



Never Try to Be Someone Different from Who You Are

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A few years ago, the Dean of the law school I attended took me out to lunch. He was in town because his son was attending a math camp. He told me his son absolutely loved math and the Dean was nurturing his skill. Reflecting on his son's math skills, he said something like:

"He's having a little bit of trouble catching on to complex integers and his skills get a little sloppy in longer problems, but he'll get the hang of it."

I had a hard time believing what I was hearing. How many parents understand their child's math skills this well?

The Dean had attended MIT for college and during the lunch I could not help but think that the Dean's father had raised him in a similar way—with math camps, insight into his math skills, and so forth. At a genetic (or similar) level, I am sure the son had some natural skills in math. Most parents would not have the slightest idea about what a math camp is. I had never heard of math camp until the Dean told me about his son.

Kids who go to schools like MIT and become great engineers, often have parents (like the Dean) who are able to nurture their natural skills—just like you too probably have some natural skills that someone may have tried to nurture along the way.

By the time the Dean's child is around 18 years old, my guess is that he will understand math so well that probably less than 1 in 1,000 people could even hope to be his equal in math. He will have a highly developed skill and gift and be doing something that he loves. The longer he does math, the more skills he will develop and the more insight he will have into it.

Most of us have things that we are good at and love doing. Everyone does. Most of us have skills that we have developed over a lifetime—everyone is good at something. The biggest mistake we often make is coming to believe that we should be someone different from who we are, with a different set of skills than we in fact have.

When I was 26, I started practicing law. I hated it but I tried my very hardest at it. For some reason, I felt I needed to be an attorney. Despite having an incredibly successful business that I loved doing, I made the decision to go to law school. Once there, I could not believe my misfortune. I was very much unlike the kids who chose to enroll in law school.

When I started working in a law office, looking out the window from ten floors up was upsetting for me. I would see various businesses down on the ground and get excited about how these businesses could be improved. I would go to the bookstore some days during lunch and buy business books. I would even be excited if the manager came up to me in a restaurant to ask me how my meal was so I could talk to him about the business the restaurant was doing.

Clearly, I was doing the wrong sort of job sitting inside a law office.

In my job, I watched some very gifted [attorneys](#) who seemed to really love what they were doing. These attorneys were not interested in business, and instead, seemed to just love the sort of work attorneys do. They would become visibly animated and excited about the prospect of going to court, or giving a client legal advice. These people were in the right profession. This is exactly how it should be. You need to do what you enjoy and what comes naturally to you. We owe ourselves this.

Something I have noticed through the course of being an entrepreneur is that numerous people I have hired in the past decide that they want to be just like me. Instead of doing what they were hired to do (because they were gifted at this and had a history of doing this), they decided that it is better to be an entrepreneur.

Perhaps they feel being an entrepreneur is sexier, perhaps they believe that being an entrepreneur is a better way to make a living.

Everyone has their own rationale; however, what I do know is that I have seen numerous people quit whatever company of mine they are working for and set up competing companies. Their thought seems to be that it is better to do what I do than what they are trained to do and understand and love to do.

Sometimes, this is the correct decision for people—but most times, it is not. Being a manager, or an entrepreneur, is a completely different job and it may not be what you are good at.

An analogy to doing something different from what you are skilled at because it looks better might be the difference between being a world-famous professional athlete and being a coach. Professional athletes can earn more than \$40 million a year with their salary and endorsements. Moreover, they have incredible and unique athletic gifts that entertain audiences. Nevertheless, these athletes need to report to practice and answer to their coaches.

What if certain professional athletes in their prime decided that they would prefer to be a coach and quit the team at the peak of their success? They might reason, for example, that a coach is "in charge" and that they want to direct the team. Most people would agree that this is insane. A coach has a completely different skill set than the athlete. Moreover, by being a coach, a great athlete would be depriving the world of his or her skills as an athlete. Finally, a coach would be lucky to make even a small percentage of what the best professional athletes do.

