

10 Powerful Lessons from a Turkish Rug Trader

By *Harrison Barnes*

Several years ago, I was staying at a beautiful hotel on the beach on a small Greek island. The hotel was full of young people in their mid-20's who appeared to be having the time of their lives. I had chatted with the [receptionist](#) several times during that week when I was at the hotel. The receptionist was my age and very attractive. She had a boyfriend who would sit in the lobby and chat with her at night. I think she was very surprised by the fact that I kept coming home alone each evening. When I would walk through the lobby each night, she would always ask me if I'd met any girls that evening and ask me to tell her about my night. She was really nice to me. She had actually given me a beautiful suite in the hotel and was charging me the same price as a normal room. She had another friend who worked in the bar near the receptionist desk who gave me free beers every evening. I was beginning to think Greece was the greatest place in the world.

At this particular point in my life, however, I was pretty out of it. A few weeks earlier, my fiancé had run off with a married man 20 years older than me, within a few weeks of our planned wedding. I was actually in the midst of my honeymoon that I had arranged before my fiancé took off. Unfortunately, I was on my honeymoon alone. It was pretty strange walking into rooms in the various islands and seeing a free fruit platter and bottle of Champagne with congratulatory notes attached to them.

I was making the most of the trip. I had the good fortune of dancing in small bars and smashing plates late into the night on several occasions. I was so out of control at this particular point in my life that I remember being asked to "settle down" by drunks who were also smashing plates in the restaurant. In addition to a nasty habit of chewing tobacco that I'd recently picked up, I'd also started smoking cigarettes in Greece. One evening I was so out of it while dancing that I set fire to a girl's hair from New Jersey. On another night, I made out with a beautiful Greek girl in a bar who I found out later was dating a soldier in another part of the bar. At some point, someone came up to me and told me that the soldier was looking for me and I better disappear. I ran out of a back door of the bar and as I turned a corner and began running up an alley, I heard them coming for me. They were screaming at me in Greek. I took refuge under a dock for several hours. I'm confident I would have been badly beaten up. The trip was getting really out of control. I'm not even going to get into any details about what happened with the Austrian girl. That is a story that I will save for another time.

In order to travel on this solo honeymoon between Greek islands, I was utilizing jet boats which had giant fans on them and in normal seas glided over the water. The receptionist showed up at the dock as I was getting ready to board the fan boat. She was with another Greek girl who she explained was her friend. Her friend was wearing these bizarre sunglasses that were circles the size of Coke bottles. The receptionist informed me that I needed a girlfriend directly in front of her friend and that her friend was going to the same island I was going to and we should "get to know each other." I had a couple of beers in my backpack and thought I would give it a try. The girl sat next to me on the jet boat and strangely enough starting cuddling with me and telling me all the things we were going to do together when we got to the island in 4 hours or so. Since I didn't know the girl and she wasn't really my type, I began to get very uncomfortable. In fact, I started to get sick. The sea was very rough and about an hour into the trip, I started throwing up. I wasn't sure if the girl or the boat was making me sick, but I decided I had to get the hell off that boat. The boat was making frequent stops along the way and was sort of like a "taxi" because people were getting on and off at little islands all along the way.

The next stop was a very small island with only a "boarding house" and no hotel. I told the girl who was apparently my "instant girlfriend" that I would meet her on the island. Strangely enough, she hugged and kissed me goodbye and told me she would miss me. She gave me an address where she would be on the next island. Since they were selling beer on the boat, I'd managed to consume several. I also had the stash in my backpack that I'd rapidly consumed. Given my buzz, I was beginning to think I was in an alternate universe.

I figured that I would get some well-deserved relaxation on the island. The island was so desolate that there weren't even any real taxis. Somehow I managed to hire a small pick-up truck to drive me to a boarding house several miles away. When I got to the boarding house, I was informed that I could share a room with a group of six German tourists. I paid the equivalent of a few dollars per day and was handed a key. After I opened the door to the room, I immediately turned around. A few of the Germans were lying on the floor, and another couple of them were watching a third inject something into himself. There was a spoon sitting on a night stand. I had seen enough and didn't stay long enough to unpack my bags. They were so stoned that they didn't even seem to notice me coming in the room.

