



Push Yourself Outside Your Comfort Zone

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

About ten years ago, an attorney who had been practicing about seven or eight years longer than me purchased his first house. I remember congratulating him on the purchase, and his response shocked me at the time:

"I am very happy with the house. I plan on living here the rest of my life."

I just looked him up and he is still living there.

At the time, I purchased a house of equivalent value in the exact same neighborhood he did. I sold my house within two years. Then I bought another house and moved. Then I bought another house and moved. Then I bought another house and moved. Then I bought another house and moved.

Why so much movement?

Each time I bought a house, I spent all of my free time redoing the house. I would redo the floors, I would paint, I put in new landscaping, I built pools, I created new rooms inside the house, I tore out just about every kitchen and bathroom, and I fixed everything that was wrong. I became obsessed with making the house perfect. I was never satisfied with the quality of the house when I moved in. One time I did this, and in less than two years I sold the house for over \$1 million more than I had purchased it for.

Once I had made the house perfect, I would start to get very bored and restless. I needed to continually be improving the house, and without this to do, I invariably would put the home on the market. Because the house was in such great condition, it would almost always sell very rapidly. Then I would find a new (superior) house and do the same thing again.

In business, I am the same way. I am continually going "full throttle" at work and spend hours a day writing down various things that need to be improved and doing reports. In business, this sort of work never ends. I am never comfortable or satisfied with the way things are going, and I'm always doing everything I can to fix what seems to be broken. It is an obsession. I even carry a notebook in my car to make sure I am taking note of everything that needs to be improved at all times. I spend my entire day on Sundays writing down stuff that needs to improve. I never get satisfied.

Week after week, month after month, year after year, I am working myself up into a virtual "mini-frenzy" finding things that are wrong or need improvement. I am fighting a constant, ongoing battle to make sure that everything I do and am involved in is being perfected to the most I can. The problem with a business and relationships with people is that nothing can ever be perfected like it can with a house. These sorts of things involve constant oversight.

I am not alone in my obsession with residential real estate. For several years, I was with a woman who was an extremely successful [landscape architect](#). She worked for men who were billionaires and she worked exclusively on their homes. The men were obsessed with the smallest of details in their quest to perfect their homes. No detail was too small or unimportant. Despite employing tens of thousands of people, men like this could give you a ten-minute lecture about how their pool heater functions, or spend hours discussing the seasonality of various plants on their property. I am guessing that these men took such interest in their homes because it was the one thing they could control with certainty. Like me, these men always seemed to sell their homes after completing all of the work. I believe that they thrived on being dissatisfied and that the ability to become dissatisfied was the source of their success.

In terms of the attorney who bought the home he planned on living in for the rest of his life, I certainly do not think there is anything wrong with this. However, he clearly did not have the state of mind where he was going to push himself outside of his comfort zone continually. Doing so most likely would have changed his life.

When I was in law school, I remember going out to an event one evening with one of my classmates. We were sitting in his car waiting for some people to show up and he said:

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At the time, I remember thinking that there was something a little sad about this. His goal was to just become comfortable and leave it at that. After he graduated from law school, he worked in the same law firm for twelve years, and then one day the law firm told him they could not afford to pay him anymore. He had gotten comfortable, but ultimately this comfort ended up turning on him.

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Everyone wants to be comfortable. The fights that are continually going on between unions and companies (or unions and governments) are generally about comforts. People want to be guaranteed a job. People want to be guaranteed they cannot be laid off. People want to be guaranteed a certain amount of vacation. People want to be guaranteed health care. People want to be guaranteed they only have to work a certain number of hours a week.

When people succeed, they tend to feel good about themselves and they tend to forget what got them to where they are. When I was 14 years old, my father remarried. Within a few months of remarrying, he moved to Bangkok, Thailand, where he was working on a business. My stepmother stayed behind for three months to wind up all of our household-related affairs.

Three months later when my step mother arrived in Bangkok, my father was waiting for her as she got off the plane. She walked right by him and he did not recognize her. Incredibly, she had gained more than fifty pounds and no longer looked like

the same person. She continued to gain more and more weight over the next year of the marriage--at which point my father and stepmother divorced. My father realized that she had "slimmed down" after her divorce from her prior husband and then gained all of the weight back right after getting married again. In sum, she was "comfortable" again after she had remarried.

I think my father and stepmother had other problems besides the fact that she gained 100-plus pounds; however, I believe that my stepmother becoming too comfortable had something to do with the collapse of the marriage. You can never get too comfortable with anyone or anything.

One of the best things that can happen to you in your life is to fail. When you fail at something, you get frustrated, your brain starts turning over and over what might have happened to make you fail, and you look for ways not to fail the next time. Frustration, rejection, and failure are some of the most powerful emotions we have access to because they can help us improve in everything we are doing.

Yesterday, I was reading a business-related book and I came upon a discussion about various well-known and successful people who have filed for bankruptcy:

- Abraham Lincoln
- Walt Disney
- Henry Ford
- Milton Hershey (Hershey Chocolate)
- Donald Trump
- Larry King
- Henry John Heinz (Heinz Ketchup)
- Mark Twain
- P.T. Barnum
- Rembrandt
- Thomas Jefferson
- Ulysses S. Grant
- William Crapo Durant (founder of General Motors)
- William Fox (founder of the Fox Film Corporation)

Prior to reviewing this list, I never was aware that any of these people ever had any sort of financial trouble. I have known scores of extremely successful people in my life who ended up getting extremely overextended financially—and in all sorts of other ways. I would say that one secret of the most successful people is that they are always pushing things beyond their comfort zone. They are never satisfied with the status quo. Financial obstacles do not stand in their way, and this can often have disastrous consequences.

Each of the men above probably could have used lots of justifications for not spending too much money and remaining "comfortable." Most of these men prior to their bankruptcies already had very successful careers and lives. But each of them kept pushing and pushing. They were never satisfied with what they had, and they pushed themselves and their businesses far beyond an acceptable comfort zone.

Each time you get outside of your comfort zone—and you succeed—you create a new sense of what is normal for you in your life. Then you push yourself out of your comfort zone again and get a new sense once more. Pretty soon your life becomes completely unrecognizable to what it was before. You need to continually get dissatisfied and push yourself outside your comfort zone.

THE LESSON

You can never become too comfortable if you wish to be successful. Your success will largely depend on your ability to become dissatisfied with your current position. Successful people are never satisfied with the status quo, and constantly push beyond their comfort zone. When do you this and succeed, you set a new standard for normality in your life. Be continually dissatisfied, and always pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone.