

Fight for the Right to Work

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In a bad [job market](#), the most important thing you can do is to keep trying. Never give up. Life is a race and your career is also a race. The problem with most people is that they are often willing to give up at the first sign of difficulty. The harder you keep trying and the more effort you put in, the more things are likely to go your way.

From the time I was about 12, I had paper routes that required me to home deliver hundreds of papers all over my neighborhood by 7:00 am each morning. It gets very difficult to do paper routes in the winter in Michigan, and it was not a fun job. The worst part about the paper route was that I had a corrupt manager. I think he was paid based on how many papers were being delivered on his route, so he kept increasing the number of papers I had to pay for, despite the fact that my customer base was not increasing. I tried to keep up with this for some time but eventually it got to be too much. He was raising the numbers of papers he sold me each week faster than I could cancel the newspapers. Eventually I gave up.

This was a huge mistake. There are people around you like my manager, who are trying to undermine what you are doing, often for their own personal gain. You should always fight back against people seeking to undermine you--and hold them accountable. Had I fought back, I am sure I would have made a lot more money back when I was delivering newspapers.



Each day I would be left with a huge pile of undelivered papers, for which I would still have to pay. For years these papers accumulated in my mother's garage. Rats came and created elaborate nests out of them. I knew this because when I would throw the undelivered papers into the garage each morning I could hear the sound of the rats scattering. I became alarmed to set foot in there. Even my dog refused to go in the garage. She would yelp and scream if anyone tried to take her in there. It was as if she was being given a death sentence and knew it.

I have never heard of a hunting dog that is afraid of rats. My mom had grown up with Brittany Spaniels and her dad had used them to retrieve various birds that he shot when he was not working in his hardware store. Our dog loved to hunt, but was simply terrified of the rats that were nesting in our garage.

I didn't blame him. I started making sure the doors to the garage were closed at all times because I did not want to get attacked by a rat either. They were big rats and they must have been living off of the newsprint. Each morning I would open the door a crack and throw the left over newspapers in there as rapidly as possible, and then run 10 feet or so to insure none of the rats had gotten out and were attacking.

I would finish my paper route and come home exhausted around 7:15 am each day. I was so tired by this work that it was too much to also contend with the corrupt manager, who was charging me for too many newspapers. I still look back on these days with a certain amount of awe because I worked so hard--and barely made any money. I was simply in the business of purchasing newspapers and delivering them to hundreds of people for nearly free, at a ridiculous hour, and then supporting a huge colony of rats.

The thing about this job, however, was that I never gave up. For 365 days every year for years and years I continued to deliver the papers. I found every means within my power to get those papers delivered. This is what you need to do with your job too. You need to find every means within your power to get it done.

One of the most amazing things about paper routes is that I do not think I was ever sick, not once during the 4+ years during which I did this job. In fact, I cannot think of another kid who was ever sick when they had a paper route either. Perhaps this is because we were in better shape, but I also think it is because when you cannot afford to get sick, you simply do not. We had to get those papers delivered and there was no one else out there who could do it if we didn't do it. Hundreds of people depended on me each day to get the news. Some of the people were old or handicapped and never left the house. Others read the paper before going to work in the morning. The fact is that a lot of people relied upon me, and getting the paper to them was extremely important to me.

In my years in business I have seen countless employees abuse sick days. I do not like this. You are not really sick until you cannot deliver a paper. I got those papers delivered though countless colds and other ailments. You need to be strong, to get out of bed and get to work. People are depending on you. This is something I learned early on. In my entire career of working for people, I only missed work for one half day. I was sent home from a [law firm](#) after throwing up in front of my secretary's desk.

The best employees never call in sick. If they really are sick, they will be so laid up that I will bring them flowers. People need to be tough because they are being relied upon. Not getting sick sends a great message to your employer.

When I was 13, a 17-year-old neighbor of mine told me he would sell me his used motocross motorcycle to use for my paper route, for \$250. My neighbor had been adopted from a wilderness area in Northern Michigan and he had all sorts of

interesting habits and toys that he had brought from the area he was from. I never asked him much about where he was from, or what had happened to his family. I alluded to this once and he turned very serious. His blue eyes appeared to start glowing like a character in *Star Trek*. I never said anything about it again. I was afraid I might be killed.