When I reached the port after a three hour walk, I was informed that the only boat passing through for the next few days was arriving in a few hours; it was a freighter bound for Turkey. This sounded good enough to me because I didn't feel like spending the next few days in a drug den. Fourteen hours or so later, I was in Turkey in a small port town that catered to the occasional cruise ship. It has been so long since this happened that I have forgotten the name of the town.

For the next few days, I wandered the streets and became very interested in how people sold rugs and carpets. There was literally a Turkish bazaar of people attempting to sell rugs and all sorts of knick-knacks. In some shops, they burned incense. In others, they played music and attempted to lure tourists in.

The shopkeepers would walk up to people passing by and speak to them in 10-plus languages until they found out which language that particular person spoke. Russian, English, French, Dutch, German, Italian...the languages rolled off the merchants' tongues. I was fascinated by the merchants because they were so persistent and so motivated in their attempts to sell rugs. They were extremely creative. They tried to sell rugs in a million different ways, it seemed.

What was so fascinating about this experience was that after looking at numerous, numerous rug shops, I became very interested in the idea of purchasing a rug. I could not put my finger on why, however, because not a single one of the rug-shop merchants had seemed particularly interested in selling me a rug. I would try to ask a question occasionally, but the

response was most likely to be something along the lines of, "How much you want to pay?"

One day, I wandered into a different rug shop, and the people there taught me how to sell rugs—and just about anything else. I made several friends and for some reason these rug [traders](#) took an extreme liking to me. One of them spoke very seriously about the prospect of opening a rug shop with me in the United States and called me several times once I'd returned back to the United States to discuss this. I stayed with the rug traders for at least a week and learned a great deal from them about how to sell and about people.

This particular trip ended up being one of the most enlightening of my life. I wound up staying in Turkey for several days inside one particular rug shop. The lessons I learned there can benefit you as well.

1) Put Your Best Products Front and Center--"The Lesson of Rug Placement."

This rug shop always displayed its best two or three rugs so that a passersby could see them. Many other rug shops put their best rugs in the back. The store I went into that day had its very best rugs right out front and center. This attracted my eyes. This was all it took. You too need good "bait" to interest potential employers.

When you think about it, no other strategy makes more sense. When you see the best goods right out front, they are most likely going to attract your attention. Attracting attention is what it's all about. Don't be afraid to toot your own horn and show people what you can do and what you are capable of. Far too many people believe they need to hold back. People need to know what you are capable of.

The rug store was located in a corridor and the corridor looked like it had been there for thousands of years. I think it had, in fact, been there that long. When people passed by, the inside of the shop was barely visible. The only things that could be seen were the rugs outside. Incredibly, most of the other stores nearby simply hid away their best rugs, apparently hoping that if customers came in, they could potentially interest them in the rugs. This was ridiculous. Think of the thousands of people who passed by these rug stores each day without ever seeing the best rugs.

Yet, isn't this what we do a lot of the time? We forget to tell people about our best benefits and why they should hire us. We fail to show our best selves immediately and show our inferior goods first. Lead with your strongest product. This will get your customer's attention.

As I got to know these rug traders over the next several days, they told me that the space they were in was exceedingly expensive for Turkey. They paid \$800 per month to be one of 1,000-plus shops in this corridor that tourists and others walked by when getting off cruise ships.

The store paying \$800 per month in rent is no different than the business on the Internet that is paying \$10 per click. If the Internet business can get traffic without paying \$10 per click, then it is doing well. The same concept applies to retail establishments. If you have no display that attracts customers and 10 come into your store per month, you are paying \$80 per lead. If you have an exciting display and 100 customers come into your store per month, you are paying \$8 per lead.

2) Watch for Every Opportunity Out There--"The Lesson of the 'Eye Watchers.'"

When I walked by the rug store and made eye contact with the beautiful rugs that were placed front and center, there were two [salesmen](#) watching me. The owner of the rug store had two boys working for him whom he trained to watch the eyes of tourists. If the tourists appeared to be looking at the rugs, he would ensure that they immediately started speaking with them. Every glance at a rug was considered an opportunity to make a sale.

When I walked by the rug store and started looking at the rugs, they immediately came up to me and started to speak with me, smiling and talking enthusiastically until I responded to what they had to say. Had these boys not been watching me, I might have simply walked on by.

