

## 21 Pieces of Career Advice No One Ever Gives You

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

### 1. Your Attitude Is Just as Important as the Quality of Your Work

In most organizations, there are various people who have a negative impression of the organization or, for whatever reason, do not like the management. There are also people who may have no problem with the organization but who, for whatever reason, get angry when they are being assigned additional tasks, or do not act enthusiastic and have a bad attitude.

Most healthy organizations will generally not advance these people and, in many cases, try and force them out the door. The saying “one bad apple can spoil the bunch” is certainly true. If you have a bad attitude, the organization generally does not want you around.

Several years ago, there was a large law firm in Silicon Valley that suddenly lost almost all of its corporate/transactional-related work. They had over 100 corporate attorneys who were sitting around doing nothing, complaining about the lack of work and, in general, being quite negative. This law firm did the most interesting thing. It took all of these attorneys and moved them to a separate building because they were dragging the morale of all of the other attorneys in the law firm down. They did not want these negative attorneys around their other attorneys.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [A Message to Garcia and Your Career](#)
- [Are You a Critic?](#)
- [Sick Crows, Your Attitude and Being on the Winning Team](#)
- [See Your Job and the World from the Bright Side and Not the Dark Side](#)

### 2. If You Spend Time with Negative People, Your Organization Will Assume That You Too Have a Negative Attitude and It Will Hurt You

When I was in high school, one of my best friends was suspended for a semester. He had upset a teacher in the school greatly by his actions. For reasons that are unclear to me to this day, this same teacher sought me out and told me he really wanted to write my college recommendations for me. I agreed, thinking he had good intentions. He wrote me the worst possible recommendation he could. He also did the same thing to another one of my friends.

There was a bit of scandal because a few of the schools that I applied to ending up contacting my high school and asking why this teacher had written such remarks. I was called into a meeting where the teacher apologized to me and stated that he had been angry with my friend, and assumed that I was also a troublemaker. My school ended up fixing the situation. They had several teachers write glowing recommendations to the schools in which they pointed out why the one teacher had written such negative remarks.

You will not always get this lucky in your career. In most cases, if you spend time with negative people, your organization will also assume you are negative. Employers know the people who are gossiping and creating problems. They assume that if you are associating with these people, that you too must be negative.

In addition, surrounding yourself with positive people has huge benefits. You are generally going to be happier, do better in your job and enjoy yourself more when you are around positive people.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Surround Yourself With Positive People](#)
- [Plant Yourself in Good Soil](#)
- [Appreciate Those Around You](#)
- [Self-Image](#)
- [The People You Work and Associate with Can Either Make or Break You](#)

### 3. Getting Promoted and Moving Up Often Depends on Doing Unassigned Work

Many people are under the impression that if they come to work every day and do their job, they will get promoted and do well. While it is important that you are consistent in your job, you also always need to do more than is asked of you. When you do each assignment, you should do it as well as you possibly can. The more value you add and the more you help, the better off you will end up.

I run a legal recruiting firm. As part of my job running this firm, I have recruiters write various articles every few months. The point of these articles is for the recruiters to share what they know with the outside world (attorneys) so that they can help them find the jobs they like. In the history of doing this, I have always noticed something: *The people who put the most effort and time into this writing are the ones who also experience the most success (i.e., placements) as recruiters.* The recruiters who do the best are the ones who write articles when they are not even asked.

What I think is going on is that the people who put the most effort and are willing to take the most initiative do this in all aspects of their work. The extra effort they put in makes them stand out and be more effective.

In most companies, there are always additional products and work that can be done. Choosing these projects selectively (and doing them) is something that can make a gigantic difference in your career. Taking on extra work shows your superiors and others in the company that you care and can be trusted.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Why You Should Work Weekends and Holidays](#)
- [Try as Hard as You Can](#)
- [Consistency is More Important Than Brilliance](#)
- [Production Assistants and Assessing Your Employer's Needs](#)
- [Carpenters, Fancy French Restaurants, Backstage, and Your Career](#)

#### **4. The People Who Leave Your Company Are an Important Network**

Many people think that once someone leaves their company there is no need to stay in touch with the person. This could not be further from the truth. The people who leave your company will often be going to similar companies, with similar jobs to your own. If things change inside your existing company, or you find yourself looking for a job at a later time, these people will often be able to help you. Staying in touch with people who have left your company is something that can provide you with numerous opportunities throughout your career.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Finding Jobs Through Contacts](#)
- [You Need Connections to Make the Most of Your Career](#)
- [Meg Whitman's Greatest Achievement, Networks and Your Career](#)
- [Informal Networks and Referrals](#)

#### **5. Never Act Entitled**

One of the biggest problems that people experience in the workforce is having a sense of entitlement that an employer should be happy to have them, that their job will always be there tomorrow and that they should always get raises, larger offices, and promotions.

