

## Evidence and Your Instincts

By *Harrison Barnes*

Joshua Bell, one of the most famous violinists in the world, took a \$3.5-million dollar Stradivarius Violin and played for 45 minutes in a Washington DC subway station.

Despite more than 1,000 people walking by, only a three-year old boy and six other people stopped to watch him. Only one person recognized him.

How could one of the greatest musicians in the world play for so long in a public place unnoticed?

Imagine if you were Bell—you had incredible, world-class talent but no one saw it. Instinctually, you may have felt like you are good at violin, but you have no evidence because no one acknowledges you, praises you, or says so.

You would probably think you were not good at violin. If you felt you were somewhat good, you might also feel that people did not appreciate your abilities. You might feel like you were wasting your time and should be doing something else.

How difficult would it be for you to stay with this and continue day after day despite no one seeming to care – or notice?

There is a good chance that you have some incredible abilities deep down that no one has ever noticed.

One of the hardest things in the world for most people is that they are not noticed. People do not notice the good in them and their talents and because no one sees their talents, many people lose faith in what they are capable of.

In the recruiting realm, I most enjoy telling candidates and people I am working with how great they are:

- I compliment them on how rare and unique they are.
- I tell them how talented they are.
- I find as many of their positive qualities that I possibly can.

If you look at anyone closely, you will find greatness. There is not a single person I have ever met that does not have greatness in them that has never been fully realized.

If you are lucky, your greatness has been recognized and nurtured. Most people, though, are never acknowledged for what they are great at and because of this their talent never emerges.

When I recognize and praise their greatness my candidates change—they get more jobs. They reach their potential more easily. They feel more confident and inspired. Some even start looking a bit different.

The symptom of a bad recruiter is someone who does not lift people up and show them their potential and their capabilities. If someone does not recognize the greatness in you, you have no evidence that you are great. Without evidence of your own greatness, you will not be encouraged, and if you are not encouraged, you may give up.

Most people give up.

Great recruiters, teachers and coaches all find the good in the people they are working with. They do this because they want to give people “evidence” that they have talent and they know that when people have “evidence” they will be encouraged to move forward even in the face of obstacles.

If someone has evidence of their greatness they are more self-confident and believe in themselves more. People who believe more in themselves go farther. Great teachers and coaches give people evidence so their students go farther.

There are certain teachers and people in this world who I have encountered whose students have an extraordinary track record of success. They have this level of success because they specialize in giving others evidence they are outstanding and special.

A great mentor will recognize abilities in people even if they are latent. They will encourage their student to grow in the right direction. Soon, the student may believe they are incredible and can do anything.

Who has encouraged you and shown you what you are capable of? Just a few people encouraging you can make a gigantic difference in your life.

When I entered high school, I remember I was getting A's and B's in English. A teacher I had took me aside and told me I should be getting all A's and that I was not applying myself, but if I did, I would get better results. When I was in junior high school I had gotten C's and B's and never really believed in myself.

I did not believe her. Nevertheless, the next year I applied myself more and got A's and A-'s in English.

I started to see the results and evidence of my efforts, so the next year I started getting nothing but A's and lots of praise. Pretty soon, I realized that if I applied myself I could always get A's in any class where I had to write papers. By my junior year of college, I received nothing but A's in all my classes and took nothing but writing classes.

Once I had evidence I was good at something, I was empowered. Before I received this evidence I have to say I really did not believe in myself. If someone had not given me evidence and encouraged me, I am not sure what would have happened to me in my life. Getting evidence was something that did a lot for me and it changed my life.

You need to do whatever you can to give yourself evidence that you are remarkable and special in whatever you want to be. You need to surround yourself with the sorts of mentors, acquaintances and friends who give you this evidence. The people who are happiest and most successful have given themselves evidence that they are worthy, special and the sort of person they want to be.

When a child is not loved growing up, they often have unbelievably unhappy adulthoods. The unhappiest people most often

have the parents who were standoffish, did not offer praise and did not make the child feel loved. Consequently, the child grows up unhappy – they have evidence no one loves them. Even if a child is good at something, a poor parent may not encourage them.

I set my television up to record a show called *Intervention* and watched several episodes. Generally, the show deals with someone who has some sort of addiction disorder – whether it is food, drugs, or alcohol. The show interviews the family, friends and others who know the person. The show also shows how out of control the person is. At the end of the show, the person sits down in front of their friends and family in an “intervention” and is forced to check themselves into a facility for treatment.

I’ve watched at least 25 of these episodes. Almost always people have some deep issues in their past that they are using as “evidence” to themselves that they are unworthy of love and happiness, which drives their self-destructive addictions.

It could be a cold distant parent incapable of telling them they loved them or it could be someone close to them violating them sexually in some way.

Whatever the reason, addicts on *Intervention* are always focusing on an incident—or a series of incidents in their past—as a reason they are unworthy of being happy and/or loved. Most often, it is a parent who consistently made them feel unloved and unacknowledged, which created the issues for the child.

It is using bad evidence that hurts us.

Conversely, using good evidence can help us a great deal.