You can lose [job opportunities](#) if you don't notice potential opportunities out there. In this case, I could have simply walked by the store without stopping—and I most certainly would have, had the rug merchants not made immediate eye contact with me and approached me immediately. You need to be incredibly alert to every opportunity that is out there. Opportunities present themselves to people who are looking for them.

3) Always Look Professional and Ensure That All of Your Salespeople Look Professional--"You Need to Look the Part."

The men who approached me when they saw I was looking at the rug while walking by (along with a crowd of other people at the very same time) were very well dressed compared to the others around them. They looked like they had just taken showers and were also wearing nice-looking shirts that appeared to have just been ironed. They were neatly shaven and looked very good.

What was so interesting about this was that later I learned that the "men" assisting me (who were young—only around 16 or so) were actually poor, uneducated Kurdish boys from the desert whose parents had persuaded the store owner to hire. The boys were paid no more than a couple of dollars per day and slept under a tarp outside of the store in the evenings. The store owner let them borrow money to look the part and gave them a very minimal commission for each sale that resulted from their efforts.

What this business understood—and what every successful job seeker understands—is that you always need to look the part and look your very best when attempting to [get a job](#). The quality of the persona you put forward will determine the presumed quality of your products. Had these boys been poorly dressed (like poor Kurds from the countryside), they wouldn't have aroused my interest and would have, instead, frightened me away.

How many job seekers make the mistake of not always looking the part? Potential employers want to be impressed by you and need to feel as if you will reflect positively on them. They want to be proud of the people selling to them because their decisions to do business with certain people say things about them, as well.

4) Do Not Ever Interrupt

Once I got inside the carpet shop, I was met by another salesman, while the "spotters" who had led me inside continued to work the tourists walking by. I started asking one of the salesmen numerous questions about the different rugs in the store.

The salesman could not answer most of my questions. I asked about dye, about whether the rugs were handmade, about how many knots there were per inch, and more. The salesman I was speaking to simply couldn't answer the questions. He eventually approached a man sitting behind a desk (the owner of the rug shop) and asked him for help answering my questions.

I noticed that the owner of the store never once interrupted his salesman when he was stuck. After a few minutes of speaking with the owner of the store, I realized that his knowledge and understanding of rugs was profound and that he could have talked at length for hours in response to my questions. However, he didn't interrupt the [salesperson](#) while he was speaking and also didn't give the slightest indication that he would. This was very important.

A boss who interrupts subordinates sends the wrong signals. Bystanders may think the company is disorganized. Additionally, people may simply get uncomfortable. Finally, the subject may feel demoralized. There is nothing worse than demoralizing a salesperson in front of a customer or making a salesperson feel as if he or she doesn't have any authority. This is never a wise tactic and undermines the strength of a sales organization at its very core.

The owner of the rug shop didn't step in until his help was requested. Once he did, I actually respected him as he began answering questions that his salesperson hadn't been able to.

You should never interrupt someone in an interview. Let whomever you are talking to finish whatever they are going to say. People hate being interrupted.

5) Constantly (Sincerely) Compliment People

From the second I walked by the rug store and made eye contact with the rugs displayed outside, I was complimented. First, the "spotters" complimented me on spotting the rugs, telling me they were the very nicest rugs in the store—"perhaps the nicest in the city."

"You have very good taste and an excellent eye for carpets," one of them said. This was quite powerful and lessened my defenses somewhat. "You have such good taste in carpet. If you like these, you will be even more impressed with *these* rugs."

When I finally started speaking with the owner of the store, his first instinct was to compliment me, as well. "I heard all of your questions. We've never had someone come in like you who sought to be so educated. You must be very smart."

This sort of complimenting naturally lessens the tension and creates an atmosphere of goodwill between the parties. These compliments were also insightful because they were about issues that I was susceptible to being complimented on.

How many people compliment their interviewers consistently? If you aren't sincerely complimenting your interviewers, you are doing yourself harm.

6) You Need to Educate Your Potential Employers About Your Strength Excessively.

Salespeople who do a [good job](#) of educating their clients are almost uniformly the most successful. At the Turkish rug shop, I asked tons of questions about the rugs and didn't stop asking questions for several days. I believe I spent at least five days with the rug traders in their shop asking them all sorts of questions. I became fascinated with the rug trade.

