

Do Not Be Immobilized in Your Job Search

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago, I was sitting in my office and the most amazing candidate came across my desk. The attorney had a degree in a hard science discipline from a school like CalTech or MIT (I believe it was physics), had gone to a good [law school](#), and finished first in his class. Not only that, he was currently working at one of the top [law firms](#) in the world and was in a practice area that wasn't just desirable at the time, it was white hot. His practice area was so in demand at this particular point in time that one law firm I'd been dealing with offered another candidate of mine (an attorney only three years out of law school) a \$50,000 bonus to take an offer (which was unprecedented at the time). This was the year 2000 and things were more different in this particular year than they ever were in history. The demand for this particular type of attorney was through-the-roof. The candidate who had received this bonus offer didn't look 10% as good as the candidate whose résumé I was staring at.

This stellar attorney wanted me to assist him with moving to another law firm. At this particular point in history, the market was so good that I estimated this person would get interviews at every single law firm I sent him to. However, as I studied his résumé, I became nervous. I didn't want to offend any of my clients by having them not accept an offer. I figured law firms would literally be salivating over this candidate and throwing offers at him. I was concerned and wanted to make sure I didn't create a feeding frenzy the likes that had never been seen before.

When the market is really good and a recruiter has an exceptionally good candidate, he/she often needs to be careful because he/she doesn't want to upset his/her clients if the candidate doesn't take an offer. As you can imagine, it costs law firms a lot of money to bring people in to interview. They need to schedule the interviews, first of all. These blocks of time that the attorneys are interviewing the person could be used for productive work. With attorneys billing at \$800 an hour and more in some of the best law firms, five or six hours of their best attorneys' time could easily cost a law firm \$5000. Law firms will also typically bring an attorney they are recruiting in more than one time, take the attorney recruit out to lunch or dinner and spend time debating amongst each other whether or not they are interested in hiring the attorney. Due to this, I realized I could really upset a lot of people by sending this attorney to them if he wasn't interested in working for them. The cost to recruit this person for the average firm, up until an offer was extended, could easily be \$20,000.

The best recruiters typically have a tremendous amount of credibility with law firms. If the recruiter tells the law firm to go ahead and extend an offer, the law firm knows the offer is very likely to be accepted. When I was most actively recruiting, I believe a great part of my success was I would always tell law firms when offers were going to be accepted. This made my candidates get jobs with the best law firms and it also enabled me to get more offers for my candidates. A [good recruiter](#) doesn't allow his/her clients to play guessing games with candidates.

This particular candidate was in a different part of the United States and I didn't end up meeting him face-to-face until weeks later. Instead, I spoke with him on the phone for several hours extensively going through his goals and needs. The situation was somewhat complicated because at the time, the candidate was also going through a divorce, and I remember spending just as much time discussing this with him as his [job search](#). However, after days of speaking on the phone, I believed we had finally settled on the perfect firm for him. I say "firm" because it was crystal clear to me he would almost instantly get an offer from any firm he went into.

There's something else I want to bring up, which is a really unusual phenomenon I've noticed with law firms and the most exceptional candidates. Throughout my career, I have had a few candidates like this particular one who had perfect records and were incredibly in demand in the market. It's always interesting to me to watch what happens. Something I've learned is all firms (and employers) have inferiority complexes. For example, had this candidate had a more average record (schools, firm) within 30 minutes of sending him out to law firms, they would have immediately started calling to schedule interviews. When you send someone who is incredibly stellar, however, a lot of the firms simply don't end up calling right away to schedule interviews. Instead, they wait for you to call and convince them to interview the person. I'm not sure why this is, but my opinion is that it has something to do with the fact that the firms suddenly want to play "coy" when someone who is exceptional shows up. They suddenly don't want to look desperate.

After I sent this candidate out, I called the "coy" law firm a couple of days later and explained to them the candidate looked like a perfect match for them. I explained to them I had spoken extensively with the candidate about them and I thought things would go very well. The firm summarily agreed to book the candidate for an entire day of interviews, followed by a dinner. This was something that law firms rarely did on first interviews. Instead, they typically brought the candidate in for what is called a "screening interview" and meet with the candidate for 20-30 minutes. This is basically so the law firm can get a sense of whether the candidate looks like they might do okay if the interview process goes further. They want to make sure the candidate is someone who looks like someone they would hire before committing to further interviews.

The day after my candidate came in, I called the law firm seeking information. After sending them this particular candidate, they became a big fan of mine and my phone calls were getting returned in less than 20 minutes. On this particular day, I didn't receive a phone call back until several hours later. There is a bit of a ritual that plays itself out with law firms when you send them candidates they really like. I will typically chat with them for an hour or more about nothing. This is something that really breaks the ice and puts me in a position where they will willingly share information. If the candidate is good enough, the law firm is also "recruiting" when speaking with you and they want to be nice to you so you will say good things about them to your candidate. With this particular candidate, I'd probably spent 2 or 3 hours chatting about nothing with the hiring partner of this particular law firm. We knew a lot of similar people and agreed we would grab lunch if I was ever in his part of the country.

