

altercation. Joe was so big and so tough that he had to ride in the Volkswagen with his head resting on his shoulder because he was too big to fit in the car otherwise.

When Joe got out of the car, the men with the gold chains and Iranian accents quickly turned into puppy dogs and made us promise to take Steve to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Then they shook hands with us and left. I think they must have thought Joe was a professional wrestler. Steve was bruised and bleeding and *still laughing*. For the next hour, we drove from church to church looking for an AA meeting to drop Steve off at. He was still laughing and there was blood all over the back seat of my car. Eventually we dropped Steve off at another party and I drove back to my side of town with Joe.

"Wow, it's pretty hardcore over on this side of town," Joe said. "Boy, it's a good thing you're not spending the summer here."

"Yeah, it sure is," I said.

When the summer began, I am sure you can guess what happened. I opened a math book and got confused within a few minutes and then I stared at the wall in front of me for a few hours while alternating between periods of doodling and feeble attempts to study. Then, I tried reading *Paradise Lost*. I was about two hours into it before I realized I had not progressed much, since I did not understand the 18th century English that the book was written in. It was also incredibly boring to me because it was about the *Old Testament*. My friends called me during those first few weeks of the summer, wanting to go out, and when I related to them that I was studying they seemed to think I had lost it.

I think I had.

Notwithstanding, I did the best I could to push forward, but I simply could not bear to memorize words in a foreign language, read 200+ years-old books, and puzzle through a bunch of math problems. I began to get depressed. My mom was dating a Scottish tugboat captain and by 6:00 pm every night they would start having a party. He would sip scotch and rock back and forth on a chair with a big smile on his face while playing tapes of bagpipe players. I'd try to talk to him sometimes and we would get into ridiculous arguments about conspiracy theories he would propose about the government. I think he believed that George Bush was an alien, for example. On the nights he and my mother stayed in, he would invariably tell me around 9:00 pm each evening:

"I am so drunk I cannot talk anymore. We will need to continue the discussion tomorrow ..."

On many nights the Scottish tugboat captain and my mom would go out and have a great time at restaurants and meet friends. I would be left sitting there, looking at page seven of a math book I had been involved with for weeks.

I must have watched a lot of television. To this day, I cannot recall much of what happened that summer. The strangest thing I remember from that summer was when a few of my friends showed up at my house one evening--on LSD. I had never really met anyone on LSD, but really did not sense anything all that unusual. Everything seemed pretty normal to me--until early the next morning. At that point, I realized one of the guys had been sitting on the curb all night staring at a blade of grass.

"I had the most incredible experience. I watched that blade of grass change all night. It got dew on it and then the dew disappeared," he told me. Drugs can really mess people up. I helped the guy get up and he walked home talking to himself about the blade of grass as if he had just met Jesus Christ.

Throughout the summer, various neighborhood girls would stop by in groups of two or three to see what I was up to. At first they were quite sober when they arrived, and the visit would generally progress in two steps. First, there would be an initial visit while they were sober; then this visit would be followed by another visit, wherein they would bring over groups of messed up friends, all hyped up, as if they were witnessing a laser light show played on a planetarium ceiling with Pink Floyd blasting in the background.

"What are you doing?" they would ask.

"I'm studying and trying to get ready for eleventh grade," I would tell them. They would look at me like I was absolutely out of my mind.

"That's great!" they would say.

Invariably, a few weeks later the same girls would come back, but with more girls. There would always be a couple more girls with them, whom I did not recognize. It was as if they were saying, "Hey, you need to check this guy out. He's totally intense and studying for classes he has not even taken yet! Isn't this the most insane freak show you've ever seen!" The spectators would tag along and their eyes would dart several times to the eyes of the girls I knew, as I related how I was studying that summer. I knew they thought they were witnessing something akin to another life form.

Visits would typically begin with idle chitchat. The girls' eyes would all be glassy-eyed from recent marijuana use and they would smell like smoke. "So, tell us about how you are spending the summer studying ..." they would always say after a few minutes of talking about nothing. On one occasion, one girl was so close to laughing she would run into the bathroom so she could laugh. Invariably, a short while after I would relate to them how I was spending the summer studying, they would leave.

