



Mental Toughness

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was practicing law, there was a guy who must have been in his early 40s who had broken with reality. I think he really might have gone insane. He desperately wanted to get ahead in the firm and worked extremely hard. He was the sort of guy who was working 18-hour days, sometimes more, sleeping on the floor of his office and so forth. I have no idea how long he had been doing this, but it had obviously taken its toll on him.

There is no doubt that the guy was making the law firm a ton of money working so hard. However, he just did not have the presence, or personality, to fit in well enough to ever make partner in the law firm. He was always tired. He spoke very loudly and did not seem to realize how loudly he was speaking. He had huge glasses that were frosted and made it difficult to see his eyes when he spoke. He'd drop papers because his reflexes were off because he was so tired. His hair was rarely combed. There was something wrong with him. He needed to take some time off—but I do not think he ever did.

I remember sitting in a partner's office in my firm one day when this guy came in to talk about something. The guy's skin was pale, he was characteristically talking way too loud, he had not shaved for days, and he was swaying on his feet. It was clear he was probably having a nervous breakdown from working so hard. When the guy left the partner's office, I looked at the partner as if to say *"this guy is really working way too hard,"* and the partner looked up to me and said:

"No one here is ever going to tell him not to work so hard. I'm just surprised he hasn't figured out he has no future here."

I remember thinking about this for some time and reflecting on it repeatedly over the years. As time went by, I saw this firm become more and more successful and I wondered if this attitude had anything to do with it. Here was a guy killing himself for nothing and no one was going to tell him it did not make a difference. No one was going to tell him this because he was making them money.

A few years after I left that law firm, I read a news story about the guy who had been working too hard. He had been arrested in a hotel room in an FBI sting. He had solicited what he thought was a 14-year-old girl over the Internet to meet him in a hotel room for sex and had gone to the hotel room to meet her. He managed to keep the story quiet for some time and, incredibly, represented himself in court. Eventually, news of the arrest got out and he ended up losing his job.

A few years after his arrest, I picked up the *LA Times* one morning and read another story. This time he was under suspicion for having thrown his wife off a boat during a cruise. The couple had taken a cruise to attempt to reconcile (they were going through a divorce after his arrest in the FBI sting). The wife had disappeared in the middle of the night and was found dead a few days later.

When most people look at something like this occurring, their immediate reaction is that there must be something terribly wrong with the person who committed these crimes. To some extent this is true, but I also believe that most people's capacity for evil can be exacerbated by the environment they are in. Here, I think that this guy was partially set off by the legal profession and being in an environment that pushed him to work harder and harder and never rewarded him for his effort. At some point, he had a break from reality. Perhaps he sought relief through meeting young girls. Perhaps he blamed his problems on his wife. I have no idea what was going through this guy's mind, but it must have been awful for him.

A stronger man would have had the mental toughness to leave the job and do something else. Instead, this guy was being dominated by an organization with more mental toughness than he had.

Something that few people realize is that the quality of a company and organization is based on its ability to manage people who are not contributing to the bottom line. The quality of an organization is also often based on the ability of that organization to get the people working for it to work harder and harder. Money does not care about your feelings—to produce it people will do whatever they feel they need to do. People will rob, kill, and hurt others in its pursuit. In its more "dignified" form, people will set up companies to make money and push the people inside them to work as hard as possible. They will go after competitors and do whatever it takes to succeed.

Capitalism is tough business, and in some companies people will be made to work in ways that are against their best interests. Employers can be cold blooded and so are many of the people running companies. This is a trait that is encouraged and is often responsible for keeping the company running through thick and thin.

Companies that survive for the longest and continually prosper are ultimately not all that nurturing: If you do not produce then the company will eventually get rid of you. Generally you will find that the longer a company has been around, the more clear-cut its management is and the better the management is at getting rid of people who are not directly contributing to the bottom line. Find a company that has been around longer than a few decades and you will always see this.

Performance reviews occur like clockwork. During performance reviews people are regularly asked to leave. People are pushed to perform more and more. The atmosphere is often brutal in most established companies. Perhaps it needs to be—this is the nature of capitalism and survival of the fittest.

A short time ago, I was at a company giving a presentation. After the presentation I was sitting with one of the top five people in the company. There must have been two hundred people working in the office of the company where I was presenting. It was a Monday or a Tuesday.

"No one knows this, but we're shutting down this entire office on Thursday," the guy told me calmly. "It's not public, so don't say anything yet."