When a prospect has unanswered questions about a product, he or she is much less likely to purchase it. You need to educate your potential employers as extensively as possible. Tell your potential employer everything they could possibly want to know, and have information available to teach them everything they want to know about you. The more people learn about something, the more they come to appreciate it.

You know your family extremely well. You know your friends extremely well. Most people don't start caring about someone or something until they begin learning about him or her or it. You need to educate your potential employer in excruciating detail about you, when offered the opportunity, so they will want to hire you.

When Steve Jobs was competing with Jean-Louis Gassée to sell his NeXTSTEP company to Apple and Gassée was trying to sell his own system, Jobs' team did far better. The result was the sale of a company for \$377.5 million versus no sale at all. In a biography of Steve Jobs, *iCon: Steve Jobs, the Greatest Second Act in the History of Business*, the story is told as follows:

Steve Jobs went first, and again was brilliant and compelling. "Pragmatic, specific, and precise," Gil later called it. Then he handed off to Avie Tevanian, his top technical guru. Tevanian had brought along a laptop to demonstrate that NeXTSTEP was not just an idea in progress but a functioning [operating system](#). The two of them put on a gold-star presentation.

They were followed by Jean-Louis, who either misunderstood that this was a shoot-out and his final opportunity, or was so certain of a decision in his favor that he didn't think he had to do anything further than show up. He arrived alone, empty-handed, and not prepared to do anything much more than answer questions. Gil wrote that "everything pointed to Steve Jobs and NeXTSTEP, but Jean-Louis had made it a no-contest. The vote for NeXTSTEP was almost a foregone conclusion." Some insiders thought that Gassée's software would have been the better solution...

As in many crucial events in history, the decision to educate the audience of buyers made a profound difference—in this case, it was worth more than \$350 million. Isn't this the same mistake many people make when selling themselves? Far too many people fail to educate their potential employers and lose jobs due to this. Far too many people are far too arrogant and feel as if they don't need to "wow" potential employers.

The owner of the rug store lectured me for hours. He brought out tea and talked about where he bought each individual rug. He had purchased numerous books about rugs from secondhand bookstores and had put paperclips on various pages to allow me to read about certain rugs. He had a photo album with pictures of his favorite rugs and notes beside each picture of a rug. The man even had a loom set up in his office where he could show people like me how the rugs were made.

The ability to educate people about who you are is of paramount importance. Educating people shows them that you have a passion for yourself. Educating people also gives them the knowledge they need to care about you in the way that you want them to—in a way that makes them hire you.

In the case of the Turkish rug trader, after attempting to sell me thousands of dollars worth of rugs and still seeing I wasn't entirely convinced, the man offered to take me on a 20-plus-hour car ride to the Turkey-Iraq border in order to purchase rugs with him. I almost took him up on his offer. A good salesperson will go to all lengths possible to educate a client. So, too, should you in your job search.

7) Bond with Potential Employers and Be Human.

It is exceptionally important to bond with potential employers if you have the opportunity. The man who owned the rug store immediately served me tea and took me to a quiet part of the store (which turned out to be a sort of "rug cave") while he talked about rugs and answered questions. He introduced me to everyone working for him and told me personal details about

them, such as where they were from and so forth.

The owner of the store even introduced me to his cousin and took me with him and a group of his friends to a Turkish casino. This level of bonding was fantastic and unlike anything I'd ever seen before. I will never forget when he introduced me to his cousin. The cousin looked somewhat depressed. "His wife is like his mother," the rug store owner told me, laughing.

Establishing a certain level of familiarity and bonding with a client is necessary in order to create a human connection and ensure that the client feels comfortable with buying. A seemingly simple purchase can take on a whole new level of meaning.

Over the next several days, I actually made friends with the rug traders. I watched as the tax authorities came and frightened them into paying taxes. I watched them have internal squabbles. They introduced me to their friends and the places they liked to go to eat lunch during the week. They showed me how they sold stuff to tourists and won their confidence. The men talked about the tourist women they had struck up short-term relationships with while the cruise ships were docked. In all respects, the experience was fascinating and meaningful. This showed me that people who are truly exceptional at sales bond with their prospects.

You need to bond with your potential employers if you have the opportunity. They need to realize and understand that you are human. Far too few people are able to bond with employers like this. The more human you look and the more you bond with a potential employer, the better off you will be.

