

Change Your Identity and Change Your Life

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Once people decide someone is a certain type of person, it is generally very difficult to change peoples' minds. We make up our mind that someone is:

- Not smart
- Smart
- Unsophisticated
- Low class
- High class
- Interesting
- Boring

... and so forth and then, going forward, it becomes very difficult to change opinions that the person is anything other than what we have judged them as being. It is very difficult for people to change their opinions about others and changing opinions, if they ever change, is something that generally takes a lot of time.

People also do the same thing with themselves. They reach conclusions about themselves that they are:

- Boring
- Depressed
- Fat
- Ugly
- Unsuccessful
- Unmotivated

...and then go forward living their lives with these identities. One of the hardest things for people to do is change their identities and the people they believe they are. Most of us defined ourselves long, long ago and now continue to define ourselves based on this long ago impression.

Have you ever noticed that when you meet someone new, they will generally tell you about something in their past that is positive such as the college they attended, that they were a great high school athlete, that they grew up very wealthy, that they used to be a model, that one of their relatives was famous and so forth? People do this because it gives them a positive identity, and it is how they define themselves. Our identities and how we define ourselves is extremely important.

We all define ourselves in some way, and the worst thing we can do is define ourselves negatively. These negative definitions of ourselves are harmful, hurtful and hold us back. I watch a lot of movies and read a lot of books. Something I have noticed in almost all movies and books is that people are always fighting against past mistakes or negative stuff that has been said about them. How many "flashbacks" can you recall from movies where an adult is having a flashback about something negative that someone once said to the person. In all of these instances, the audience generally learns that it is this "past definition" of the person that is controlling his or her life.

One of the more interesting things I have observed in my life—because it is so rare—is when a very overweight person decides they are no longer going to be overweight and goes on a diet and loses (and keeps off) a bunch of weight. When people do this, they end up looking different—and better. They often become happier, more energetic and a completely different person.

On the few occasions in my life that I have known people who were once fat but went on diets, the change was stunning because I often did not recognize them after this weight loss. From a psychological standpoint, it was even a little difficult to process. There was a person I had judged and felt was one way for the longest time who suddenly became someone completely different. It was a complete reversal of the person physically and not what I expected. What this showed me was that we often judge people one way and, once we do, changing our opinion becomes extremely difficult – often almost impossible.

You may say "I am fat" or "I am lazy". Once you decide this, your behavior will often be consistent with this identity—even if this identity is negative. One of our strongest needs is to make sure that our behavior is consistent with our identity—even if our identity is negative.

In business and in the legal arena, I have encountered many bad people: People who have spent time in prison, been in major trouble with the government, or been sued for doing very bad things. I was raised to believe that people should be forgiven and can become better people. I want to believe people are good. When you meet bad people, they often say things like "people say I am dishonest" or "people say I cheated" and so forth. Statements like this often show how these people define themselves (based on how others have defined them).

When I meet these people, I often assume the best and that they have been reformed and are now good people. However, in general I have found—not always (but almost always)—that peoples' nature is pretty constant. If I meet a bad person and let them into my world, their nature of being bad generally comes out. They will cheat me, do bad things and generally create various problems if given the chance. What makes this so remarkable is that these people often do bad things when there is no cognizable reason to do so – no financial gain, for example. They just want to do bad things because it is in their nature. It seems that there is a part of these people that believes they must harm others or do bad things in order to be consistent with

their nature.

Like being a bad person who commits crimes and harms others, people's issues with stopping smoking, losing weight, starting to exercise, quitting drugs and so forth are generally short term. The reason for this is because their identity is tied up in being a certain type of person. If you believe you are a fat and lazy person, when you start trying to lose weight and exercise you will be fighting the person you are the entire time. In order to really change, you need a new identity.

Part of the power of religion is its ability to shape people's identity. When someone is baptized, for example, the idea is that they symbolically are becoming a completely new person. This identity and what many go along with it (the various rules of a religion) is then reinforced by the people the convert to the religion fraternizes with. Most religions, gangs, and social groups involve giving people a new identity.

