

Play the Game by Your Own Rules

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

We essentially have two choices in our lives. First, we can be average. We can let the people around us mold us, and we can let society marginalize us, as we follow its so-called norms. Alternatively, we can take a stand, choose not to play by the rules, and simply do things in a way that makes sense to us.

Applying this philosophy and career advice to your [job search](#) is a tremendously successful strategy, especially in a challenging economic environment.

Let me share with you a story about one of the most incredible men I have ever known. He changed the rules of the game in his life. He drew a line in the sand and decided he was going to live the sort of life he wanted. He may have been someone just like you. Whether you are in a [blue-collar job](#) or a white-collar career, you will identify with this man.

I grew up in a suburb of Detroit called Grosse Pointe. From the time I was 18 until I was 27, I owned an asphalt sealing business. Each summer, I would go door to door, visiting literally every house in Grosse Pointe, trying to sell my asphalt-related services. At the time, most of the people who lived in Grosse Pointe were very conservative. Many of them worked for auto companies, or suppliers of auto companies.

Once a year, I would call on a man named Ken, who lived in one of the largest homes in Grosse Pointe. He wore expensive, flashy shirts from Italy, and ridiculous looking Swiss watches. He also had a collection of Ferraris. When I passed by his house I would always notice him sitting in his driveway, revving a Ferrari, or walking around his backyard pool in a robe, or smoking a cigar while taking a leisurely walk. Ken always seemed to be enjoying himself, almost as if he were in a perpetual state of bliss. He appeared to have a kind of fantasy life.

Eventually, Ken and I became friends, and I gradually learned all about his business. His story was incredible to me. He'd gone to all the right schools, earned an MBA, and gone into the [banking business](#). He'd worked for a prestigious bank for several years and enjoyed his experience. However, at some point he realized he would never be able to achieve the life he wanted by staying where he was.

One day, he was having the windows cleaned at his house. He observed that the two men from the [window cleaning](#) company showed up, cleaned his windows in 15 minutes, and left. They did this three times a year, and each time they billed Ken \$125 through the window company. He saw the cleaners went to each house in the neighborhood when they did their tri-annual cleanings. Ken figured the men doing this work probably did not make more than \$8 an hour. At that point, he realized there was a lot of money in window cleaning.

Despite being a highly paid banker, Ken started cleaning windows in his neighborhood each weekend. You can imagine how people must have looked down on him--someone from a blue-blooded background now doing this sort of blue-collar work. But Ken decided this was what he wanted to do. Pretty soon, he was making more money cleaning windows each weekend than he made each week at the bank. Eventually Ken quit his job.

Ken was soon making over \$1 million a year with a window cleaning crew of six guys going door-to-door around Grosse Pointe. But more importantly, Ken was the person he wanted to be. He did not have the same stress he had when he was a banker, even though he took a seemingly ridiculous risk with his career, going from prestigious banker to window washer.

When Ken became the person he wanted to be, he did not worry about what other people said. How many of us have ever had the courage to do this in our own lives?

Do you want to be a musician, an artist, or an actor? How about an [auto mechanic](#) or a sports coach? You need to follow your heart and pursue whatever it is you want to do. When you do this, everything in your life changes. I cannot count the number of people who stepped out of the rat race and did exactly what they wanted to do with their lives, and have found not only happiness, but also great success. And, the rewards don't always have to be financial. The most important ones you receive may be spiritual. These are the rewards that change you from the inside out.