This is an incredibly dangerous attitude and something that I have seen crater the careers of numerous people, especially younger people in the workforce.

In general, people who act entitled end up being looked down upon by superiors and have lots and lots of problems in the workplace. Before certain rewards come, you need to work hard and prove yourself. If you do not put in the time, you will not get the respect of colleagues and others and rewards will be difficult to come by.

Titles, offices, and raises generally come (and are earned) with time. Your job in any organization should be focused on the needs of the employer and the employer's clients. It is not about you. You are hired and in the position you are to serve others. The better and more effectively you serve others, the better off you will be. The people who are respected the most (and do the best) are the people who come to work ready to do the job.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Do Not Be Controlled By Your Need to Feel Significant](#)
- [Narcissistic Entitlement Syndrome](#)
- [You Will Succeed in Your Job Search and Life When You Are Concerned with Giving and Not Taking](#)

#### **6. Never Act Too Stressed at Work**

If you act extremely stressed by your job at work, tell everyone how hard you work and make a big deal out of this, it will not help you. Instead of thinking how hard you work, your superiors will think that you have reached the limit of how much responsibility you can handle, and this will hurt you.

When I was working in large law firms, I sometimes worked over 100 hours straight without sleep. I would work through the night. The next morning, I would take phone calls and go into meetings as if nothing had happened. I was by no means the only attorney who did this. When you work really long hours, or are under a lot of stress, you are expected to keep your cool. If you are complaining and making a big deal out of it, people simply will avoid giving you important assignments in the future.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [The Importance of Disconnecting from Your Work](#)
- [The Benefits of Being Unemployed and Doing Nothing](#)
- [How to Manage Crisis](#)

## 7. Always Try and Accept Invitations to Spend Time Outside of Work with Colleagues

While it is never a good idea to let coworkers into your personal life too much, it is important that you make a habit of accepting invitations to spend time outside of work with colleagues.

While no one may necessarily tell you this directly, people generally want to work with people that they like and feel connected to. It is very important to be as connected with others at work as you can. If people feel an affinity to you, they are likely to want to help you, give you the best assignments and promote you. At most employers, some sort of favoritism is operating, and it is important that you be on the right side of this.

### See the following articles to read more about this topic:

- [Why You Should Never Miss a Company Holiday Party or Invitation to Your Boss's Home](#)
- [You Need to Be Connected with Others at Work](#)
- [Relationships, Commodities and Making Connections](#)
- [Take Small Actions and Meet Others](#)

## 8. You Should Put Away Your Cell Phone in the Office

Many people spend incredible amounts of time messing around with their cell phones in meetings and at the office. In fact, in many companies, there are people who appear to spend more time on their cell phones and playing with their phones than working.

Years ago, I knew a guy who owned a telephone answering service. I expected him to tell me that the service got busier when the economy was good instead of when it was bad. At the time, we were in the middle of a recession, and I asked him how his business was doing.

"My business actually increases during recessions because bosses see their receptionists playing with their cell phones all day, and it is the first place they see they can save money. They let their secretaries go and use my service to answer their phones instead."

When you are there to work, you are there to work. People who appear focused and on top of their jobs are the first ones to get promoted and the last to be let go. When you are playing with your cell phone in the office, it sends the message to your employer that something else besides work is important to you.

### See the following articles to read more about this topic:

- [Why Aren't There More American Day Laborers, Doctors, Engineers and Textile Workers](#)
- [The Importance of Productivity, Focus and Measurement](#)
- [Add Value at Every Turn](#)
- [Parking Benefits and Falling in Love with Your Job](#)
- [Play Each Day Like It Is Your Most Important](#)

## 9. Your Employer May Be Monitoring Your Computer and Phones

While I wish people had better things to do with their time, many employers monitor the computers of their employees. In the recruiting world, I have actually seen people fired for personal things they may have said on the phone and emails they may have sent from their work computers.

In addition, many IT people inside of companies amuse themselves by learning everyone's secrets by reading their emails on an ongoing basis. I was out to dinner once with an IT person, and he asked my advice about whether it would be illegal to blackmail his former boss about having an affair that he had learned about by reading his boss's emails.

Years ago, I was working with a group of partners at a major law firm who were interested in switching firms. The firm they were at learned they were considering leaving because they had installed screen recording software on their computers. Despite the fact the partners were communicating with one another using their personal email addresses, the law firm was recording their screens and was able to read everything.