8) Trust Your Potential Employers.

The rugs that the traders wanted to sell me cost thousands of dollars. After days of haggling and bonding I finally told them that while their rugs were beautiful, I could hardly justify paying the amounts they were asking for them without getting them appraised. Incredibly, the men told me to write them a check and that I could cancel it and send them the difference if I found out the rugs were worth less than they said they were when I got home.

I could scarcely believe it. This ended up really sealing the deal for me with these traders. I purchased several thousands of dollars worth of rugs from them. I would not have done this had I not trusted them.

As an aside, when I returned home, I discovered (after visiting numerous rug shops) that two of the rugs I'd purchased were not worth what the Turkish traders said they were worth. I canceled my check (which they hadn't cashed) and, after several telephone conversations with the men, sent them a check for the value of the rugs. While this left a bad taste in my mouth, the trust *did* go both ways and I realized that there is a different method of doing business.

You need to telegraph to your potential employers that you can and will trust them. Negotiating aggressively over finer details like health coverage, salaries, and bonuses, and so forth too aggressively can often result in you blowing a deal. You need to protect yourself but you also need to telegraph trust.

9) Love What You Do.

Early one morning, I was sitting in the carpet cave with the Turkish rug traders, surrounded by rugs. I couldn't have anticipated at the time that I would soon learn one of the most powerful business lessons of my life.

We'd been drinking tea and a Turkish liquor, Yaki, for hours and it was about 3:30 in the morning. One of the Turks was trying to explain to me the enthusiasm it takes to succeed in the rug business, but he was really talking more about life itself.

He went down a corridor and came back with a rug that was worth about \$40,000. It was the most beautiful rug I'd ever seen in my life. The colors were so vibrant. It was a Kurdish rug, about 100 years old, and had been smuggled into Turkey from Iraq during the Gulf War.

The trader lit a cigarette, took a long hit, and took a sip of the Yaki. The eyes in the room were all glued to the rug. The rug really was something else. But this particular trader had his thoughts on something even more significant. He was looking toward the ceiling.

"You don't see it now," he said slowly. "But you will."

"What don't I see?" I asked.

"You have to love the rug," he said. "You have to love the rug."

The idea of loving the rug was so powerful. For the rug traders, the rug represented how they made a living. It was an art form and something that transformed lives everywhere—including their own lives. Carpet, to these traders, truly was "magical."

If you think about it, how many merchants and salespeople truly love the products and services they are representing? When you love your product or service, everything changes. It changes for you and for the people you do business with.

You need to really love your profession and what you do. You need to love the value you bring to the world. Whatever you do for a living supports you and gives your life meaning. The more you love what you do the more meaningful your career will be. This was something the Turkish rug traders realized and the love of rugs and what they represented was something that I believe has been passed down probably for thousands of years. The rug represents life itself.

10) A Well-Sold Product or Service Has Long-Term Value.

Using considerable strength, I carted all of the rugs I'd purchased from the rug traders back to the United States as luggage. There are two matching rugs in particular that I like quite a bit and have taken with me from place to place across the United States for more than a decade now. These rugs have always been on one side of my bed and have been with me through different relationships and numerous life changes.

I look at these rugs every night before going to bed and step on them every morning when I get up. I will probably pass them onto one of my children when I die, and I will tell my children the same story about these rugs that I have told you today—they have that much meaning.

And this is the point of something that has been well sold. The good or service may not be worth a ton of money, but when the person selling it imbues it with a ton of meaning, it becomes worth something to the buyer. This is significant.

The rugs to me are worth far more than any estimator could ever appraise them for. The reason for this is simple. They are priceless because of what they have come to mean and what the owner of the rug store stated they meant. He told me the rugs were from a family, that he had purchased them, and that they had been a wedding present. He held them under bright lights and almost cried when he spoke about them. The rugs are meaningful to me, and I will always consider them priceless because of what the rug trader made them mean. Your potential and current employer needs to see you like I see those

rugs.

THE LESSON

This article discusses the many possible approaches to your job search, and the necessity of selling yourself to potential employers. You must use every means at your disposal in order to achieve your employment goals, and you must present yourself in as much of a positive light as possible in order to successfully sell yourself, and the ten tips presented in this article detail how to do so.

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