

Do Not Allow Others to Hold You Back from Success

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Imagine you are a doctor working in a small clinic in the suburbs of Chicago. You are surrounded by uninspired doctors who are happy going back and forth to work each day in exchange for a salary. You, in contrast, have no interest in money and are concerned with curing a fatal heart disease. In fact, you have been working on curing this disease for the past 15 years.

You talk about the importance of curing this fatal heart disease to everyone you meet.

You have a giant library at home of textbooks and other journal articles that you are constantly referring to in order to work on fighting the disease. In your free time, you go to conferences and do everything you can to further your research. Your garage is a huge laboratory and all of your extra money goes to purchasing sophisticated equipment for this.

Unfortunately, you are surrounded by people who have very little interest or respect for the work that you are doing. In fact, these people think very little of you. Since you have been working on this for the past 15 years, they think you are “crazy”, and tell each other that you have wasted your life.

And then one day you find a cure. You save countless lives and become one of the most famous doctors in the world.

It is the people that have this sort of passion that are most valuable to the world and make the most difference. People with this amount of passion for what they do have a gift but may still be looked down upon, mocked and not thought of highly by many people. However, this passion is what changes the world and makes good things happen.

I have known numerous people similar to the doctor in this hypothetical above. The situation is generally always the same: A person gets excited about something and is different. The world tries to hold them down and make them dull and uninspired again. A few people emerge from this negative, downward pressure unscathed. Those who do generally accomplish great things—and at a minimum accomplish more than those who followed the pack and conformed.

Several years ago, I started writing all sorts of in-depth articles about topics that were interesting to me such as: [how to interview](#), [how to write cover letters](#), [the best way to find jobs](#), and [other career and employment advice](#).

Doing this type of work (which I enjoy) has always been considered by some people as a poor use of my time. I am often told things like:

- People do not want to read long articles.
- You should save the most valuable information for people who are going to pay you for it.
- It is a waste of your effort, and you should do something else.

When I write articles, I like to write in-depth, and I like to say as much as I can about a given topic. I think that if someone wants to know something, and they are taking the time to read your information, the best thing you can do is spend the time to tell them everything you know.

I soon discovered videos. I realized I could make videos about these same topics. If people wanted to learn about [how to get a job while in law school](#), and would rather watch a video than read an article about this, I decided that these videos would be a valuable tool too. Some of the videos I made were an hour or longer and consisted of me sitting in front of a camera lecturing about job search.

Sometimes I even made videos while driving around. In one memorable video, I drove around on my ATV. (This particular video was not well received by many of my own employees who are attorneys. They did not find it to be dignified and reserved like they thought an attorney should be.) In this video (made during the height of the recession), I urged people who were having a difficult time finding jobs to stop relying on only one method of searching for jobs (a recruiter, job site, mass mailing) and use every method possible—including knocking on doors. Given my opinions about the severity of the recession and how difficult it was for people to find jobs, I sent it out to every attorney in the United States that subscribed to my various newsletters (over 1 million people).

There were so many things I wanted to share with people so, about 15 years ago, I also started hiring freelancers to write articles about the topics I assigned to them. Most of these articles were short, uninspired and mechanical. As time went on, American freelancers working for our company, who were not as closely supervised as they should have been, started farming out the articles to places like the Philippines and India. The products that came back (tens of thousands of articles over several years) were not policed by our companies and were often published.

Nevertheless, these second-rate articles were added to our sites and people read them. The articles were not all poorly done, but most were done with a complete lack of passion.

I did the same thing with videos. I even started a video production department to have these videos made and hired people to discuss a variety of job search strategies and news about finding jobs. At one point, I had a department of around 16 people doing nothing but making these short videos.

For numerous years, these short pieces of content got traffic from search engines. If someone was searching for an article about “How to Get a Job in Eugene, Oklahoma!” I might have had an article or video about it that rose to the top of the search engines.

Not too long ago, however, I decided to review all of the traffic to the various websites where these articles were, and I found something interesting: The majority of the readers were coming to the very long articles and videos I was making. In some cases, over 100,000 people may have read a 3,500-word article I wrote about [how to dress for interviews](#). In contrast, most

of the articles that were short and pithy might have been read by a few hundred people. The odds are these lousy, short articles did not help many people.

I then undertook a study of all of the articles on all of our sites and found the same thing to be true over and over again, and it applied not just to me—but others in our companies who were passionate about something. For example, [one long article my wife wrote about leaving the practice of law to become a legal recruiter](#) was read by a massive amount of people. The same thing went for all of the articles where people had put their heart and soul into something and not just gone about it in a mechanical fashion. People want to hear from and read information from people who are passionate about the subject.

Standing in the shower this morning, what hit me was this: I had likely wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars (if not millions of dollars) over the past decade on content and writers without passion for something. If you do not have passion and interest in something, no one really cares what you think, or what your opinion is.

It is like this with careers, relationships and just about everything you do: If you do not have passion for it and are making a second-rate effort, you are probably wasting your time. The real results are achieved by people who have passion for something – it could be an idea, a cause, a type of work, or something else. If you have that passion you need to listen to it. Doing so will not only make you more successful; it will make you happier in all areas of your life.

Passion for a subject matter and what you do is by far the most important thing. If you are passionate about what you do, then people will pay attention to you.