I liked this guy a lot and he used to drive me to school. He would generally brag about how he was going to be cheating on a test that day, or was going to take a look at some sort of illegal weapon after school. He kept a gun in his glove box. On one occasion he showed me how he had copied 50 pages worth of notes on to one page of a book in between the lines of text, so he could cheat on a test that day. He bragged that it had taken him days to do this. It was beautiful work and the words were the size of pinheads. I wondered why he did not simply study for the test that was coming up. This seemed to me as if it would have been much easier, and less time consuming.

He looked like the lead character out of *Revenge of the Nerds*, but he was into things far more macho than any typical nerd. For example, he collected shotguns and hunting knives. He also liked to go deer hunting; he had several pictures of him sitting on the corpses of dead deer that he had killed. He just appeared one day in our neighborhood and proceeded to purchase all sorts of old cars and brought a touch of Grizzly Adams rural Northern Michigan with him to the suburbs. Unfortunately, he died when he was around 18, while doing some sort of military exercise demonstration. It involved twisting a shotgun to his head in a rapid fashion. He had invited some students from his school, and had been showing them how adept he was with a gun. The gun discharged and shot him in the head in front of his astonished peers. People I knew never talked at all about this incident because, apparently, it was incredibly disturbing--beyond words.

I heard through my mom years later that the guy had still been talking to the group and performing his exercises, for several seconds after he had shot part of his head completely off. He had been oblivious to the fact that he was missing half of his head. His body continued operating on autopilot for some time before he finally expired in front of the screaming group.

The motocross bike I had purchased from the guy was that it was not street legal, as it turned out. In addition, I was living in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, which was a very suburban area, probably at least 60 miles away from the nearest dirt bike trail.

Also, the dirt bike had no muffler and no kick stand. After a ride, I had to lean it against a garage or just put it on the ground. In addition, the bike was quite tall and I could barely fit on it. Finally, since it was built for motocross, it had no lights on it. It was clearly not built for riding on roads.

It was, however, built for riding on people's front lawns, through topiaries and more. It also fit a bag of newspapers on its long seat quite conveniently. Incredibly, I was suddenly able to do my paper route in less than 45 minutes with this new tool. Around 20 minutes of the expedition consisted of me balancing the bike against a tree while I loaded up my newspapers. I literally rode this awesome machine right across front lawns, barely ever riding on the street. Since I was operating at 5:00 am people were sleeping and I never got any complaints. The bike was loud, but I darted so quickly in and out of doorsteps that I am sure I was long gone by the time any one ever woke up. People would get woken up due to the motocross sound, and probably saw tracks across their lawn the size of small car tires; but I am sure they never imagined these were caused by the 13-year old kid with the paper route bike. I knew that I would be in serious trouble if I were ever caught by the police on this incredible motorcycle.

This was how I did things. I had to deliver the papers. I knew I had a job to do and I took every action within my power to get it done.

Word soon spread to the kids in my neighborhood that I had this amazing toy. In fact, word spread for miles around, and lots of kids started coming over just to see the bike. In some cases these kids would ride their bikes from five miles away or more. When I had purchased the bike, I knew I would be in serious trouble if I were ever caught riding the bike during the day. One time I was sitting around the house with a good friend of mine and we realized that a store we wanted to get to would be closing in the next 10 minutes. It would take us at least 25 minutes to get there on our regular bikes. Somehow my friend convinced me to fire up the dirt bike. My idea was that if I were to ride the dirt bike fast enough on the streets, no one would see us. I still to this day do not understand what I was thinking.

I fired up the dirt bike and drove like hell. I was riding on side streets and had no idea how fast I was going because the bike had no speedometer. I knew the speed limit was 25, however, and when I heard the sirens behind me I was very scared. We had been going along, having the time of our lives, and had made it at least 2 or 3 miles. When I pulled over, the policemen that approached the motorcycle looked speechless. Here were two young kids in the suburbs, who had just been pulled over riding a motocross motorcycle.

"You were going 71 miles an hour in a 25 zone," the officer said dryly as I finally managed to get down off the motorcycle and lay it down in the middle of the street. "Do you have a license?"

I explained I had no license, no registration, no identification, and no insurance. Plus, I was only 13, so the officer did not seem to have any idea what to do. The first person he dealt with was my friend. I had been wearing a helmet. He radioed the station and they called my friend's parents, who rushed over to pick him up. The officer gave him a ticket for not wearing a helmet. My friend's father was a very important and respected man in the city. I think he was the mayor of one of the Grosse Pointes. This was despite his having a huge collection of pornography (and sex toys) hidden in his bedroom closet, about which every thirteen-year-old kid in the entire city knew--and sometimes watched while he was at work. After this episode, many children would be banned from associating with me, as this smut king mayor spread word that I had been caught on my nuclear powered paper route bike with his son going 70 miles an hour in a 25 miles-per-hour zone. I gave a false telephone number for my mother, so the police could not reach her. My parents were divorced and I was living with my mother at the time.