You can change your identity as fat, dishonest, lazy, or stupid when you no longer see yourself as that sort of person. You need to change your identity, however. If we believe we are one sort of person, the most difficult thing to do is to act inconsistently with this identity.

I recently read about a man who has run 8 miles a day for almost 40 years, Robert Kraft. In 1975 he made a New Year's resolution to run 8 miles a day, and now he has booked 115,000+ miles.

Through hurricanes and hailstorms, sickness and injuries, Kraft has become a South Beach legend, and a tourist draw. Early on, his friends dubbed him "Raven" because of his black clothes and late-night country songwriting he does when he's not running. The name stuck.

Now almost 40 years in, Raven has a following of more than 2,000 runners from around the world, all who have completed the eight miles with him at least once. When a runner finishes, Raven officially assigns them a nickname. Gringo, Taxman and Dizzy are the all-time leaders, each having finished more than 1,600 runs.

But nobody will come close to Raven. According to the U.S. Running Streak Association, he is No. 8 on the all-time streak list, for running for 39.4 years. When it comes to daily distance though, he ranks first. No runner is on record having run this many consecutive daily miles for this many years.

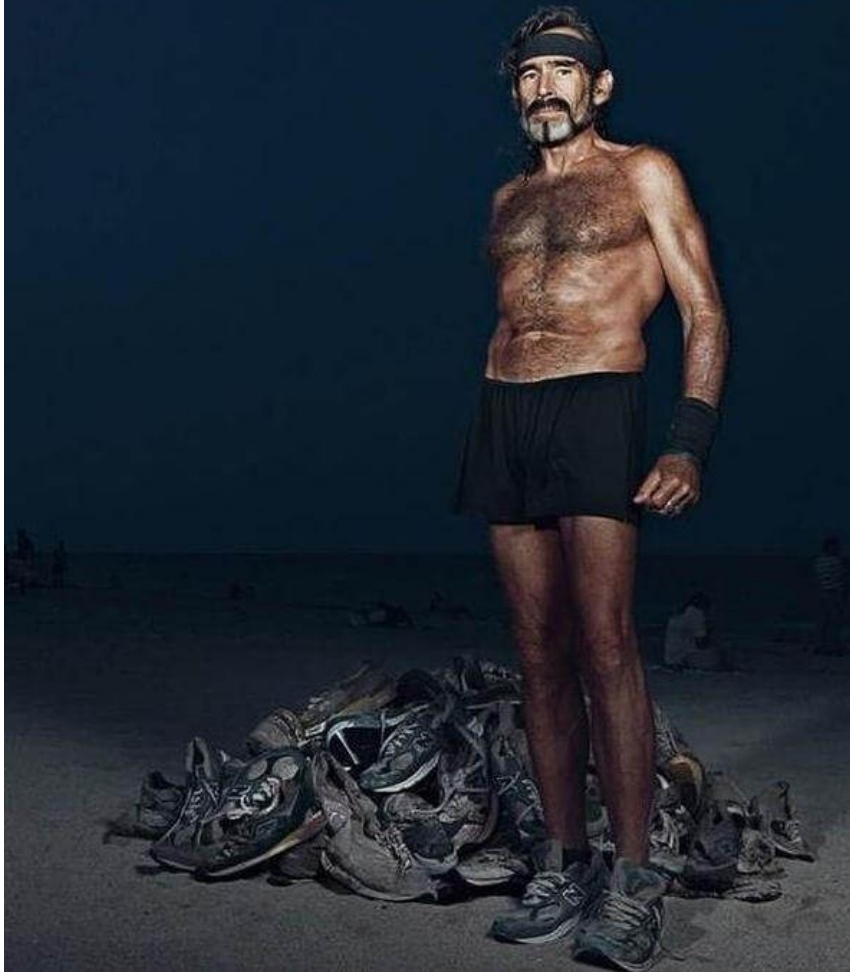
"Three doctors told me to quit 20 years ago," he laughs. "So much for them. I don't know if they're still alive."

He's more reliable than the Post Office and people on South Beach know it. A lifeguard, a group of windsurfers, a random beachgoer—all say hello to Raven as he runs by. They love him here.

