



Do Not Overreact to Past Pain

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of my first jobs was parking valet cars at a country club in Detroit. As part of this job, I would get to keep all the tips I earned each day. The busiest day of the year was typically the Fourth of July. I came into work early that day and worked all day long in the hot sun running back and forth to cars. The traffic and number of people parking their cars was nonstop.

By 7:00 p.m. I had been running back and forth for so long that I felt like I was going to pass out. I was so tired I was running like I was drunk. I was drenched with sweat and every muscle in my body hurt. Occasionally, I would stumble. I was spitting sweat when I talked, and people checking in and picking up their cars were starting to look at me with alarm when they saw me. By 3:00 p.m., the manager of the club brought me a bunch of towels from the pool and instructed me to sit on them when I got in people's cars.

Despite my extreme exhaustion, I could not believe my luck working that day. My pockets were stuffed with more money than they had ever been in my life. I must have had \$500 in small bills. Now and then, I would be running and some money would come out of my pockets.

I had been sprinting back and forth to cars for more than twelve hours and was exhausted. Between running with a towel in my hands and wearing black pants and a white button down shirt that were both covered in sweat, I must have looked like a real piece of work. I was so dizzy and disoriented I was not sure what was going on. All I remember is looking up in a daze while sitting on a curb, catching my breath, and seeing my boss looking at me.

"You're done for the day. Empty out your pockets and give me all your tips. I am keeping all the money you made today."

I was so disoriented I did not think anything of this. My boss had never done this before. Some days there was hardly any business at all and I went to work and made no money. Today, though, I would have made up for all the bad days I had ever had. Instead, I had given up my holiday, almost killed myself working, and made no money.

I got home around 7:30 p.m. and lay down on my bed. I had a horrible headache, and outside I could hear kids shooting off fireworks. I was so dehydrated and exhausted I just lay in bed all night and did not get to sleep until late that evening. My heart was racing because I was so completely exhausted. To top it off, my mother did not have any air conditioning.

The next evening I was invited to a bar with a few friends of mine. I had been wandering around in a daze all day, watching television, eating microwave pizzas, and that sort of thing. I walked into a very crowded and hot bar that evening and was standing talking to some girl, when I started to get dizzy and simply passed out. Although I did not see myself pass out, from what I understand, I went lurching into a table next to me, knocked over a few pitchers of beer, and then hit the ground hard. I had not even had anything to drink.

I was still weak on my knees and having a hard time standing after my previous day parking cars in the sun. The heat of the bar had done me in. When I woke up, one of my friends was dumping his beer on my face to rouse me. A few moments later, a bouncer appeared and kicked me out of the bar.

"He's cool, he's with us," one of my friends said.

"I don't care. He's got to leave."

I could not believe that I was getting kicked out of a bar for passing out due to exhaustion lingering twenty-four hours later from parking cars for no money.

When we got outside, my friend asked me if I would wait in the car while he and everyone else hung out in the bar. Since I was no longer allowed in the bar, I spent the next few hours sitting in the car listening to the radio. At least there was air conditioning.

My next shift parking cars was a weekday afternoon a few days later. I was working there with another girl, and we had been standing around doing nothing for a few hours—which meant I had spent the day working for no money.

"This job sucks," I sighed. I then proceeded to talk about passing out, not making any money, and how our boss had stolen my money the day before.

She sort of looked over at me dumbly and did not say anything.

The next day after telling the girl I thought the job sucked, my boss was waiting for me when I got to work. Apparently, my [job of parking cars](#) sucked even more than I thought it did because after I had left that day, the girl called our boss and told him what I said. For reasons that are unclear to me to this day, he took my remarks extremely seriously and told me if I ever said anything bad about the job again, I would lose it. He seemed to be having an extremely visceral reaction to what seemed to me like a statement of fact.

He must have yelled and screamed about all of this for at least five minutes. When he left, though, he really had succeeded in frightening me. I was young and at an impressionable time in my life. As further punishment for my criticisms, he also made sure he gave me the worst days to park cars for the next several weeks I did the job. He always gave me lunches (which were the slowest time of day) and never dinners. He never gave me holidays, and he changed my hours from 11:00 to 3:00 for the lunch crowd, to 10:00 to 4:00. Since I was paid only by tips—and since no one came in for lunch before 11:00 or after 3:00—I can only assume this was part of his vengeance as well. Due to speaking out against the job, he made sure I paid the price.

In fact, after that I decided it was never wise to criticize any sort of supervisor—or job—again (at least if I risked it getting back to them). Instead of standing up to supervisors and complaining, I made it a habit for the rest of my career to basically just do what was asked of me—and never complain to others. I also came to believe that if you trusted people with your true

feelings about a job, you risked a lot of pain. Better to leave the job than complain. Better to avoid people who complained about their work than be associated with them.

If you touch a burner on a hot stove, you will immediately experience pain. Because of this, the odds are pretty good that you will avoid touching burners in the future because you do not want to experience this pain again. The need we have to avoid pain is part of our nervous system and biological in its nature—people survive by avoiding pain. If we believe something is going to be painful, we are going to do our best to avoid it so that we do not get hurt in the future.

While touching a burner on a stove can be painful, so can the fallout from criticizing a supervisor, getting a bad review at work, getting fired, being reprimanded for certain behavior, and more. Not getting promoted over other people can be painful. In fact, there are countless painful experiences people can experience in association with their careers.

A great deal of what happens to you in life is a result of your fear of experiencing pain. There is pain associated with rejection. There is pain associated with failing. There is pain associated with being embarrassed. There is pain associated with being punished. There are an incredible number of things that we tend to link pain to in our lives when in reality we probably should not be doing so.

I want you to think about how this can play out in your career. In my case, I reacted to this early experience by basically never criticizing bosses or supervisors and fearing to do anything less than what was asked of me. When I was practicing law, I rarely turned down work and I never complained about the work I was doing. I was afraid that if I complained about the work, I would get fired, demoted, or put in a difficult situation. In retrospect, this does not make a lot of sense—but this is the way my mind worked. Instead of complaining or sticking up for myself, I felt the only way to escape this was to quit.

In our careers, it is important to look at things we may avoid doing because we believe they can cause us pain. Not everything that causes us pain is bad. You cannot get caught up in the past and need to get control over yourself to follow through. The worst thing you can do is allow yourself to stop acting based on experiences that caused you pain.

In the case of complaining about my supervisor and the job, I had every reason to complain. The job did suck. In fact, it was probably illegal (1) not to pay me, and (2) for my supervisor to take all of my money. Most of us have been manipulated by others to experience pain at times when we probably should not be experiencing pain at all. Here, my supervisor wanted to make me afraid of complaining about my work conditions and the job to discourage this in the future. It was not rational, nor proper, for me to carry this fear of criticizing others into the rest of my career. How much are you afraid of in your job and life due to past pain associated with something that is no longer relevant to your current circumstances?

THE LESSON

Do not overreact to past pain; people experience countless painful things in her careers, but that does not mean one should avoid doing things because they might cause you pain. Not every painful thing is bad, and anything is preferable to inaction based on past painful experiences. Your current life and job should not be affected by past pain stemming from experiences that are no longer relevant.

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