Something I have never understood is how people can be happy and successful and then end up sabotaging their success by believing another type of job is better than their own. I have seen people do this more times than I can count. Someone is happy doing a job and is good at their job and then, all of a sudden, decides they need to be something different in order to be happy.

Most people who put themselves on a path that does not match their skills become extremely unhappy. If you are doing something that does not make you happy and does not make use of your natural gifts, then the odds are very good you will be unhappy doing this.

Your career is a spiritual practice. What you do for a living is about taking something invisible and making it visible—and this

is something that I believe is “spiritual” in nature. When you are doing something you truly love and that gives you pleasure, you are drawing on something deep within you that excites you.

The problem with many people is that they think of their **jobs** as work. They believe it is important to be very professional and serious, for example, or that work should not be fun. When you think like this, work becomes unfulfilling and dull. In contrast, when you are doing something you love and that makes use of your natural talents, you are likely to be far more fulfilled.

Everyone has various gifts and skills.

- Some people are born to be good managers.
- Other people are born to be entrepreneurs.
- Other people are born with a certain talent that could be sales, or music, or athletics, or law.

The biggest mistakes happen in our careers when we want to be something that does not match our natural gifts and skills. We believe we need to change and be something different. We grow unhappy with who we are and decide that we need to change. This sort of thing is always occurring and there are an incredible number of people out there who seem to believe they need to be something different than they currently are.

Whatever your skill is, you need to embrace your gift and not try to be something you are not. Rejecting what you are good at leads to unhappiness. For example, if you do a job just to make money, you are likely to be extremely unhappy. You may have “success,” but you will not be fulfilled doing the work. Success without fulfillment is failure. What you get never makes you happy in the long term—who you become makes you happy (or, if you make the wrong decisions about who to become, sad).

From a young age, I have operated and started various businesses. I have always enjoyed doing this and I gravitate toward it. This is just something that I seem to enjoy and I find myself thinking about doing this sort of thing quite a bit.

When I was around 8 years old, my stepfather opened a small nautical gifts shop and I spent a lot of time in the shop watching him and learning about being an entrepreneur. I saw him almost go out of business and I also saw his successes. I learned about the sense of possibility that went along with being an entrepreneur—and about the potential for failure.

- I remember when things were going well for him and he went to look at a Rolls-Royce, and another time when he was looking at giant yachts you could land helicopters on.
- I also remember when things went poorly and all sorts of people were showing up at the door of our home asking for money. I remember that I was asked to answer the door back then, even as a young child, so the people calmly went away.

When you grow up around something like this, you learn to understand it. You can deal with the emotions of it, and just being around this you end up improving. You see patterns other people do not and you get a sense of things. You find joy in aspects of the job others might not. In my case, this is what I found.

For me, entrepreneurial work was the sort of thing I gravitated to and what I enjoyed.

Several years ago, I was meeting with a famous lawyer about something. He had become incredibly successful as an attorney and I admired him. We were walking around his office in Century City in Los Angeles and I looked around and admired all the work that was going on. I expressed to him that a part of me wished I had stayed an attorney doing the sort of work he did.

“No, that’s the last thing you should be doing,” he said. “You have a different gift than I have. You need to do what comes naturally to you.”

He was absolutely right. The thing about doing the stuff that we are gifted at and good at is that it can make a huge difference in our lives. When you are doing the things you are good at, you will love yourself much more than if you are doing something you are not good at. Moreover, when you love yourself, you will also have more love to give others. When you connect with yourself, it is also far easier to connect with others.

You need to find your true gift and go with it. You should never try to be something you are not just because it seems attractive from afar.

THE LESSON

Never try to be someone who you are not, or something that does not match your natural gifts and skills. Embrace your skills, whatever they are, rather than rejecting what you are good at and setting yourself up for unhappiness. Find your true gift, and run with it.