While it may be tempting to communicate with others from your work computer, or phone, this is never a good idea.

## 10. Always Help Others Even If There Is Not a Direct Benefit to You

I have never understood why so many people go into jobs with the idea that they are in competition with everyone around them. They withhold information, do not tell people when they are doing something wrong and play a variety of games. It takes very little effort to give referrals, answer questions and assist others.

When you help others and get a reputation for doing so, you will also become well-liked by the people you are working with. Being well-liked and getting a reputation for helping others will pay unexpected dividends in your career.

In addition, if someone at work needs help, it means your employer needs help. Helping others is simply part of your job and something you should always do.

### See the following articles to read more about this topic:

- [Self Help Means Helping Others](#)
- [Share What You Know](#)
- [Being Nice Makes Good Business Sense](#)
- [The Importance of Being Well-Liked in Your Job](#)
- [Get Security By Concentrating on the Needs of Your Employer](#)

## 11. Try and Concentrate on Doing the Work You Enjoy and Are Best at and Avoid Things You Do Not Do Well At

Most people have certain skills they are better at than others. It is important that you are always doing the things you are best at and avoiding the things you are not. Some people are good at management. Others are good at following directions. Some people are good with clients. Others are not. Regardless of your skill set, you are generally going to do better throughout your career when you focus on doing the tasks (and work) that you are most skilled at and get the most positive reinforcement from.

One of the examples I like to give to people when discussing this is to imagine if someone like Mike Tyson decided he wanted to be a neurosurgeon. While I do not know everything there is to know about Mike Tyson's intelligence, I think this would probably be a real uphill battle for him. Tyson is skilled as a boxer. He is far more likely to experience fame, admiration and financial success through being a boxer than anything else.

You need to do the work you are good at and have the most talent at. If you cannot do the work you are best at with your current employer, it may make sense to switch jobs. You are only going to advance (generally) when you are able to do the work that you are most talented and best at.

### See the following articles to read more about this topic:

- [Try to Only Work in the Best Target Audiences for Your Skills](#)
- [Love What You Do](#)
- [Love People Who Give You Work and Your Work](#)
- [You Need to Enjoy What You Are Doing](#)

## 12. It Is Important to Look and Act Healthy and Take Care of Yourself

Very few people will tell you this, but how you look at work (your weight, health and dress) will have a direct impact on your success at work. It sounds a bit cruel, and it sort of is, but it is true. For the most part, the most successful people are also the fittest. They take care of their bodies and look the best they can.

I am sometimes invited to CEO roundtables and other events. When I go to these events, I am always quite amazed that most of these men are very fit, slim and healthy-looking. I believe that the fitness of people is something that is used to judge who should advance up various ladders and who should not.

I spend my days looking at resumes. I often see resumes of attorneys that do not make a lot of sense. Someone may have gone to a less-than-stellar law school and not done that well there. Yet, they have had a succession of jobs at the very top law firms in the country. I would estimate that 95% of the time when I view these resumes, the person turns out to be extremely attractive, and someone who has made a real effort to take care of themselves and keep themselves up.

No one is going to tell you that being overweight and not taking care of yourself is going to hold you back, but it will. You need to take the best care of yourself as you can. Almost all of the most successful people do.

### See the following articles to read more about this topic:

- [Supermodels, Your Body and Your Mind](#)
- [Weight Loss, Security Guards, Hard Work and Your Career](#)
- [Use Existing Resources](#)

## 13. Your Career with a Given Employer May Depend on Having a Good Mentor There

In many organizations, you may have a very difficult time ever advancing unless you have a strong mentor. Mentors serve multiple purposes. They will lobby on your behalf, they will point you in the right direction, prevent you from going the wrong direction and can assist you in many other useful ways.

When you watch and observe the environment you are working in, you may discover that advancement is extremely difficult without a mentor. If you are in an environment where you cannot find a mentor, it often makes sense to leave.

When I was practicing law, I saw numerous attorneys who were advanced and made partner by law firms with the assistance of a good mentor. Similarly, I saw many other attorneys who were severely held back by not having good mentors. You should do everything you can to find a strong mentor.

### See the following articles to read more about this topic:

- [The Importance of and How to Find a Mentor](#)
- [Mentors, Attachment Disorders and Your Career](#)

## 14. If You Behave Poorly Outside of Work, Your Superiors Will Generally Learn About It

Many people think that they can behave poorly outside of work and it will not affect their jobs. This could not be further from the truth. Your personal behavior outside of work, if it is offensive enough, will generally get back to your employer and affect you at work.