I wish I would keep meeting billionaires. I’ve met more than I can count recently. Most billionaires are complete assholes. While I find them unlikable, I think there is really only one reason why — They have an incredible level of self-confidence that they bring to everything that they do. At least for a few of the ones I have met, when you talk to them they speak of various achievements they have had in the past and always map out their future in a way that makes it seem as if they will never fail. When they speak of their future, they always use all sorts of evidence of the things they have done in the past as “evidence” that they cannot fail.

While I find the billionaires I have met off-putting, I believe that a real thread that goes through their success is their ability to always use past evidence of what they have done to encourage their self-confidence in their present-day abilities.

For most of us, it is not listening to our hearts that hurts us. If you feel you can be a great musician, you should do it. It does not matter what the evidence is. Go to a music school, associate with people who will bring out your best so you have evidence of how good you in fact are.

Over 15 years ago, with no savings, a new wife, mortgage and a house payment, I quit a \$170,000 a year job in a law firm to start a legal recruiting firm. I knew nothing about recruiting other than 1) I knew I could sell people, 2) I knew I would enjoy it, and 3) I felt instinctively that I would be exceptional at it. I had no evidence and everyone around me discouraged me from doing it – in fact, many people thought I was crazy. I did it anyway and it was the best decision I ever made. My first year I made over \$1,000,000 and I was happier than I had ever been.

Lawyers are some of the most unhappy people in the world. Part of the reason they are so unhappy is because they are always looking at evidence and making all sorts of judgments – not just about the cases and matters they work on, but about themselves.

- Lost a case? This could be evidence they are a bad attorney.
- Not enough business? More bad evidence.
- Someone happier than you? More bad evidence.
- Someone fitter than you? More bad evidence.
- Someone working in a better firm than you? More bad evidence.

The class and pecking order for attorneys is so extreme that most attorneys look around them and always have some sort of evidence they are not good enough.

Because the law is so cerebral in nature, most attorneys are constantly using their brain and they believe that they are not good enough. They are always evaluating evidence and the evidence prevents them from being happy.

Even if you are enormously talented, if you continue living your life and your career the way you are, you may never get the evidence of how good you in fact are.

The people you surround yourself with will generally either bring you up or bring you down. You need to surround yourself with the sort of people that give you evidence that you are the person you want to become. The people you spend your time with will determine the entire course of your life – they will give you evidence that you are one thing or another.

- Smokers tend to hang out with smokers.
- Drinkers hang out with other drinkers.
- Former drinkers hang out with other drinkers.
- Fat people spend time with other fat people.
- Fitness enthusiasts spend time with other fitness enthusiasts.

The fact is that whatever sort of person you are, you will generally seek out people just like you who can give you the evidence you are seeking that you are one way or another. Look to spend your time with people who are exceptional and who will give you evidence that you too are exceptional.

The problem with most people is they do not trust their hearts and instincts--and pay attention to the wrong evidence.

They look for the negative in everything they are doing.

They listen to negative messages and do not believe in themselves and trust their instincts.

Instead of taking one wrong message as evidence they could do something differently, they take the message as evidence they have failed and are no good.

Instincts are powerful. Using our instincts properly can determine whether or not we will be successful. Most of us use logic and reasoning, which leads to us being calculating and not following our hearts.

Bell—the man with the violin in the subway-- could be a metaphor for you of the way you are living your life. Most of us look for evidence to prove that we are happy, successful, popular and so forth – and few of us find it. However, unlike Bell, many of us do not realize we are successful and great and so we stop playing without the evidence that we are great.

When I compliment my candidates on their careers, I am almost always one of the first people to have done this to them with the sort of praise I give. Many times people have started crying when I compliment them in person. This is beautiful, but it is also not right—everyone deserves to be recognized for what they are good at.

Something I have noticed over and over again is that a great proportion of lawyers who have attended top prep schools, good colleges and worked very hard and then gotten good jobs and worked very hard there – tend to do quite well in their careers.

This is not always true – and I certainly could discuss countless examples of it not being true – but it is generally true.

I've puzzled over this for a long time.

I think the people who go to these schools are using this fact as evidence that they are good and worthy and it empowers them to continue doing well even in the face of adversity.

Because I am in the recruiting industry, I've also noticed a great proportion of people coming out of various very good law schools who tend not to do that well. For example, I've noticed a lot of people out of Duke Law School, in particular, do not do as well in the law as the competitiveness of this school might suggest.

I am not sure exactly why this is – or why so many otherwise talented people from these schools seem to do more poorly in the work world than the excellence of these schools might suggest, but I can guess why: There is likely something cultural in these schools in the way the teachers interact with the students and the students interact with one another that provides a great many of the students evidence that they are not talented, good lawyers and so forth.

Perhaps there is some sort of popularity contest going on that makes most students feel like unworthy outsiders. Perhaps the school does not encourage students. Perhaps there is an issue with the way the faculty is selected; or the motivations of the faculty. I have no idea. I just know what I have seen from many of these students and it does not add up.

Evidence is important. You need to surround yourself with people who give you evidence of your greatness and what you can do. However, more importantly you need to follow your heart. You need to believe in what you cannot see. You need to not question your greatness and just go for it. You need to never question your instincts.

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