



Concentrate Your Effort Where You Can Grow Roots

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

At least once a month someone approaches me to speak about a business proposition that has absolutely nothing to do with what I do for a living.

- A few years ago, someone wanted me to work on building self-storage centers.
- A few years before that someone wanted me to help sell nutritional products.
- Years after I stopped practicing law, at least five people that I can remember approached me with plans to start law firms with them.

While I am always interested in learning about new things, none of these proposals are related to the work I do. If I had chosen to participate, I would not be nearly as effective as I am concentrating on what I do for a living. My expertise is limited to the career business—and nothing more.

Most of the time, each of these proposals has been couched in terms that look far more attractive than what I do for a living. It may sound easier. It may sound sexier. It may sound as if there is more security. It may sound as if there is more money to be made. It may sound more respectable. Whatever it is, there are always all [sorts of opportunities](#) available to us that sound better than what we currently do for a living.

When you concentrate on doing one thing, you are constantly learning more and more about it. The world respects and rewards people who are able to concentrate. In virtually every profession, there is consistently room to get better and better at it, and you can only do this when you are concentrating. The longer you do one thing, generally speaking, the better you become at it. To succeed, you need to know your place and where you are the best.

If you needed brain surgery, you probably would not be comfortable with general practitioner performing the surgery. Your life would be on the line and you know that someone who does nothing but operate on brains is likely to be far more effective than someone who does a variety of things. For this reason, you would be careful to make sure that you went to a brain surgeon.

This is the same way the world thinks about you. If you are seen as someone who does a variety of things—and not one thing really well—then you will not be as valuable. You will be a “generalist” and not a specialist.

It is like this with [jobs](#) and remaining with an employer—or pledging your loyalty to someone. If you are constantly jumping from employer to employer, your resume will tell the story that you are not able to concentrate. It is foolish to jump from job to job believing you will advance with each successive move—this is rarely true. People who go the farthest are usually those who attach themselves to people who are able to advance their interests. His concentration of effort breeds loyalty and rewards that will not come without such concentrated effort.

Your career advances by concentrating your efforts—everything is about concentration. Not only should you be focused on doing one thing, but you should also be focused on doing the best possible work you can for one employer if possible.

In your career, you are always going to need the help of people above you—those more powerful than you. Even billionaires require the help of politicians and others to create favorable policies for them and their businesses. In your job, you will generally only succeed with the assistance of those more powerful than you. Literally everyone requires the assistance of the more powerful. Do what you can to find a respectable employer you are able to attach yourself to and concentrate your efforts on. By concentrating your efforts in one direction, you will get better and better at your job. You will understand your role, and the person you are serving will begin to rely on you and appreciate your loyalty.

In order to consistently be successful, you need to remain true to the core—and know who you are. Just as people dissipate their efforts at work, others do the same thing socially. What you are not, often looks more attractive than what you are. For example, in social settings I often meet people who invite me to do things that have nothing to do with the sort of person I am. At some of the parties I have gone to in Malibu where I live, there are all these surfers who stand around talking about surfing—and throwing off a certain “vibe” surfers have (they tend to dress, talk, and act a certain way). These surfers tend to socialize among themselves and portray themselves as the “in group.”

A few years ago, some of these surfers started asking me to go surfing. This must have happened at least ten times. I do not own a surfboard, nor do I have any interest in surfing and the surf culture. Frankly, I do not like going into the ocean because it is too cold. I am not saying there is anything wrong with making new friends and doing new things—but I would not have a lot to offer in terms of conversation and shared interests with someone who spends his or her days surfing. I would be just as out of place spending my free time with that person as I would be operating a self-storage center.

When people first started asking me to go surfing, I felt a little bad that I had no interest in this—just like I feel bad when people approach me about businesses that sound better than what I do for a living. I started looking at surfboards and read up a little bit on surfing. But I never got to the point where I ever truly wanted to do this. I'm just not the sort of guy who likes to get up at 5:00 a.m. and go splash around in the ocean with other men—it's not me. I felt it would be a waste of my time because it is not where my interests lie and I would not be happy. It's not the sort of thing I could see myself doing very long at all.

Over the past several years, I have witnessed a few people my age (doctors and businesspeople, for example) move to Malibu and try to fit in with the surfers. Initially, I would be drawn to these people and find myself chatting with them and sharing our mutual observations that we were not interested in participating in the surf culture. But when you are surrounded by people who are all doing one thing, it can begin to look appealing. You want to do what looks the most appealing—even if it

is not within your realm of expertise and even if you do not fit in.

Accordingly, I saw some formerly “professional” people grow their hair long, start talking in surfer lingo, and begin spending their valuable free time with the “real surfers”—and never quite fitting in. Does this make sense? I think a lot of this has to do with the fact that they are trying to fit in—not that they are comfortable with this style of life. There is nothing wrong with this, but since they are spending a lot of their free time with people just because it seems like the “in thing” for them to be doing—I wonder how much they can contribute to these groups and what they get out of it themselves.

Will these people help their **career**? I do not know—but somehow I doubt it. I am not saying that you should only spend time with people who can help your career—but I am saying you should seek work and people where you feel like you can establish roots and grow. The person who moves from group to group and job to job never is able to establish roots. You should spend your time and work effort in situations that complement (and appreciate) your strengths and where you can grow roots.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with the fact that I am not opening self-storage centers, or that I am not interested in spending my days with surfers. I prefer to concentrate on spending my time with people and tasks where I add as much value as possible, where I can grow roots—and where I can make the most use of my skills and strengths. One of the most important things you can do in your life is to concentrate your time and energy where you add the most value and not get distracted by work or people who are not compatible with either of these.

THE LESSON

Advance your career by concentrating your efforts, and seeking work and people with whom you feel you could grow and establish roots. Devote your time and effort to pursuits that complement your strengths, and where you can add the most possible value. One of the most important actions you can take in your job search is to concentrate your assets where they can add the greatest value, and do not distract yourself with incompatible work and people.

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