

Understand the Nature of People, Jobs and the Environments You Commit To

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago a long-term relationship I was in ended and I felt absolutely terrible: the person I was with could not stop fraternizing with other men. At least a few times a week, she would be out with a different man and say it was related to work. We lived together and she would come home late – sometimes she would make excuses that she was staying with friends and would not come home at all. Eventually, I was so angry about this all the time that the relationship ended.

One of her male friends had ties to organized crime. He operated check cashing businesses and all sorts of dubious loan sharking-type of businesses in Las Vegas. He commuted back and forth in a private jet between a mansion he had purchased on the beach in Malibu and Las Vegas.

One night, she didn't come home. As the hours ticked by that evening, I remember first being worried, then angry, then confused, then angry. She finally called me at 11:30 and told me she wasn't coming home that night. "What the F@*&!?" I screamed at her. I was very upset. I felt jilted, upset and let my feelings out.

"If you talk to me like that again I am going to 'call Vegas' and have you taken out," she said. She then hung up. She was serious. She was literally threatening to have me killed by someone I knew could have me killed.

When the relationship ended, I was very upset. I bought some books about how to repair relationships. I started going to religious services. I bought some religious books and followed the advice they had to offer. I moped around and felt pretty awful. There were a few days I did not go to work. One day I set up a lawn chair in the driveway of my small house and sat there all day – I didn't move or get up. When it got dark, I went inside with a horrible sunburn.

I realize now that one of the most important things in life is to understand where others are coming from.

When you understand the psychology of others, it puts everything in perspective.

When you put everything in perspective, you can live a far better life.

Most of us – myself included—are far too concerned with ourselves, our egos and our needs—to step outside of ourselves and look at the way the world really works: Our view of the world is often driven by the fears, insecurities, and issues that other people have.

My ex was a beautiful and accomplished woman in many respects. Despite all of this, she had a brutal childhood which I never quite understood. Something had happened in her teens which caused her to suddenly stop speaking with her father – and her mother divorced her father. I asked her sister about it once. The sister was standing outside on a freezing cold night chain smoking.

"She's going to have to tell you what happened," she said. She took a deep hit of her cigarette and stared blankly into the cold night. "It's too personal for me to tell you."

As a teen, my ex had been sent away for a short time to a summer camp for troubled teens because she had been cutting herself with knives. I never understood what that was about.

I never put any of this in perspective. Because I was young, I was focused on her beauty, how she made me look and, well, sex. I was unable to see her real self and what was going on with her.

Before I settled down with her for a time, she had really seemed to thrive on men's attention. I never understood quite why she thrived on getting attention from so many men. When I met her, I thought that her numerous dates meant she was happy and free. It was only later that I realized something was terribly wrong.

After the break up, she stopped by my house one afternoon. I was surprised to see her. She told me that in the few months since we had broken up, she had dated some 30 men – and found one guy that she liked. Paul Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft.

As I listened to this, we were sitting outdoors at the Ritz Carlton in Pasadena, California. It was 12:00 noon and she was on her second margarita. She wore sunglasses but pain was visible in her face. What I realized at that moment – and something that I had not realized in all of my weeks of soul searching following the breakup—was that she was seeing all these men and seeking out wealthy and powerful men because she felt dead and worthless inside. She needed to be connected to someone important to feel important.

I realized I bore a lot of responsibility for the crummy way I felt. It was partially my fault because I chose her. There would never be anything I could do to change her— she was the way she was no matter how much I loved her, no matter how good I was to her. Her demons would haunt every relationship she ever went into.

I was just as guilty as she was. I had chosen her for the wrong reasons. I had allowed myself to be emotionally abused and tolerated it. I continued to play the game and watch – long after a much more emotionally mature and secure man would have called it quits.

When you look around at your friends and the people in your life, what you see is a reflection of you. If you are insecure, you will surround yourself with people like you. If you are a junkie you will be around junkies. If you are vain, you will be around people who are vain.

I once heard a story about a man who had a dog known as the Dog of America. This golden retriever dog was incredible:

- It did flips on command
- It jumped through hoops
- It could bark and cry on command

Because this dog was so remarkable, the man who owned it thought that he could teach the dog to sing. For months, he hummed and tried his best to get the dog to sing. He told everyone he knew that the dog would soon sing.

As the months went by, the man became increasingly angry. He was furious that the dog would not sing. He constantly yelled at the dog for not singing and then he fell into a deep depression. He then tried harder and harder to make the dog sing, but the dog wouldn't.

"Who's crazy?" the man who first told me the story asked. "The man or the dog?"

Something people do not understand about their careers and the lives they lead is that you are rarely going to change people, or the institutions you work in.

Early in my legal career, something emerged called the Greedy Associates Boards. These were boards where young attorneys congregated online and, for the most part, said negative things about the law firms they were working for. They complained about the hours, the salaries, the bonuses and more.

I never had any interest in participating in these sorts of boards. What I wondered, though, was why all of these people were practicing law and working if they hated it so much? All of their complaints were not going to change anything. Law firms are institutions that have been around for hundreds of years. They operate on the billable hour and are profitable based on the number of hours their employees work. Complaining about this will never change how they operate.

Many people go into various jobs, professions and relationships without understanding the "nature of the beast" they are getting involved with.

When I got involved with the woman, I knew her nature – but made the mistake of getting involved anyway.

When a man tries to train a dog to speak – he knows its nature and that it does not speak.

When someone takes a job in a law firm – they know its nature.

One of the more unusual aspects of human psychology is that many people fail to understand the nature of the people, environments and jobs they become involved with. The most important thing you can do is understand the nature of what you get involved with, and accept that it will define you.

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