Late in the day, my phone call was returned by the hiring partner's secretary. "He wanted me to tell you we aren't moving

forward," she said.

"Any reason why?" I asked her.

"He did not give me any reason," she said.

For the next several days I started stalking this particular hiring partner with phone call after phone call. Worse yet, my candidate kept asking me when he was going to be receiving the offer. I told him I didn't have any "final news" yet. Now what I am about to say may seem a tad unethical, but I want you to understand a little bit about what really good recruiters do. A really good recruiter can literally snatch candidates from the jaws of death and get them hired when they are about to be rejected. This is something the very best recruiters out there can do. When you have rapport with the law firm, they will follow your lead and often actually hire the people you recommend to them. Here, I needed to know what was going on.

Several days later, I managed to track down the hiring partner.

"I'm really sorry I didn't return your calls," he said.

"You cannot reject this guy. He is exactly what your law firm has been looking for."

"I know," he said.

I sold the partner on the candidate for at least 15 minutes, finally getting him to agree not to reject the candidate and to bring him in for another full day of interviews with different people. I have no idea how I did this, but I didn't give up on my candidate. I absolutely refused to give up because I knew he really wanted to work in this particular law firm.

As the conversation with the partner was winding down, he asked me if I had met the attorney. I told him no.

"You should meet him," he said. Generally, when you are talking to exceptionally important people (and this attorney was, at the time I saw him, in the legal newspapers frequently and I'm sure he was making well over \$2,000,000 a year) they have the ability to keep most of their interactions to niceties. Here, the fact that this came up at the very end meant that he was leaving me with something he wanted me to think about. This one remark about meeting the candidate was something I should do.

It occurred to me that I had never seen a picture of the candidate. I'd also never had the opportunity to observe his mannerisms and how he might do in interviews. Given the fact that an Oracle of an Attorney had just given me the strongest possible hint that I should meet this attorney, I decided to do so. I called him up and told him I wanted to fly him to Los Angeles at my expense so we could chat and get to know one another. Not a lot of recruiters will do stuff like this, but it was a habit I had really gotten into doing. I flew candidates from all over the country to meet with me, and the process had really yielded some outstanding results. When you get behind someone and show them what they need to do and say once you understand their particular interviewing style, incredible things can happen to them. It can change their lives.

I will never forget the moment this particular candidate walked through the front door of my office. He had the longest hair of any man I had ever seen. His hair went clear down past his buttocks. He had so much hair, he had manipulated it with barrettes or something to keep it away from his eyes. When he sat down and started talking to me, he was also quite depressing. He just kept talking about his divorce. The divorce was the least of my worries, however. I simply couldn't get over how much hair this guy had. I'd never seen a man with so much hair in my life.

Hair is a personal thing and I didn't want to upset this particular guy and didn't bring it up immediately. In fact, it wasn't until we were eating lunch that I decided I should say something about it. It was the white elephant in the room. I didn't want to upset him because men can get really sensitive about their hair.

A couple of years prior, I was visiting my home in Michigan and saw one of my dear childhood friends. He had lost a little bit of hair and he was sitting in the front seat of a car and I was in back. I tapped the back of his head and said "looks like you're getting a little bald spot." To the astonishment of everyone in the car he turned around, leaned over the seat, starting punching me in the face and screaming never to call him bald again. It was a bizarre episode from a guy who was traditionally very mellow. It was for this reason that I was careful not to say anything about my candidate's hair for some time.

"I don't know how to say this," I finally said as we were eating desert. "But do you think cutting your hair may make it easier for you to [get a job](#)?"

Unfortunately, my worst fears were confirmed. The candidate started going off in a rampage, saying "there [was] no fucking way!" he was going to be cutting his hair and wouldn't bow to the establishment and a whole host of other things. He must have gone on a verbal rampage for at least 15 minutes and I realized it was an incredibly sensitive issue for him.

He told me it had taken him over 3 years to grow his current hairdo—just about the amount of time he'd been working in his current law firm. He hadn't always looked like this, and if he had, I am sure he would have had a very difficult time getting a job with the law firm he'd joined when he was in school.

In addition to his incredible depression over getting divorced, the biggest issue this guy had was his hair. He also told me if the law firm that wasn't interested in him and was unwilling to make a decision about him right away, he wanted to look at other firms. A lot of other law firms. We discussed at least 15 more law firms and he told me he wanted to speak with them all. I knew they would all want to speak with him and I was afraid. However, I also knew that he was qualified to work in them and I should abide by his wishes. If they wanted to discriminate against him because of his long hair there was nothing in particular I could do about this. That was their issue and not mine.

