

## Expose Yourself to Pain in Your Job Search

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was growing up, I did not have any friends whose parents were attorneys. In fact, I did not really know any attorneys until I got to college. A girlfriend of mine at that time had a friend whose stepfather was an attorney. I met him during my senior year, when I was applying to law schools. He seemed nice enough, and we shook hands and exchanged pleasantries, and that was that.

When I went to law school several months later, I decided that I would write him to tell him that I was looking for a [summer job](#). I sent him a letter reintroducing myself and told him that I would be calling him over the Christmas break. I was excited about the possibility of working in his law firm over the summer, as it was one of the biggest law firms in Detroit.

I will never forget calling him the day after Christmas. I called his office at approximately 9:00 a.m., and he picked up his phone on the first ring. I reminded him who I was and that I had sent him a letter with my resume recently.

"I am not sure why you wrote me a letter with your resume," he said. "It was not really appropriate to send me that and it is also not appropriate to be calling me."

With that, the attorney lightly placed the receiver down and hung up the phone.

After this occurred, I found myself extremely flustered. My heart sank into my chest. All sorts of feelings of inadequacy, shame, and so forth came up. Since this was one of the largest law firms in Detroit at the time, I was concerned that I might have done profound damage to my future. Moreover, I wondered if there was something wrong with me that had made the attorney treat me like this. I wondered if it would be possible for me ever to get a job as an attorney.

I grew up in a neighborhood of Detroit that was not that nice. I was raised largely by a single mother and we did not travel in the same circles as the attorney and his family. I wondered if I was suffering some sort of class discrimination or some sort of negative treatment because I was not cut from the correct cloth. I was very upset about this.

Since this was my first experience looking for a full-time job, I reasoned that it was never a good idea to call people on the phone when looking for a job. I reasoned that the best thing to do was to simply send a letter and avoid any sort of conflict. I reasoned that rejection is less likely when you do not put yourself out on the line as I had done with the phone call.

Several years later, I briefly started my own law firm, and my number was listed in the Yellow Pages. A girl on summer vacation from her first year of college called me on the phone looking for a summer job. I immediately invited her in to speak with me and commended her on her bravery for calling me. I offered her a job on the spot. At the time, I only had one other employee. For the next few summers she worked for me. Then, before she went off to her senior year of college I made her a job offer of \$40,000 a year starting right out of college. She also had a job offer at Enron at the time; however, this offer was pulled when the company collapsed spectacularly. She ended up starting in our company after graduating from college and worked at the company for some time. She never would have gotten a job with our company had she not been brave enough to call me on the phone.

Throughout the years, I have hired numerous people who called me before sending a resume. I have always admired the risk these people take of in-person rejection. It must be incredibly painful to be rejected on the phone like that. I know it was for me personally, when I first picked up the phone and started looking for a job. Making in-person contact, though, can make a giant difference and is something that can fundamentally change the quality of the experience you have in your job search and life.

I used to operate a residential and commercial asphalt business in Detroit. For the first year or so of doing this job, I spent thousands of dollars putting flyers in mailboxes, mailing out letters, and getting the word out by mail. However, it was very rare that anyone called me on the phone looking for an estimate. After giving an estimate, my odds of getting the job were always quite slim. It was not until I started going door to door selling the service that my business took off. In fact, I would estimate that I did twenty times more business by going door-to-door than I would have done had I simply passed out flyers and sent letters.

*What do you think this means for your career?*

In the case of calling around looking for a job, the difference you are going to get between calling and just e-mailing a resume is huge—in fact, the improvement you will get is likely to be exponential.

Right now, I know someone who is extremely talented and really needs a job. Despite this person's incredible talent, there are aspects of their resume and experience that are likely to result in them being quickly turned away for interviews, if they simply mail or e-mail their resume to an employer. For at least the past month, this person has been e-mailing out a resume here and there with very little success whatsoever.

A few weeks ago, I sat down with this person and gave them a list of more than 100 employers they needed to contact by calling on the phone. I was not talking about calling the Human Resources Office, but instead, calling people inside the employer's office, who are likely to have a need for this person. These are the sorts of phone calls that these people are not expecting and also the sorts of calls that are likely to lead to the greatest rewards. Since this is someone I have been friends with for some time, I wanted to make sure they got a job and I told them what it is going to take to go the limit and get a job.

Well, it has been a few weeks and I am confident that this person has not made a single phone call. We are talking about someone who is extremely talented and has a history of very high level achievement—a top 1% sort of person.

Why no phone calls? I have no idea; however, my belief is that this person is afraid of making phone calls to employers because they are afraid of the rejection and the pain they will feel when they are rejected. It does not feel good to have people put down the phone on you. It does not feel good to not be acknowledged. It does not feel good to feel you are not wanted.

Despite the need for a job and the incredible importance of having a [good job](#), most people would much rather avoid the pain of in-person rejection rather than take a risk.

Several months ago, I read a book by the founder of Zappos, Tony Hsieh. Here, he wrote about the tremendous pain and difficulty he experienced during a mountain climb he did voluntarily after selling a company. Shivering, starving, vomiting, and so forth does not sound like a lot of fun to me. What is interesting, though, is that many of the most successful people in the world consistently expose themselves to pain and all sorts of difficulties. My belief is that they feel that this pain raises their threshold for pain and makes them stronger. Enduring pain and doing what others will not do always makes you stronger and ultimately provides you a better life.

Everything that we do is a cause set in motion. Not picking up the phone and calling an employer about a potential job is a cause set in motion. Allowing someone to not have to reject you face-to-face is a cause set in motion. Spending more time on a better cover letter for your job search is a cause set in motion. Researching more [job openings](#) and employers to send your resume to is a cause set in motion. In fact, everything that you do is a cause set in motion.

When I was in law school, I became acquainted with an admissions officer at the school. Each year, a given number of students are put on various wait lists at graduate schools—to be admitted if a certain number of people do not show up, for example. A little known fact is that at numerous graduate schools each year, a few people from all over the country travel to the admissions office and sit in the lobby the first day or so of school to wait and see if a spot opens up.

These brave souls simply tell the admissions office they are there and to let them know if a spot opens up.

“You are welcome to wait, but it will not make a difference,” they are always told.

From what I understand, a good portion of these people are admitted every year. By taking this extreme action and showing their commitment—and exposing themselves to the potential pain of in-person rejection—these people are far more likely to get off wait lists than people who simply wait in the background.

The more pain you are willing to expose yourself to, the better you will generally do. When you take the hard path in your job search and do things that others are not willing (or are afraid) to do ... you always end up far better off than those who do things the easy way.

### **THE LESSON**

People succeed by taking risks in their job search, potentially exposing themselves to pain and rejection. Despite the need for a job, most people would rather avoid risk instead of facing the pain of an in-person rejection. You must realize that risk and pain are inherent in a successful job search, will make you stronger, and ultimately lead you to a better life.

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