

Specialize, Be Seen and Associate with Greatness

By *Harrison Barnes*

Not too long ago, I was spending the afternoon with a man who had sold a company for \$850 million that he had founded. His home was perched on a cliff over the ocean in Malibu – sort of like Tony Stark's home in the *Iron Man* movies. Very few people know who this man is. He took an ordinary product and created a huge national chain around it, remaining relatively anonymous the entire time.

"I have a few famous neighbors," the man bragged to me. He then mentioned a well-known local real estate agent who was his neighbor. He seemed to take a tremendous amount of pride in the fact that this well-known real estate agent was his neighbor.

Why was this real estate agent so well-known? The agent is on shows like *Celebrity House Hunters* and has his face and name plastered all over local newspapers each week selling houses. The man sells expensive homes and nothing more. He works in a small office with just a few people. He is seen on television with various celebrities on an ongoing basis. However, he is only well-known because he sells expensive homes and is associated with various celebrities. That is it.

He certainly has not started a huge national chain of stores or run a company with thousands of people reporting to him. However, to the man whose house I was at that day, the real estate agent was of great importance simply because of his association with celebrities and the fact that everyone knows who he is.

In your career, you can really go far if everyone knows who you are. There are risks in getting out there and being seen, but success comes to those who specialize and put themselves out there to be seen. If you are "seen" with important people, then that is even better.

People are attracted to influence and celebrity. Regardless of what you do, it is important that you try and get out there and get in the limelight.

One time, I thought I might have cancer because my doctor had misdiagnosed me. I found the best doctor I could in the world, someone who had been on various television shows, written books and so forth. People want to use experts and they are attracted to influence and celebrity.

Incredibly, the "well-known" real estate agent I told you about is so well-known that he does not even show houses. His staff shows the homes he is selling. I purchased a home from him once and never met him until the purchase had been completed – and then only because he needed to drop a document off and was in the neighborhood.

Regardless of what you do, you should do your best to be a celebrity and be well-known. Getting well-known in small niches can go a very long way. For example, Arnold Schwarzenegger was well-known as a body builder before he became known as an actor and politician. Being a niche celebrity can give you huge dividends.

In the past, our company has sponsored various employees from India and worked on getting their work papers and visas. I never had much say in who we hired to do the immigration work because, once the employees got here, a mysterious network seemed to pop up that recommended an also Indian-born attorney practicing law in the United States. The first time I visited the website of this Indian-born attorney, I could not believe my eyes. He had pictures of him shaking hands with:

- the President of the United States,
- the former President of the United States,
- the Governor of California,
- the former Governor of California,
- Pamela Anderson,
- Billy Joel,
- Tori Spelling ...
- and all sorts of other well-known people.

I am not sure what Pamela Anderson, Billy Joel and Tori Spelling have to do with immigration law, but who cares? If I was from a foreign country and saw pictures of an attorney shaking hands with Pamela Anderson, I would be impressed. I would think he really was someone.

In reality, if you want to get your picture taken with an important politician or celebrity, there are all sorts of fundraisers you can go to. There, you can pay \$5,000 or so, stand in a long line, and get your picture taken with the celebrity or politician. (See <http://audio.wrko.com/a/37445376/what-it-cost-to-take-your-picture-taken-with-president-obama.htm>) However, most people do not know this. How brilliant of this attorney to do this ... it is not my sort of thing, but imagine how much business he gets from it.

In fact, despite having gone to an unaccredited law school and being a solo practitioner (and other various issues with his background), he was able to charge as much as the largest American law firms do for his work. In fact, he was charging a few times more than other solo practitioners for the exact same work. In addition, people wait weeks to even get an appointment to speak with this attorney about filling out some simple immigration forms (that do not require any great deal of skill).

That is the power of being someone and associating yourself with others who are someone. When you surround yourself with important people, it rubs off and (consciously or not) people consider you more important. How else do you explain a near-billionaire getting a sense of importance from the fact that he lives down the street from a real estate agent that sells homes to celebrities on television and whose face is plastered all over the local television?

The ability to be seen is huge, and it can make you enormously successful. In the town I grew up in, there was a man who owned a local auto dealership and had started out as a mechanic with no high school education. Years later, he ended up purchasing the auto dealership and grew it into a huge dealership with car lots all over the state. He became well-known shouting about various car deals on television and doing things like beating a rubber chicken over his head while practically foaming at the mouth about the great terms he was offering on cars. However, people knew who he was and, because of this, he built a huge brand and became well-known.

In every community, there are various people getting seen who end up becoming local celebrities. They could be the local optometrist, the local personal injury attorney, or the local veterinarian. There are people who make it in every community in the country because they take their expertise and allow themselves to be seen.

I speak with attorneys about their careers each day. In order to be a successful attorney, you generally need to specialize, be seen, and associate with greatness.

First, an attorney who practices all sorts of law (litigation, contracts, corporate law, etc.) is generally going to have a very difficult time getting ahead unless they run a law practice in a small town. Being an attorney is a form of "being specialized"; however, the more specialized you are, the better off you are generally going to be as an attorney.

When someone hires someone, they want to choose the best. You cannot be the best if you are doing a bunch of different things. It is okay to go see a general doctor if you are being treated for a cold, broken bone, cut, or infection. However, if you have a brain tumor, you are going to call in the "big guns" and go see a neurosurgeon. Who in their right mind would let their family doctor perform complicated brain surgery?

Second, once you are specialized, you need to get out there. Opportunity comes to those who are seen. People are seen when they go on television, on the radio, are interviewed in the papers, when they write articles, when they advertise themselves. If you are not seen, you do not get business, and if you do not get business (in a law firm environment), you are going to have a difficult time getting ahead. You need to be seen. All of the best known attorneys were able to be seen.

One of the greatest mistakes attorneys – and others -- make when looking for a job is not getting out there. If you are looking for a job, you need to use the mail, use the phone, attend every event you can, and meet every person who can possibly help you. This is the only way. I've worked with so many attorneys who are afraid of rejection and do not get out there. Getting out there is often the difference between greatness, and really reaching your potential, and nothing happening at all.

Third, you need to associate with greatness. Being associated with greatness can take a lot of forms. In the small law firm I run, for example, a famous attorney recently did an amicus brief on our firm's behalf. I did a press release about it because I felt it helped the firm. (See <https://www.jdjournal.com/2014/02/13/erwin-chemerinsky-the-most-influential-first-amendment-scholar-in-the-united-states-submits-amicus-brief-in-support-of-harrison-barnes/>) Greatness can be the quality of law school you went to, or the firms you worked at, or even the individual attorneys you worked with. That is why education and experience is so important in the legal community. The more greatness you are associated with, the better.

Regardless of who you are, you can accomplish amazing things if you specialize, get out there, and associate yourself with greatness.

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