After several weeks of this, I became quite mopish. I was hardly making any progress in my studies, and despite making my best efforts, I could not bring myself to get through any of the textbooks and other reading. It lacked excitement, to say the least. I also told myself that I needed to disassociate myself from my wild friends if I were ever going to get into an excellent college. Other than that, I am not really sure what was going through my mind. Literally nothing happened that summer. To this day, I am still getting over the damage that summer did to me.

The thing about this horrible summer is that it is no different than the lives many of us lead; and it is no different than the lives many people lead after they lose a job. The most serious mistake I made that summer was that I stopped moving. I literally did nothing that summer and ended up accomplishing absolutely nothing. It was the worst 12 weeks of my life.

When you stop moving and being productive, you can very easily get depressed. That's when bad things happen. When things stop moving, they die.

Every week, I review all sorts of unemployment data to learn about what is going on in the job market. One of the points that is often noted in these statistics is that there are numerous people who simply stop [looking for jobs](#) each week. These are people who may have been looking for a job, but then they give up. This is absolutely the worst thing that can happen. I have seen this happen with so many people I know. People simply stop trying to look for a job. Nothing good can come from this.

These are people who have stopped moving. You never want to stop moving. The more you move, the more opportunities you will see.

That summer was completely worthless to me socially, financially, and academically. I had stopped moving. While it is admirable to try and study for an entire summer, I suppose, I was not able to do this. Instead, I withdrew and became a circus attraction by virtue of my inactivity.

The quality of your life is determined by what you focus on and you need to choose things that are interesting to you. You need to direct your focus on tasks that are going to keep you productive. One of the images I never have been able to get out of my mind is when the police are called, or an ambulance is called, to rescue someone that is overweight and trapped inside a house. I see stories like this in *USA Today* all the time:

### **Rescue Workers Who Can't Get Morbidly Obese Woman Out of House Call for Front-End Loader**

Dozens of paramedics and firefighters failed in their efforts to get a morbidly obese New Jersey woman out of her house and to the hospital. Now they're waiting for the county to send over some heavy construction equipment.

As of 11 p.m. last night, the woman still had not been extricated from the house and rescuers on the scene were calling to county officials to inquire about borrowing a front-end loader.

After several hours of work, the rescue workers on the scene concluded that they wouldn't be able to get the woman out of the house without removing a second-story window.

The scene began just before sundown in the 100 block of Huff Avenue, when reports said the woman, believed to weigh between 700 and 800 pounds, fell and injured herself in an upstairs bathroom," *The Trentonian* reports.

[http://blogs.usatoday.com/ondeadline/2007/04/rescue\\_workers\\_.html](http://blogs.usatoday.com/ondeadline/2007/04/rescue_workers_.html)

While such stories as this are extreme, they are examples of people who have stopped moving, and they demonstrate what can happen when you stop moving. When you stop moving, the job market and the world begin to look at you very suspiciously. All further progress is extremely difficult for people who stop moving.

In the [practice of law](#) (and in many other professions), the absolute worst thing you can do is have a significant unemployment gap on your résumé. This is often interpreted by prospective employers as a lack of commitment to your job and your profession. Also, on another level, I think that other attorneys look at it as if you are out of touch with what is going on. You are no longer current, and are therefore less relevant. If you are perceived as being out of touch, you are much less employable. You need to be perceived as continually *in touch*.

Several years ago, a very talented attorney I know was fired because the company he was working for was involved in corrupt activities and he told them that he was under a fiduciary duty to report this. Despite the fact that he had been earning over \$200,000 a year at the time, he was fired. He came to me and told me that for his own psychological health he just needed something to do. He told me he would even work for \$20 an hour. I gave him some tasks to do and he was very grateful. He was just trying to look out for his health. It worked for him.

Research by the *American Psychologist* confirms that work "plays a central role in the development, expression, and maintenance of psychological health. [It can] promote connection to the broader social and economic world, enhance well-being, and provide a means for individual satisfaction and accomplishment."

There are far more benefits than just this, for sure. You need to keep moving and should never slow down. Even in a bad market it is important that you stay busy and work. Do not ever idle. When you slow down, bad things can happen.

### **THE LESSON**

You must maintain a state of constant motion; when you stop moving and being productive, bad things happen to you. Things die when they stop moving, which is why you should never give up under any circumstances. When people stop moving, they make all further progress difficult. Avoid gaps in your employment, as you will be seen as out of touch and less employable; instead, you need to stay continually moving and never slow down.

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