

The Need to Feel Loved, Your Life and Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago an old friend of mine was coming to town for a few nights. He was living in New York at the time and was arriving in Los Angeles with his girlfriend to visit her parents. I was excited about seeing him, as we had not seen each other in several years. I was never particularly close with him, but we had grown up together.

Another friend of mine who grew up with us, and also resided in Los Angeles, suggested that he and I rent a limousine and take our visiting friend around town to several clubs. I called a limousine company one Friday afternoon and rented a giant limousine with a hot tub for around \$1,000.

"We're going to have a great night!" I told my friend. "We've rented a limousine and planned a huge evening in your honor!"

At around 8:00 p.m. the giant limousine pulled up in front of my house. I was there with my girlfriend, excited about the big night that lay ahead. The plan was to pick my friend up at a restaurant dinner in Beverly Hills where he was having dinner and then go out. I tried calling him several times but he did not pick up. I was getting very annoyed because there was a giant limo in front of my house, I had already paid the limousine company and I had no idea where we were going.

Eventually, he called me around 9:00 p.m. and said:

"I'm at a dinner with my girlfriend and her family and I'm going to go back with her family to their house. I need to get to know her family better."

Normally, this sort of thing would not have bothered me. Here, however, I had rented a non-refundable limousine. I ended up having a decent evening with the car and drove around Los Angeles with my friend and girlfriend picking up various people. The evening ended up being a lot of fun despite what had transpired earlier.

On Monday morning, the friend I was supposed to take out emailed me instructions related to opening bank accounts with his brokerage firm, as he was a stockbroker. I had never done substantial business with him and he was seeking to have me transfer all my banking relationships to him. I thought this was incredibly rude and discourteous.

I am not sure exactly how I responded. What I do remember is that I was quite insulted about him blowing us off over the weekend. In addition, I was somewhat put off by the request that I invest money with him after what had happened. Normally, when someone wants you to invest money with him they do not simply email you forms requesting that you open accounts without a suitable introduction.

Some sort of argument ensued and I am not sure exactly what occurred. What I do remember from the exchange was what my friend that I had hosted the party with responded after one particularly heated email exchange:

"Everyone just wanted to be liked and loved. Let's just agree we all like each other and move on."

For some reason this comment really stuck with me and I remember reflecting on it a great deal throughout the years. There was a great deal of truth to this statement because what I was upset about was having been stood up—of not feeling important enough to have had my friend show up for his own party. Then, I felt further insulted when he emailed me forms seeking to have me invest money with him.

In truth, there was no reason for me to have been upset about any of this. His family-related obligations simply became more important than seeing someone he was not really very good friends with anyway. The problem, I realized, was me. For whatever reason, my ego was shallow enough that I allowed something that was relatively insignificant to upset me.

A few days later a check arrived in the mail for his share of the limousine ride. He sent \$300 since he felt that this represented 1/3 of the cost split between three friends. I returned his check and never heard from him again. It was a meaningless end to a relationship with someone I had known for over 20 years. Only now do I realize that it was largely my own sense of rejection that caused this relationship to end as it did. As corny as it sounds, deep down this sort of thing comes down to a desire we all have to feel loved.

- How many relationships have you ended for stupid reasons related to your own sense of rejection and insecurity—a need to feel loved?
- How many jobs have you ended for stupid reasons related to your own sense of rejection and insecurity—a need to feel loved?
- How would your life be different if you did not feel a sense of insecurity—a need to feel loved?

Most species are not as dependent upon their parents for survival as a human is when it is born. A turtle crawls out of an egg and never knows its parents. A frog is born as a tadpole and expected to survive on its own. Even most mammals spend only a few months with their mothers and then are completely alone.

Humans, however, are much different than other animals. Instead of spending a few months or years dependent upon our parents, we spend one to two decades (or longer). When we are born, our survival is 100% dependent upon someone putting our needs ahead of their own—for an extended period of time. If a baby or young child is not given love and taken care of, it will die very quickly. Receiving care and love from others is among the most important components of our existence from the moment we are born. Without love a child dies.