Over the next several weeks, he interviewed at every single one of the 15 law firms and was rejected from every single one of them. After he was rejected from those firms I managed to get him interviews at several other law firms, and he was rejected from these as well. While the law firms didn't say it directly, I knew for all of them the issue was the hair. They could just not get over this.

The stupidest and saddest thing ended up happening with this candidate. Due to his long hair, no one ended up hiring him. He might have been able to get hired if he'd a little bit better attitude, but as the interviews progressed, he seemed to get angrier and angrier. At one point he told me he was contemplating suicide. Everything just kept going downhill.

A couple of months later, he finally called me up and said, "I may consider cutting my hair." At this point, however, he had already interviewed with almost all of the firms in his geographic region of the United States. There wasn't much more he could do. He ended up dropping off the map and doing something else besides practicing law. His career as he knew it, had come to an end.

I have thought about this particular episode several times throughout the years, because this person sabotaged himself and his career. This particular person could have fixed everything by simply getting a haircut. He was in charge of what happened to him, just like you are in charge of what happens to you. You choose what the world and your career will be for you. As George Bernard Shaw wrote in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*:

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them.

This statement is incredibly relevant to your life as well. You are in charge of what happens to you. Anything you want to happen, you can make happen.

If someone was to come to you and say that unless you got a job working as a [bank teller](#) in some part of the United States within the next 12 months, you would be executed at the end of 12 months, you would find a way to get a job as a bank teller.

- If it meant cutting your hair, you would cut your hair.
- If it meant moving to another part of the country, you would move to another part of the country.
- If it meant applying to 10,000 jobs, you would apply to 10,000 jobs.
- If it meant mass mailing your résumé to every bank branch in the United States, you would mass mail your résumé.
- If it meant calling every [bank manager](#) in the United States, you would call everyone you could.
- If it meant losing 100 pounds so you were more presentable, you would lose 100 pounds.
- If it meant taking English lessons so you sounded better, you would take English lessons.
- If it meant learning how to do math equations in your head, you would learn how to do this.
- If it meant learning to always smile, you would learn to always smile.
- If it meant learning to laugh at stupid jokes, you would learn to laugh at stupid jokes.

In fact, my guess is you would do absolutely whatever it took in order to get a job as a bank teller. You would make sure you didn't leave any stone unturned, and would do whatever it took to survive. I know you would, anyone would do this. People are in the business of surviving.

Why then do so many of us not do whatever it takes to get every job we go after? You need to do whatever you can within your power to get a job. You need to go after a job like someone who is going to be executed if they don't get the job. This level of commitment to your job search will change everything. This is what you need to do if you are going to get the job you seek. This is what the people who really succeed do. They make their search for a job an all consuming obsession.

What I saw that was so disappointing in my long-haired candidate was he wasn't doing everything within his power to get a job. You may think it's unfair someone can't have hair past their buttocks and get a job in a white shoe law firm paying well into the six figures, but this is just the way it is. Society has rules and we can use these rules for our benefit or they can work against us. Having hair that's not past your buttocks is a rule that must be followed to get a job with most major law firms. I'm sure there have been historical exceptions, but probably not many.

As a consequence of this man not playing by the rules and not doing everything within his power to get a job, he was almost driven to suicide. In fact, he may very well have been, I don't know. What I would impress upon you is you need to do whatever you possibly can to succeed in your job search. If you don't do this, you won't experience the success you are entitled to.

Many of us believe being smart is about how high our IQ is. However, the ranks of the unemployed contain plenty of exceptionally intelligent people. The real test of someone's intelligence, in my opinion, is their ability to take action and get the results they want from life. When I think about the story of the man with the long hair, what I think about is immobilization. His job search was immobilized because he refused to cut his hair. Are you immobilized in your own [job search and career](#)? If you aren't doing whatever it takes to get a job then you are surely immobilized.

Does your lack of self confidence prevent you from applying to every possible job? If so, you are surely immobilized. Does your fear of the unknown prevent you from looking for a better job? If so, you are surely immobilized. Does your jealousy of someone else prevent you from working effectively in your job? If so, you are surely immobilized. You are immobilized whenever you are not functioning at your highest and best state. This is what you need to do and if you are looking for a job, the most important thing you can possibly do is throw out all of the stops and do whatever it takes get the job of your dreams. You never want to be immobilized.

THE LESSON

If you aren't functioning at your highest level in your job search, then you are immobilized. You must get out to look for the circumstances you want, and create them if you cannot find them. You need to make your job search your all-consuming priority and proactively do everything in your power to keep moving toward your goals.