"He's ok. I know who he is," my friend's father, the porno mayor, told the many policemen who had gathered. "Do not take him to Wayne County Juvenile Detention. He'll be dead in an hour if he's taken there. Just release him. "

I got a ticket for driving a vehicle without a registration, going 71 in a 25-zone, reckless driving, driving without a license, driving a vehicle without lights or signals, and other infractions I do not recall to this day. There were so many tickets I could not fit them all in my pocket. I was told to give them to my mother. They sent a tow truck to pick up my motorcycle and I walked home.

The worst part about this was that I was going to have to do my paper route without the motorcycle in the morning.

I have no idea how I did it but within two days I got my motorcycle back. I think I got the guy I had purchased it from to pick it up and give it back to me.

You can always find a way to get your work done. You need to do everything within your power to [get your job](#) done.

He made me promise to never ride it during the day again. The most serious problem came a few days later, when I opened a very official letter addressed to my mother. I then realized I had a court date that I was expected to attend in a few days, with my parents. I realized that if my mother found out about all of this I would be screwed. I did the only thing I could possibly think of.

I called the judge.

I needed a good story and to this day I am still not sure how I came up with the story I did. I explained to the judge that my father had just died a tragic death, when he was attacked and killed by a group of rabid bats during a caving expedition in South America just some days back (I do not think my father has ever been in a cave, and he is alive and well to this day) and that my mother was really shook up by this. I explained that the shock of the bat attack combined with this would really send my mother over the edge.

"Is she drinking a lot?" the judge asked.

"Yes. She's very upset," I lied.

"I would be too if I were her. Damn! A crazy bat attack. I bet they have really sharp little teeth."

"The sharpest!" I cried.

I am not sure how I delivered this monologue, but I do remember crying.

"He never knew you cannot disturb bats while they are sleeping during the day. Thousands of bats just descended on to him from everywhere!"

"I know...I know..." the judge said.

After what must have been an unprecedented 20-minute discussion, the judge told me that he was not sure that he could do anything and that I would need to bring my mother to court the following week. He promised me he would check to see what he could do, however.

A few days later, another letter arrived from the courthouse. I intercepted this one, just like I intercepted the previous one. I remember it started with something like, "I spoke with your son and am so sorry about your husband's death at the hands of so many rabid bats..." The letter then detailed the charges and the judge said that he would be dismissing the charges, and that we did not need to show up for court. The judge admonished my mother to watch me, despite her time of unprecedented grieving, and urged her to not drink so much. I could not believe it.

My friend went to court for not wearing a helmet and ended up being fined a lot of money. His father even hired a lawyer to represent him. Since he was a local mayor, the small hearing had been a little spectacle in the area. I went to the hearing and my friends' parents were there together with the lawyer. I was called on to testify in front of the judge about the event surrounding my friend not wearing a helmet. My friend broke down and cried in front of the judge. He was wearing a suit and tie. I was testifying in sneakers, shorts and a tee shirt. My friend ended up getting grounded for quite some time and I continued to ride my motorcycle.

The motorcycle was not without its problems. For example, the chain frequently came off, which was very annoying. But it did the job. Eventually I got some sense and put a classified ad in the paper and sold the dirt bike, so I could purchase a real motorcycle with the proceeds. That bike was much better because it had a license on it and everything. Despite being years away from being old enough to have a license, I rode that motorcycle everywhere. I even took it across the American border on a bridge to Canada, and spent hours riding it throughout Canada. I'm probably the only 14-year old who ever did anything as crazy as this.

What I learned from my motocross episode is that you need to figure out how to get your work done. You need to use every means within your power. When you grow up street smart, you learn that you cannot always count on things to go the way you want them to. You need to fight on. Fight for the right to work.

THE LESSON

Things will not always go the way that you want them to go, so you must not be discouraged by adversity in your job hunt. When you persist and consistently put forth your best effort, things are much more likely to go in your favor. Also, you must resist others' efforts to undermine your efforts and potential; focus instead on doing everything in your power to fight on and complete the task at hand.

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