As a child grows up and starts to walk, talk and so forth, it is still dependent upon the love of its parents. A child who is ignored, disliked and not taken care of by its parents will very soon experience all sorts of emotional, mental, physical and other problems. A child learns very early on what sort of behaviors will earn it the love of its parents and what sorts of behavior will be met with disapproval and punishment. Disapproval means the threat of love being withdrawn.

Love can be withdrawn by parents in many ways:

- A parent can simply leave. This is something that always inflicts massive damage on a child and it lasts a lifetime. This happened to Steve Jobs. Jobs' mother put him up for adoption when he was a baby and Jobs never even knew his father. When Jobs was older he learned who his father was. His father tried to get in contact with him. Jobs was so furious at his father for not being there he refused to speak with him. Jobs was damaged by his father's love being withdrawn despite the fact that he never knew him.
- A parent can divorce another parent, cheat on another parent and so forth. I do not know how many people I have known who stopped speaking to a parent because one parent left the other parent. Children feel that love has been withdrawn even when it is not due to them. If one parent hurts the other, the child can take this personally as rejection.
- A parent can ignore a child. A parent who ignores a child makes the child feel as if they are insignificant and not lovable. A child who feels ignored may act out in negative ways, or try hard to achieve in positive ways to attract a parent's attention.

Most of us have a deep, ingrained need to be loved by our parents and caregivers. Most children have an almost natural predilection to seek out the approval of their parents and others. Without that love, children act in all sorts of ways—some positive and others negative.

The success of humans as a species is largely the result of our ability to function in groups. Functioning in groups requires that group members be approved of by others. People have this deep, instinctual need for love and to be connected with others. I believe this is due to the unique nature of how we must adapt to survive as children and a species. In our lives, a great deal of what occurs goes back to that fundamental issue of how we felt loved as children—either positively or negatively influencing us.

As children grow older, the love they receive from their parents and the world starts to come with conditions. As babies they could do anything they wanted and receive love. As children grow, the love and approval they receive from their parents becomes conditional upon doing certain things. If children do not meet these expectations, they are spanked, grounded, sent to their rooms and so forth.

All of the conditioning we receive as we grow sends us an ultimate message: If we do not act, behave, or achieve a certain way we will not receive love. On a deep level, every person out there has the sense that if they do not receive the love of others they will not survive.

The moment that we start to feel like we are not being loved by others we react very negatively. Because love is so important to people, most people will react in negative ways if they are afraid of losing love. For example, if someone is in a relationship and they feel like the other person is going to break up with them they may try and hurt the other person first by ending the relationship, or do something else to sabotage the relationship.

The moment we start feeling we are going to lose love, the fear that we are going to “die” on an emotional level occurs. A child who does not receive love will, of course, die if the lack of love is severe enough. Those feeling that they are going to lose love are greatly affected:

- Some people get depressed.
- Other people get angry with the world and lash out at it.
- Some people become criminals.
- Other people kill people.
- Others start using drugs.
- Other people cut and mutilate themselves.
- Some people start working harder.
- Some people engage in risky sexual behavior.
- Other people start overeating.

Whatever it is, if people feel like they are not getting love, or losing love, they react in some way. If someone does not get love from society, parents and others, he or she becomes damaged. Most emotionally damaged people suffer from the belief that love has been withdrawn by someone, or some group of people. People who have trouble in their careers generally have issues getting the approval of others—and approval, of course, is a form of love.

The majority of the most successful people I have ever met were motivated seeking approval (i.e., love) from their parents. For example, many successful movie stars have parents who never made it in the industry, but wanted to. Their children had the fierce drive and determination that enabled them to succeed, in many cases because they wanted to prove something to their parents and earn more love. The majority of the most successful businesspeople and others I have known were motivated by seeking the approval of parents and others, even if it was on an unexpressed level.