I have seen many people lose jobs because of their behavior outside of the office. In some cases, this behavior was not even that bad but ended up upsetting the wrong people when they learned about it. You are a representative of your employer both when at work and when you are not at work. If you behave in a way that reflects poorly on your employer outside of the

office, it can affect your job negatively.

**See the following article to read more about this topic:**

- [Protect Your Reputation at All Costs](#)

### **15. Ask Your Superiors What They Think You Need to Improve at and Perfect It**

Most people are not great at every aspect of their jobs. You likely have some weaknesses. There is nothing wrong with having weaknesses. Everyone has them. If you have certain weaknesses, the smartest thing you can do is fix them.

When you address your weaknesses, you show your employer that you are interested in improving and taking your job seriously. Employers want people who are interested in improving and take their work extremely seriously.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Never Stop Growing](#)
- [Making Others Aware of Your Weaknesses Can Make You More Trusted](#)
- [Practice Makes Perfect](#)

### **16. If You Are Not Engaged in Your Job, You Should Find a New One**

You need to enjoy your work and what you are doing. If you do not enjoy your job, the odds are that you are also not performing well. If you do not enjoy it, find a new job doing something you really like.

While many people do their best at work even if they do not enjoy their jobs, you are rarely going to get ahead or have any sort of success doing work you do not like or enjoy. People have successful careers doing all sorts of things that no one would ever expect. You are going to be far better off doing something you really, truly enjoy rather than working at a job you are not happy doing.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [You Need to Enjoy What You Are Doing](#)
- [Never Abandon Work You Are Exceptional At](#)
- [8 Reasons You Are Not Motivated and Why You Need to Stay Motivated No Matter What](#)

### **17. If Your Company Looks Like It Is Going Downhill and Cannot Be Stopped, You Should Find a New Job**

There are certain companies and organizations that are simply in trouble. They could be in an aging industry, have bad management, or simply be going out of business for one reason or another. There are other companies that are growing and moving forward.

One of the most important things you can do to protect your career is to invest your time and effort with employers who are growing (and not retreating). There are generally more opportunities (and job security) with employers who are growing than those that are shrinking.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Choose an Employer Marching Forward](#)
- [Plant Yourself in Good Soil](#)
- [Avoid Sophisticated and Saturated Markets](#)

### **18. You Are Not a Fit for the Culture**

You should always try and work in an environment where you fit in. If you do not fit in, you may find yourself denied promotions, advancement and held back. Conversely, when you do fit in, you could be advanced up the chain quite effortlessly.

It is extremely important that you go to work inside of organizations where you fit in. If you do not feel like you fit in with your employer, you should find an employer where you do.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Organization Culture Matters Most](#)
- [The Importance of Fitting In](#)

### **19. You Need to Always Be Improving**

You can literally do whatever you want in your life and become the person you want to be if you never stop improving. The idea of constant improvement, of always getting better and better at what you do, is something that can change your life.

There are countless people out there who are very successful, yet they have refused to stop where they are. They continue

to learn and improve and grow. You need to get better and better at what you do. If you have lost a job, make sure your next job is an even better one. You own your future. The past has already happened, but you can make the future whatever you want it to be. Who are you going to be? What are you going to achieve?

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Never Stop Improving: The Secret to Career and Life Success](#)
- [The Dangers of Complacency](#)

## 20. Face Time Is Very Important

While most employers will not tell you this, face time is very important. When you are hired to work somewhere, you are being hired to be part of a group that works together. Your presence is important to the employer, regardless of whether they say so. When you are in the office, you are available for questions, collaborating with others and working within a team.

Many employers will also assume you might be “goofing off” or not being focused if they do not see you in the office. In most jobs, if you want to get ahead, you are generally going to be better off spending much more time in the office than the people you are working for.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Are You Here? The Importance of Being Present in Your Job and Job Search](#)
- [Be Committed to What You Do](#)
- [Show Up on Time](#)
- [Consistency Is More Important Than Brilliance](#)

## 21. You Are a Product

Very few people realize that they are “products” that are bought, sold and used by employers. Because you are a product, you should always realize that you need to be the best possible product in the market. You are expendable and can (generally) be replaced. I have seen many companies let hoards of people go because they wanted to replace them with better people.

You should always be aware that you can be replaced and do your absolute best to stay on top of your jobs. You should never get complacent because if you do, your employer may choose to replace you.

**See the following articles to read more about this topic:**

- [Your Job Search Is a Marketing Operation and You Are the Product](#)
- [You Need to Be Relevant to Your Employer](#)
- [Treating Your Career Like a Small Business](#)