

Emotions and Our Careers

By *Harrison Barnes*

Around 4:00 p.m. each day in New York, there is a shift change among cabs. During the shift change, the cab drivers have to return the cabs to dispatch and give them to another driver. Between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m. yesterday, I stood in front of a big office building trying to hail a cab to the airport; more than twenty cabs stopped, then refused to take me to the airport when they found out where I was going. It was also pretty cold out there and I was a bit desperate, so I started flagging down every single Lincoln Town Car I saw.

A few cars stopped and asked me what was wrong. The third car stopped and told me he would take me to the airport for \$65—he was an illegal cab driver who had been patrolling for people just like me.

During the ride to the airport, the driver told me that I was lucky he had agreed to take me to La Guardia because a police officer nicknamed "King Kong" was working that day. He told me that after dropping me off, he planned on parking the car and approaching people leaving the airport. Apparently, he had been caught doing this before and each time he was caught, he was fined \$300 and put in jail for a day or two.

He also said that "a friend" had sent a bunch of cocaine to his house from Colombia around a decade ago and he had signed for it and ended up going to prison.

"I wish they'd stop bringing that shit up. It was more than ten years ago, and I never asked him to send me \$60,000 in cocaine anyway. How was I supposed to know what was in the package?"

For more than an hour, I heard a long tirade about King Kong. King Kong has apparently gotten his name because he has put hundreds of illegal "cabbies" in jail and does the work of twenty-plus police officers. He runs around the airport arresting illegal cabbies all day, every day. King Kong has arrested so many illegal cab drivers that he is known to most of the thousands of illegal cab drivers throughout the city of New York.

Despite being an ordinary police officer, King Kong has a special place in his heart for arresting illegal cab drivers. He loves his job and approaches it with a sense of enthusiasm that is legendary.

I love it when I hear stories about people like King Kong. There are people like this in every profession—those whose commitment and enthusiasm is legendary. These are people who have tapped into something that others have not and whose careers take on the quality of a mission.

Why would King Kong be so interested in putting illegal cab drivers in jail? I am sure that he has a special interest because it fulfills some sort of emotional need he has. The emotional need could be the desire to feel powerful, to feel in control, pride in his work, a massive disdain for illegal activity, a sense of empathy for legal cab drivers—who knows. Whatever it is, I am sure that there is an emotional component to King Kong's enthusiasm for his job. When you find someone who is extremely talented at anything, there is always an emotional component to it. They do what they do because it makes them feel a certain way. They become dependent upon their jobs for how they feel emotionally.

In the East, there is a belief that we should be happy and enjoy life now because this is all that exists. In the West, we are taught to go out and achieve something so that we can feel good about ourselves.

To Westerners, therefore, feelings of happiness and a person's emotional state is often based on level of achievement. If people are achieving goals and successful at what they set out to do, they tell themselves they can be happy. If they have not achieved what they sought to, they are not happy.

Do you know people who are unsuccessful? I do. There is nothing wrong with being unsuccessful—what is problematic is how people choose to feel about themselves when they are not achieving what they want to. People often do not give themselves permission to be happy because they have not achieved what they wanted to.

Lawyers are some of the worst. There is an entire "pecking order" of the most prestigious and least prestigious law firms. It is a huge accomplishment going to law school and becoming an attorney. Nevertheless, many attorneys never allow themselves to feel truly happy and successful because they do not feel their firm is prestigious enough.

I know people who have had dreams of being in show business, writing novels, and so forth who have not yet achieved these dreams. These people, too, believe that once they achieve these dreams, their emotional state will change and they will be happy. Because they have not achieved these dreams, they feel a profound sense of disappointment in their lives and who they are.

There is nothing wrong with using tension and goals to motivate you to achieve something more. In fact, you should have goals because they motivate you. But problems can occur when you allow your current level of achievement to dictate how you feel about yourself.

You see, most of what we do in our lives is about trying to attain a certain emotional state. Instead of feeling the emotional state we want, we allow our emotional state to be completely influenced by external events—many of which we have no control over.

Imagine if you played the lottery each day and went into a deep funk every time you lost. You might mope around and feel bad about yourself for picking the wrong number combination. Then the next day you would do the same thing. Then you would do this again. You might justify to yourself that everything will be better and you will finally be happy once you hit the big one.

My guess is you are smart enough not to have fallen into this trap with the lottery. You probably would tell yourself that this sort of thought process is of no benefit to you and that it does not make sense to base how you feel about yourself on

something over which you have no control. Instead, you probably do not give much thought to the lottery at all and do something besides feeling bad about this.

While it is a subtle distinction, I hope you can see the trap of this thought process—because it can apply to any externality you are basing your emotional state on. It can trap you where you least expect it. It can make you feel bad about your current job—and allow this feeling to fester. It can make you feel bad about your current financial situation—and allow this feeling to fester.

We control our thoughts and choose how we feel. Not external events, not titles, not money. We control our emotions.

Most of what we do in life can be traced back to a need that we have to experience certain emotions. We do the things we do because of how we hope they will make us feel—often not even because we want to do them. We are more concerned with chasing an emotion than we are with the actual task at hand.

- The work we do is about trying to get certain emotions.
- The way we spend our free time is about trying to get certain emotions.
- Our spending patterns are about trying to get certain emotions.
- Our eating habits may be about trying to get certain emotions.
- Our exercise patterns are about trying to get certain emotions.
- Our relationships with substances are often about trying to get certain emotions.
- Our motivation level may be about trying to get certain emotions.

Whatever emotion you can think of, the odds are very good that we have a belief that something external to us will bring about this emotion.

The key to really being happy in our lives is to not make our emotional state dependent on anything external to us—we should allow ourselves to be happy, fulfilled, proud, valued, and so forth naturally. When we make other people and external events responsible for our emotions, we limit the quality of our lives. Since the quality of our lives comes down to how we feel, the importance of allowing ourselves to be naturally happy should be obvious.

Because so much of our existence is tied up with the search for various emotions, it stands to reason that our emotional state—and having a good one—is among the most important tasks we have as human beings. The way you feel about life and the world will have a tremendous impact on your psychological health and the health of those around you.

THE LESSON

Everyone tries to maintain a certain emotional state, and learning to control your own emotions will have a profound impact on your career. While everyone allows their emotional states to be influenced by outside events, there is no advantage in basing your own emotions on things that you cannot control. Allow yourself to discover happiness and fulfillment naturally, rather than making your emotions dependant on external circumstances. Your outlook will have a tremendous impact on your psychological health, as well as that of those around you.