



The Focus of the Group You Are in Determines the Kind of Person You Become

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was around 7 years old, an international touring group of forty or so young singers and dancers called Up with People came to my Detroit elementary school. The group put on a spellbinding show that mesmerized me. I went to a relatively small elementary school that must have had fewer than two hundred students in it. The fact that I still remember the show—and its positive message—more than thirty years later, is a testament to how good this show was. For months after the show, I remember kids from our school sang the songs the group had performed.

From what I remember, the cast members were all smiling (both before and after the show), danced through the aisles of the gymnasium/auditorium where they performed, and really put on a great show. Afterward, some of the cast members even went up to individual children in the audience and told them things like they were “precious” or that they were “cute,” making it even more memorable.

Up with People was founded in the mid-1960s, somewhat as a response to the negativity of the prevalent hippie movement. It was meant to be a positive voice for young people—instead of the more prevalent negativity of the time. Rather than focusing on what was wrong in the world, the group focused on creating world peace, happiness, and community service. The group never had any religious affiliation.

By the time I was 18, several of the kids I knew had started to listen to the Grateful Dead. As part of this, most of them turned quite negative. They talked about how bad corporations were and how people needed to mellow out. They soured on school and started smoking marijuana between classes. They started speaking in slow, monotone voices. Their grades slipped. Their skin turned pale. They started growing their hair long. A couple grew goatees. One got kicked out of school.

I do not disapprove of those who use drugs—but some stuff can go too far. Not everyone who drinks wine becomes a wino on a street corner and not everyone who uses drugs has a problem with it either. In terms of the people I knew who were following the Grateful Dead—stuff soon got out of control. I even knew some people who started using crack cocaine within months of becoming enamored with this group.

Despite what I knew was likely to be bad time, I decided to make the trip to a Grateful Dead concert in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with my friends in 1988. While I never had a lot of experience with the hippie movement, watching people sell dangerous drugs to one another and take acid did not seem like a positive thing. At the concert I saw mothers with babies who had taken acid and were spinning in the aisles while the band played. There was just not a lot of positive stuff going around.

The most notable aspect of the concert for me was not when my friend (who had taken too many mushrooms) suddenly started screaming because he was so zoned out he could not see his hand. Instead, the most interesting part of the concert was the huge dichotomy I saw between the University of Michigan students who were working at the doors of the concert and showing people to their seats and the Grateful Dead fans attending the concert.

- The Michigan students were all clean-cut, sober, well-spoken, and professional looking. Michigan has always been a very good school, and the kids working at the concert looked as if they were doing their best to prepare for lives of productivity, [good jobs](#), happy families, and finding the good in life.
- In contrast, the people attending the concert were worn down, on drugs, unhappy looking, and seeming to represent the negative side of life.

The Grateful Dead and the people who attended their concerts back then had very obvious overtones as people who were concerned with what was wrong with society. In response, these people put themselves in a position where they were not contributing to society as much as they should.

The idea of the Grateful Dead versus the clean-cut and happy group Up with People is an image that has always stuck with me. One group stood for something happy and positive and the other stood for something largely negative. One group went into communities and performed community service and told people how special they were. The other group went into communities, set up tent cities, dealt drugs, and got people to drop out of society rather than participate.

After reminiscing about the Up with People event I saw more than thirty years ago, I reviewed their website today. I found the following language on the site:

More impressive than where Up with People has been is the very real and sustainable change it has inspired across the globe through its contingent of alumni. For over four decades, students who traveled in Up with People have gone on to become enthusiastic leaders in their hometowns, their countries and the world. Equipped with the life skills and broad perspectives learned “on the road,” they have made a tremendous difference in a myriad of careers and through their life choices, have truly become global citizens.

I liked the idea that the Up with People group seemed to stand for and focus on so much that was positive.

There is a tremendous number of factors we can focus on if we choose:

- We can focus on the temperature of the room we are in.
- We can focus on the texture of the desk we are sitting at.
- We can focus on the meal we had last night.
- We can focus on how we felt the last time we were sick.

Have you ever known someone really down on the world and life in general? I have. I've known lots of people like this in the

past. Someone who gets down on the world is likely to see everything around them as negative. People around them are seen in a negative light. Their career is seen in a negative light. Pretty much everything around them will be seen in a negative light. Instead of focusing on the things around them in the world that are positive, happy, and uplifting, a negative person will “delete” what’s positive and focus on the negative.

The power of focus is massive. If you choose to focus on the positive, life looks good. If you choose to focus on the negative, life looks bad. If you choose to focus on ways to be more successful, you will be more successful. If you focus on what is wrong with your job, you will see more things wrong than right. If you choose to focus on what is right with your job, then you will see more right than wrong.

The psychology of the group may focus on the positive or the negative. The focus of the organization where you work will generally have a lot to do with how successful the organization is—and how fulfilled the people working inside the organization are. The group psychology of an organization will generally focus either on the positive in its people and environment—or the negative.

Most of us are experts in deletion. We delete the things around us that we do not want to pay attention to. You are certainly deleting a lot of stuff in your environment right now. If you did not delete all this information around you, the odds are very good you would never get much accomplished at all—you would be paralyzed by so much information that you would not be able to function. So, most people only allow themselves to focus on a few things at a time. One of the true joys of our minds and psyches is that we have the ability to direct our focus.

Where your focus goes, your energy generally follows. Most people in the world, though, are not all that focused. Instead of focusing on the outcomes they want in their life, they get bogged down in various details. These details end up detracting them from their focus, and in the process, not much ever happens. Your ability to focus on the outcomes you want in your life and career can make a profound difference in what happens to you. Your ability to focus on what is positive and not negative will also make a huge difference.

The problem with focus, however, is that most people do not know how to use it to their advantage. Instead of focusing on the stuff that will take them forward and give them the results they want in their lives, people focus on the wrong things—or allow others to tell them where to focus.

Most people, you and me included, have something that makes up the majority of their focus. For some people this focus could be their family. For others the focus could be on their job. For others the focus could be on the sports they play. Whatever your focus is, whether creative or destructive, you generally end up becoming. The focus of the groups you associate with also plays a large role in the course of your life.

The reason that the focus of the groups you are a part of is so important is that most groups end up having a massive influence on our focus—groups generally have a cultural psychology that focuses on certain aspects of life. There is a reason that you can make massive generalizations about the sorts of people who followed the Grateful Dead around and the sorts of people who joined Up with People—both groups had an overall focus or message.

You should choose carefully the groups you associate with and participate in. I believe nothing is more important than choosing groups with a positive focus—the focus of the group will determine the kind of person you become.

THE LESSON

Make sure that you are involved in groups that focus on positive things. Your success in life depends on your ability to focus on the outcomes you want, and the focus of the groups with which you associate will in turn shape your own focus. You must endeavor to always choose groups with a positive focus.