Because I have been doing what I do for a very long time, I have noticed that the types of people who criticize you for being passionate about something are generally the kinds of people who lack passion themselves for anything (or have to keep it under control).

- They may be stuck in a job that does not allow them to express themselves or have passion for their subject matter.
- They may be extremely depressed and lack passion.
- They may be in a small town or community where conformity is aggressively enforced among people, and they are afraid to stick out.
- They may be in a country where conformity is expected.
- They may have been told they need to do everything they can to fit in and accept what is given to them.
- Their parents may expect them to behave a certain way.

If someone is in a job they do not enjoy, that is boring, repetitive and they are working around a bunch of uptight (or otherwise uninteresting) people, and they see people who are extremely passionate about something, this may not necessarily make them happy. In general, these people will not understand a very passionate person and may subject them to some sort of criticism, treat them as outsiders, or otherwise attack them.

When I was practicing law, I was with the Los Angeles office of a New York law firm. One day, a partner walked into my office and asked me out to lunch. He then took a look at my shoes. They were a nice, \$200 pair of shoes and were only a few months old.

“Get those shined first,” he said. “There is a guy downstairs.”

I got my shoes shined. Afterward, I began getting my shoes shined once a week. I also noticed that most of the other young attorneys in the office got their shoes shined often. Despite the fact that few of us were ever seeing clients, or had any reason in particular to have shoes you could practically see your reflection in, people did this.

Getting your shoes shined so they look really good is certainly not a bad thing. In fact, I maintain this habit to this day with my work shoes and get them shined after wearing them only a few times.

What I saw, though, was that the people inside of the law firm were using little things like this to engender a sort of formality among the staff and attorneys. Anything that smacked of a lack of conformity to dress, mannerisms and other similar details was immediately shut down and frowned upon by the “higher ups”.

What this did was make everything more serious, more in tune with formal details and it was almost a cultural thing. The firm was trying to make everyone quite similar—a product. The problem with this product in my eyes was that the product was someone who was not allowed to be too passionate about anything.

One guy, who did not last too long in the law firm, brought a large cappuccino machine into his office because he wanted access to cappuccinos all day. Prior to this, he was seemingly a well-liked guy who had no problems with anyone in the firm. The machine sitting on his desk, however, was a sign that he was different. After he plugged it in, everyone started going by his office and inspecting the machine and making remarks like “Oh my God!” I think they knew what was coming. Even partners in the firm came by and looked at it. They, of course, would never do something like that.

During the few weeks he had the machine in his office, I noticed that he started to get a lot of criticism for his work. Partners started to go into his office and close the door (which meant he was going to get some criticism). After a few weeks, the machine was gone. A few months later, the attorney was gone.

“Why did you get rid of the cappuccino machine?” I asked him.

“Because a partner I was working with told me it made him look bad.”

While I certainly see nothing wrong with a cappuccino machine in an office, it was a sign of the level of conformity that this law firm expected of its members and the employees there. This conformity meant that any expression of originality—and even passion—was sharply disapproved of and expelled like a virus. Lots of groups are like this. In fact, most are.

It was like this with the work product we did in the law firm as well. No risks were taken. No law review articles were ever written, few speeches were ever made and no one did much to attract any attention. This was kept in check. Keep your head low, work hard and do not attract attention.

Artists are an interesting group because they rely on this passion to succeed and get ahead. Typically, artists do not do well in small communities, corporate environments and religious groups because their originality and self-expression is met with sharp disapproval.

I grew up in a conservative, relatively small community in the Midwest. I remember there was a kid in my elementary school that did not like sports and was interested in art. He was labeled a “fag” and kids would not play with him—just because he had a passion for something else. If he had been a writer, or a science aficionado, he would have been called a “nerd” and similarly excluded.

Los Angeles is a very interesting place. There are areas around here where you are likely to find many different types of people – some with passion and others who are under the impression they need to keep that passion completely in check. It is like this all over the world.

For example, one area, Pasadena, California, is an older area of Los Angeles that is set up almost like an East Coast town. The residents dress conservatively, are conservative in their values, and conformity is largely expected from the people that are there. They conform, for the most part, because this is where they find comfort.

In contrast, in an area like Venice, people walk around without shirts, many have multiple tattoos, and there are marijuana dispensaries everywhere. One community encourages individuality, and the other does what it can to keep passion in check.

There is a huge tension in society that exists between discouraging passion and allowing this passion. The presumption lies in favor of keeping this passion in check and being around others whose lives and beliefs are similar. There are far more areas like Pasadena around Los Angeles and the country than areas like Venice. In fact, there are very few areas like Venice out there.

This is what you are up against. You live in a world full of people that want to keep your passion in check. The second you are passionate about something, you become different. The second you become different, the more people will try and get you to conform. If you do not conform, you will be made to feel bad about being different. Your only solution is to ignore this pressure or move to a location where people will allow you to be yourself.

Being passionate is not related to just art. You could be passionate about anything.

If you have something inside you that is calling you, you need to listen to it and do it. While it may not seem like it, the only result of surrounding yourself in a work, social, religious, or political environment that does not respect your passion is complete unhappiness and a life where there is almost a complete lack of fulfillment.

The worst thing you can do is allow yourself to be held back in any way by people who do not respect your nature. You need to find your nature and do what makes you happiest.

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