I was quite astonished by this. This was a successful company. At the same time, this is also the way business works.

The brutality of the most successful companies and organizations is no different from the brutality of the most successful people in business. Several years ago, I started noticing that the most successful people in business (and in many other

professions) shared similar traits. For example, you might be in negotiations with them about one thing or another and say: "I can't do the work for you for that price. I will lose money."

They'd calmly respond: "Sometimes you just need to take a loss."

In reality, these sorts of people have no interest in your needs or concerns. They are 100% out for themselves and have a psychology that is such that they will use you up to the maximum extent they can. They often do not care about others.

All around these people you will find one person or another who is upset or aggrieved by being taken advantage of, ripped off, or cheated in one form or another by some sort of clever trick or business tactic pulled by the person: The most successful people I know of in business have legions of people who will attest to their cheapness, brutal negotiation strategy, ability to intimidate, litigiousness, and more.

There are limits to success in business. Most businesspeople are happy making a decent living. Others want more. Still others want even more. What I have seen, time and time again, is that the higher you move up in the pecking order, the more brutal and savage businesspeople will become and the more you will find people around them who are angry with these people for one thing or another.

These sorts of people drive others (like the guy I used to work with) insane. They intimidate their way through life and leave lots of wreckage in their wake. They give other people heart attacks. They cause divorces. They drive people to substance abuse. These people create many, many problems for others because nothing stands in their way.

I live in Malibu, California, and am neighbors with lots of extremely wealthy people. If I do a Google search for just about any of these neighbors, I will find tons of negative stuff from all over. Some of these people even have hate sites dedicated to them. They are all very nice in person, and on a personal level they do not seem that bad. But if you were to go by what others are saying about these people, you probably would never want to talk with them. In business, these people seem downright terrifying. And they are. When you are doing business with them, they usually win and they have no interest in your concerns or needs.

I remember a few decades ago watching an interview with Donald Trump. Trump had just sold Merv Griffin a hotel resort. Griffin paid Trump a massive amount of money for the resort. The show was about how Trump had ripped off Griffin. Trump was bragging in the interview about how he was smarter than Griffin and was able to trick him into paying a higher price than he should have.

"I have no idea why he paid so much. It was not worth anywhere near what he paid," Trump proudly told the interviewer. "Maybe he is stupid, or maybe I have a good smile."

This is how it is when you deal with people like Trump. There is no fairness to any of the dealings. It is like two animals meeting in the wilderness and one killing the other. One person does not look out for the other at all. Trump is a predator and he does not want to be your friend or help you. And you find that attitude throughout businesses.

In my experience, most of what occurs in life and in our careers is a mental game. Your success has to do with how hard you work and how effective you are; however, ultimately everything that happens to you and whether or not you reach your full potential is going to be a factor of how you run your mind and your mental toughness. Having this "killer instinct" and being ruthless is something that gets companies and a lot of people ahead. In fact, you can look at your place in the world as someone who is either being dominated by those with mental toughness, or dominating those who do not have it. What else is a leader than someone with mental toughness?

Over the years, I have read a lot of books about peak performance and high-level success. Some of these books have been very good. There are books that link success in business to diet and exercise. There are other books that link success to marketing. Still other books link success to interpersonal skills. In all of my studies of this, though, I think there is one thing that stands out above and beyond everything else in terms of what makes someone successful: *How mentally tough a person is*.

When you have a goal, it is generally just not enough to have the goal. You need to believe in your goal. If you do not believe in yourself and you do not believe in your goal, then you are undermining yourself and others—and you will fail. This is what happens to most people. Most people and their goals end up getting undermined—either by themselves or others—and they fail. Most people do not have the mental toughness to accomplish their goals.

Companies that are focused, and people that are focused, often seem cold blooded. I think there is a lot of truth to this. This focus backed up by mental toughness is often mistaken for being cold blooded. A more important idea, I think, is that nothing gets in the way of the most focused companies and individuals because of their mental toughness.

If you believe in what you are doing and yourself—and you have extreme mental toughness--then you will not fail at practically anything you do. Having supreme mental toughness changes everything.

THE LESSON

Your mental toughness and the way in which you organize your mind are the two biggest determinants of everything that happens to you and whether or not you attain your full potential. Mental toughness can prevent any conceivable article from hindering you. Developing mental toughness changes everything for you, and once you have it you will believe in yourself and what you are doing, and you will greatly diminish your risk of failure.