

## Values and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In my entire career, I have not come upon a single instance in which a candidate left their firm within one year of starting there. Putting a person in a job where they are likely to stay is more difficult than it may sound. In order for someone to stay in a job for an extended period of time, they need to believe that the job is a good fit for them.

In speaking with jobseekers, I have heard comments like:

- “That firm is so cool, the people there all like to do stuff like go mountain climbing together.”
- “That firm is great. Once you get a job there, you pretty much always have a job because they never let people go.”
- “I really like the people at this firm. They love to go out and have a good time all the time and are all friends outside of work.”
- “I would never work at that firm, the people there are too uptight and boring.”

In each of these examples, the person is making explicitly clear what they do and do not value in a job. The person who likes the mountain climbing firm values adventure. The person that likes the firm that does not fire people values security. The person that likes the firm where everyone goes out and has a good time values companionship.

How does all of this translate into getting people to stick to their jobs? When I am working with a candidate and understand their values, I may recommend a given firm that matches the values that the person is seeking in an employer. Once the person gets into the firm and believes the firm matches their values, they are more likely to be comfortable, happy and stick to their job.

You can do this with people as well. If someone is hesitant about spending time with another person, you just need to explore how the other person matches that person's values and make this clear to them. Once this is done, getting two people together is easy. Similarly, driving people apart is easy as well: all you need to do is talk about how one person's values do not match the other's.

Values drive everything. If you remember, high school consisted of the jocks, nerds, stoners and popular people. The jocks valued sports and physical fitness. The nerds valued ideas and school. The stoners valued tuning out and being angry with other groups. The popular people valued being social. These values determined who these people spent their time with and, often determined the entire course of these peoples' lives. Your values are incredibly important in determining where you go and what you become. If you change your values you change your life.

In their lives and careers, people have values they are either moving towards, or moving away from. The choice of values to move towards and ones to move away from is often illogical. Nevertheless, these choices often end up controlling our destiny and what happens to you. If you understand your values, the reasons where you are in your life and career, and why, will be very obvious to you.

At 5, I went skiing for the first time. I put on my skis and my father helped me climb up a little bunny hill to ski down. As I climbed up this hill, I saw someone bent over and riding down the hill with their hands close to their skis. This looked like fun. At the top of the bunny hill, I did the same thing and ended up running over my fingers with the edges of my skis. I cut them down to the bone and flaps of skin were hanging from my fingers. I was in severe pain and crying.

My father rushed me to the ski slope's emergency medical trailer. The cut was such that the doctor there could not fix it. The pain was so extreme they shot the fingers up with some local anesthetic and gave me a Valium to calm me down. There was blood everywhere and the injury looked awful.

I was then rushed to the hospital where the skin on my fingers was sewn back together. I still have noticeable scars on my fingers from this accident to this day.

I've been on more skiing trips than I can count, but a part of me is always wary about the dangers involved. I've suffered some bad falls that left me limping for days; I've been nearly frostbitten before as well. At length, I've decided that I particularly do not enjoy skiing. After the numerous accidents I've had, I've decided that comfort and security is far better than all of the risks involved. I also avoid white water rafting and other dangerous sports.

I've been on several ski trips over the past several years. What I really enjoy best when at ski resorts is sitting around the resort reading books, going in the Jacuzzi, sitting in front of the fire in the lodge, getting massages and going out to eat at night. To me, this is the most enjoyable aspect of skiing. In fact, this to me is many times more enjoyable than skiing.

I usually avoid any type of danger but I'm eager to embrace things that are comfortable and secure. This is the sort of person that I am and these are among the values that control my life. If you were trying to get me to do something, talking about a comfortable couch, snacks, television, sunshine and a warm pool is much more likely to get me to go somewhere that talking about an all day hike in the woods.

Values also control my career.

As part of a law firm, I saw many people losing their jobs for reasons that did not seem to make sense. I saw partners losing their jobs when they got older. Many of these people had great difficulty finding new jobs. With the security values I have, this was disturbing to me--it made me nervous about doing this for the rest of my career. Accordingly, I told myself I did not want to spend my career working in a law firm.

Everyone is motivated by values. These motivations control what we want to do, where we work and the lifestyles we ultimately adopt.

The values we choose are important because humans tend to move towards the things that we value. In my life and career, I paid close attention to security and comfort. I moved towards work and acted in ways that were likely to lead to these states. For me, these values create pleasure.

We may also move away from some values. Everyone in the world is moving towards the values that are important to them and seeking to move away from those that cause them pain. When we look at jobs or choose companions, we are always asking ourselves whether it will lead us to negative or positive feelings. We will feel good or bad depending upon whether or not a given decision is in comportment with our values.

You can generally gain a good understanding of how people think and plan their lives. You need to understand what it is you want in your life—and what you are trying to avoid.

Consider values like success and money. Over the years, I have met men who never hesitate to point out how much they value these things. What is amazing to me, though, is how quickly this “value” goes away after they are happily married and settled down with a wife and family. While the man may have been moving towards success, what he was really after was love and companionship—not money or success. The success was a “means” to finding love, not the ultimate value the person was seeking.

Some people want a nice house. What is the purpose of this? For many people it might be comfort, significance, or security. Generally the things we are after are means to something else—a feeling and/or deep-seated need that we have apart from this value.

It is important to understand what it is you value in your life and how your values have affected you. Decisions we make in response to our values may seem illogical. For example, I value security and felt that I could not get this in a law firm. Why? Probably due to various experiences I had growing up that made me distrust people and made me feel I needed to be independent to achieve security. Similarly, avoiding action-oriented activities is a value that I have that is similarly irrational: It is based largely on a skiing accident I had when I was only five years old.

Your values may also be illogical. You need to make a in-depth inventory of what you value in a job and in others. If you closely examine what you value and are moving towards, and what you do not value and are moving away from, you will have a better understanding of why you are where you are in your life and career.

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