Successful politicians, doctors, lawyers and leaders of industry are often deep down seeking approval and love. The love people are seeking may not even have to do with parents: People may just want to feel loved by others in general, or they may be seeking the approval of a former teacher, an old friend or lover, or someone who withheld approval and love from them in the past. Many people believe that if they achieve enough, do enough, or make enough money that they will be loved. The basis for how many people think, act and behave is rooted in their need for love and approval.

One of the most important questions you can ask yourself is “*how much of what you do is related to seeking love?*” How much does the need for love impact your life and your day-to-day existence?

When I was in graduate school, my dad took my girlfriend and I to Paris for a 72-hour frequent flyer miles sponsored vacation. It was a very nice gesture for him to do this and something he did not have to do. When we arrived in Paris late in the evening, my father told us to meet him in the lobby in the morning at 8:00 a.m. to start a marathon day of sightseeing and touring. Unfortunately, my girlfriend and I were so completely exhausted and jet lagged that we did not even hear our alarm go off in the morning. Instead, we continued sleeping and did not end up getting up until after 10:00 a.m.

We called my father and could not find him. Eventually, early in the afternoon, we found him in the lobby. He had been touring the city all day. He was extremely angry and upset with us. He said something to the effect that we were on our own the rest of the trip and ended up storming off.

This was an upsetting event. My girlfriend started crying and was extremely upset. She wanted to go home and felt that my

father was being horrible. She broke up with me because she said she could never be in a family where someone would suddenly lash out like that. My father felt like we were horrible for sleeping in.

At its heart, what was going on was about love. My father felt “unloved” and disrespected by us sleeping in—just as I had felt unloved and disrespected years later when my friend did not show up to the party I had thrown him. My girlfriend (whom I had discussed marriage with), felt unloved by my father and was worried about being loved in the long-term by her family. Everything in this conflict came back to love.

There are so many people out there who jump between jobs. At the heart of many of these moves from job to job is that the person does not feel appreciated (i.e., loved) by their employers. If someone starts to feel insecure with an employer—and as if the employer does not care about them—they start feeling tremendously insecure and start looking for new work. In fact, so much that occurs in the workplace revolves around people’s deep-seated need to feel appreciated and loved by others.

It is generally easy to make someone quit a job. All you need to do is subtly start ignoring the person, not smiling at him or her, and so forth. These sorts of gestures rapidly start to make the person on the receiving end feel insecure, unwanted and unloved. I have seen this sort of thing occur more times than I can count. Feeling appreciated, loved and wanted—and making another feel appreciated, loved and wanted—is the heart of all employer and employee relationships.

In addition, people irrationally staying in jobs despite being treated poorly often occurs due to the need people have for the approval of their supervisors and others. People need to feel appreciated by others and employers are able to cater to this dynamic to get the results they want out of us.

Some people stay in certain geographic locations to be close to family members who they rely upon for love. People want to be near those whom they love and who give them love back.

People base their careers and lives around work schedules and doing certain types of jobs that please others. It may be working a certain type of job that gives them flexibility, or doing a certain type of job that requires them to earn a certain amount of income. At its nature much of this comes back to love.

At its heart, it is important to understand that this need for love and approval is something that is often used against you in your career. There is nothing wrong with needing to feel loved and cared about; nevertheless, this need is often a driving force behind much of what we do in our careers. We seek approval and want to be needed.

There is nothing wrong with the need we have to feel loved. Nevertheless, it often creates massive turmoil in our careers and actually serves to hold us back instead of benefit us. For example, supervisors and others can recognize our need for approval and use this against us. We may make certain decisions in what we do in our lives and career based on this need when, in fact, we could become much more if we were not so dependent on the need to be loved.

In every decision you make in your career, it is important to be aware of this deep seated need you have to be loved, approved of and cared about. You need to step back from your actions and ask yourself how the things you do come back to this need. Everyone is motivated at some level by the need to be loved and a fear of having love taken away from us.

You have to make this need to feel loved, that everyone has, work for you and not against you.

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