



Seek Out Environments, Conditions, and People That Create Positive Beliefs in Yourself

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Recently, my 5-year-old daughter finished applying to kindergarten. I never had to apply to kindergarten; instead, I just went to the local school in my neighborhood in Detroit that anyone could attend. In California, there are charter schools and all sorts of options to public schools.

I think it is probably a good idea that she's not going to attend the local public schools. There are some really bad kids in my neighborhood.

A few years ago I was coming out of a nice dinner at a local Mexican restaurant. I was standing outside waiting for my wife while she was in the bathroom. Several kids --one who I vaguely recognized as a 17-year-old child of a neighbor-- were sitting on a ledge outside of the restaurant discussing a porno they were making.

"We've already shot three scenes so far and another two and we'll have the porno made," one of them said.

They then started talking about how one of the girls they were making the porno with refused to a scene involving a sex act choreographed in a certain way.

I could scarcely believe it. These were high school kids making a porno movie on the weekend. Where I grew up the entrepreneurial kids mowed lawns. Here, they were making pornos.

I did not have any children at the time but made a mental note that I was not sure I wanted my kids going to school with kids like this.

I ride a Segway Scooter back and forth to my office since I live so close. A few weeks ago, I was riding my Segway past three kids who looked about 15 and they started screaming names like "loser" and so forth at me. I turned my scooter around and went back to confront them. A couple of the kids were my neighbors -- I see them riding their skateboards and so forth by my house all the time.

"What the fuck is your problem?" I asked them.

"You're a really bad person swearing at little kids!" a girl with the kids told me. "You're a real pervert."

I shook my head and "scooted" away. When I was about 100 feet away, one of the kids screamed at the top of his lungs: "DICK!"

I turned around and went back up to him.

"You deserved it for swearing at a young kid!" the girl said. She had an earring in her tongue.

I am not sure exactly what I said to them but I said something to the effect that I bet they were doing poorly in school, did not play sports and were angry at the world and that they should take pride in themselves instead of trying to attack others.

"What do you think is going to become of your lives?" I asked them. "Are you guys on a good path or a bad path?"

One the kids said "Fine ... please just leave us alone." They were really animated and confident before I said that. When I started talking to them about their lives, their self-images, and their potential, everything changed. I realized that these kids did not have a strong sense of who they were -- or who they might become. Without a strong sense of self, they were unlikely to do well in their lives.

Certain types of kids are admitted to the best schools, just as certain types of parents are likely to send their children to the best private and charter schools, just as certain types of kids are going to be motivated to attend the schools. The result of all this is that kids end up among a group of peers that set high standards for themselves.

The kids I saw were from the local public school. They were the sort of kids I grew up with. In fact, I used to be a kid just like them (to at least some extent). I knew the odds of these kids doing much with their lives were limited. I know people who have gone to prison, become heroin addicts, and more. This is the sort of future that awaits people who have negative self-images and grow up in bad environments without developing the right psychology for themselves.

A year or so ago I was sitting in the waiting room of one of these you-have-to-apply elementary schools with my wife--a third visit to the same school--and asked how competitive it was to get in. I honestly thought just about every single one of the kids who applied got into these elementary schools.

"After siblings and legacy children who are admitted, we have about 275 applications for 15 to 20 spots each year," the administrator told me.

I could scarcely believe it. That's more competitive than getting into a college like Yale. How on earth can someone determine how accomplished a 5-year-old is?

I asked about admissions statistics at all the schools and got similar answers.

For the past two years, we have been going to one meeting after another in these elementary schools. The process starts when the child is about two. We visited the school our daughter is going to at least seven times. There were coffees, question and answer sessions, tours, and more. Then, after the applications were filled out, there were parent essays, multiple recommendations for the children, and so forth.

There were also interviews.

Some of the schools wanted a list of all the charities we gave money to.

One school even held small mandatory "focus groups" with 10 or so prospective parents and the principal and school administrators to talk about parenting challenges. That really pissed me off having to spend an entire morning there.

At the focus group, several of the parents cried and were obviously putting on a show for the administrators.

All of the letters announcing what school our daughter got into went out on the same day and came on a Saturday. At around 1:00 pm our phones started ringing with calls from other parents inquiring what schools we got into and so forth.

All of the news we received that day was not good--and we wondered why. Despite not getting flat-out rejected anywhere, we were told by at least one school that we would not be admitted for kindergarten but likely later on. Despite feeling this entire process was ridiculous, I took it as a personal rejection.

- Why do people care so much about where their children go to school?
- Why do people care so much about where they go to school?
- Why do people care so much about the neighborhoods they live in?
- Why do some people care so much about the clubs and groups they belong to?

I honestly do not think there is much difference between a public school or private school in terms of what the child is likely to learn. The same thing goes for colleges, law schools, and so forth. The textbooks are going to be the same for the most part and the teachers are going to be following the same lesson plans.

The difference--and what I think people are most concerned about--is the environment and how this environment shapes us and our beliefs about ourselves. You are likely to associate with different types of kids with different values and beliefs depending on the schools you attend. This is, of course, not always the case, but it's more often the case than not.

The beliefs we have about ourselves often come from our environment. If we see success all around us, then we too believe we should be successful. If the people around us are all failing and not achieving stuff at a high level then we too do not feel successful.

I had the fortune to attend a competitive high school and college. When I hear from people I went to school with, I am constantly hearing one success story after another about how one person has done this or that at such a high level--as well as a dose of stories of about failures.

To some extent I do not enjoy hearing from people I went to school with because it makes me feel inadequate about my own achievements and makes me feel like I should be accomplishing more in my life. For example, Mitt Romney went to my high school. Hearing about all his success on the national stage has made me think to myself that I am a failure in contrast--and it makes me want to try harder. It also makes me think to myself: if this person did such and such, I could be more and I should be doing more.

I never would have this sort of pressure in the back of my mind if I were not hearing all these success stories from people I went to school with. I feel all of this because of the environment I was in. The environment we grow up in and are a part of determines, in large part, the person we become. We want to rise to the level of our peers and be successful as well.

This is the reason that parents are so aggressive about sending their kids to good schools. They want their children to achieve something at a high level and be around other high achievers and children with similar aspirations.

Not everyone grows up and develops in the best environments. In fact, most people do not. Because most people do not develop in these sorts of environments, much of what they accomplish needs to come from within. We need to condition ourselves to have positive beliefs about ourselves. You need to create strong beliefs about yourself and what you believe you can become. Most often, the difference between those who succeed and those who do not is what they choose to believe about themselves and what they are capable of achieving.

Much of what people achieve in their lives is determined by their beliefs about reality. For example, if we believe people are evil, cannot be trusted, and will hurt us, we are going to see evidence to support this belief all around us. In contrast, if we believe all people are good and that the world is a happy place, we are going to see this all around us as well. The people we grow up around and associate with can impact how we see the world, but we can impact our beliefs about our success as well.

If you believe you will be successful, you are likely to take more risks. You are likely to have confidence that you will rise no matter what happens. You are likely to be more optimistic. If you think highly of yourself, you will also respect yourself more. Others will respect you more. If you believe you are a certain way, the odds are you will eventually be this sort of person.

I believe that one of the most important things is adopting beliefs that help us to grow.

You need to associate with and spend time with people who are going to encourage strong beliefs about yourself. The people you associate with make all the difference. You should seek out people who have high standards for themselves and spend as much time as possible with them, instead of the opposite. These people will shape your beliefs about yourself.

The places where you work and spend your time are just as important as the schools you attend. You should try and work in places that are encouraging and bring out the best in you. You should try and work in places that challenge you and are filled with successful people. These people will challenge you and shape your beliefs about yourself. Once you are in the best place possible, you should seek to work with the most successful people there.

With limited exceptions, it does not matter what you do for a living. You should, however, seek to do something you are exceptionally good at and do this at the highest level you possibly can. You want to condition yourself to believe you are accomplished and good at something. The better you feel about yourself and your abilities, generally, the better you will continue to do.

Your beliefs about your success and what you are capable of will, in large part, determine who you become and are capable of becoming. Seek out environments, conditions, and people that create positive beliefs in yourself. That's a key to success.