"I realized I have this gift of stubbornness and determination and dedication and discipline I could share with people," he says around four miles into his run.

[This man has run eight miles everyday for nearly 40 years](#), Fox News





What is so interesting about Kraft is that he simply made a decision to change his identity and, in an instant, became someone completely different –a completely different person. His obsession with running 8 miles a day probably has a lot to do with the fact that he defines himself as someone who never misses a day. This identity, however, is part of his strength as a person.

You too can change your identity in an instant. If you see yourself as a different kind of person, you can become that person simply with a decision. If you want to be a superstar worker, more fit, less fat, more interesting – anything is possible once you change how you see yourself.

Most of us are more comfortable being consistent than changing. We call people who are consistent trustworthy. If someone is inconsistent, in contrast, we call them “flaky” and may not trust them. We get comfortable living and behaving a certain way. If we continue to live and act a certain way, we keep the same friends, job and our life remains safe. If we change, we get out of our comfort zone and become someone different. This is dangerous and very hard for many people. It is safer for us to behave consistently with our identity.

In high school, you rarely see “stoners” and “nerds” suddenly going out for the football or basketball team. Conversely, you rarely see the “jocks” suddenly becoming nerds and quitting sports – although this change might do each of them good. People get an identity, and they stick with it because changing is too hard. If a “stoner” suddenly became an athlete, the odds are pretty good that the stoner would lose their stoner friends and be in a situation where they had to make new friends. For people with a given identity, this sort of thing could be terrifying, and they might simply decide to remain the person they are known for rather than change.

This is what we do as well: We judge who we are by our own behaviors, the people we associate with and our professions, and then behave consistently with this identity (even if it is a negative identity).

The hardest thing for anyone to do is to change their identity and become a different and better person.

Who are you really? The definition you have of yourself is creating boundaries that either expand and help you, or limit you:

- Are you a go-getter?
- Are you someone who runs 8 miles a day?
- Are you a leader?
- Are you a good person?
- Are you a bad person?
- Are you your past?
- Are you your future?

Your identity is a definition that you give yourself that will determine how you interact with the world and the quality of your life. How you define yourself will determine everything –and is incredibly important. The elements you use to define yourself determine who you are.

See: [The Power of the Positive](#)

Part of how you define yourself is also based on what you are not. There are certain things I would never do. I would never kill a baby, for example. This is part of my identity and how I see myself. You too probably share the same belief. In order to change and become a new and more effective person, you need to adopt whatever change you are seeking into your identity the same way. If you see yourself as a certain type of person, this identity will define you, and you will shape your behavior

around it as well.

If you define yourself based on what you are not, in a negative way, that is not good either. For example, many people define themselves as:

- Not successful
- Not attractive
- Not fit
- Not intelligent
- Not motivated
- Not interesting

Defining yourself as “not something” desirable is not helpful for you and will not help you. When you define yourself, you should do so in a way that empowers you and does not drag you down.

To achieve what you really want to achieve, you need to ask yourself: “What sort of person would I need to become?” To become that person, you need to create a new identity and define yourself as someone who would achieve what you want to achieve. You need to believe that you are that person.

- If you were the person you wanted to be, how would you think about yourself and life? You need to act this way to become that person.
- How would you act, think and behave if you were already living your dream and living the life of the person you want to be? You need to get a clear vision of the person you want to be and become that person.

If you start thinking and behaving like the person you want to be, then everything will begin to show up in your life. You need to get a clear vision of the person you want to be, and you will become that person. You need to know who you are regardless of what is happening in your life: Your character needs to remain constant. As long as you know who you are, your outside world will begin to change to match the person you want to be.

You also need to be careful about how you see others around you. If you start judging others negatively, they will pick up on this and judge you. Also, when you see others in a negative light, you often reflect this same belief back on yourself. The best thing you can possibly do for yourself and others is to see people as being more than they even see themselves. When you do this, you will also see yourself in a similar way, and this will help you a great deal.

See: [Appreciate Those Around You](#)

You can easily make your vision of yourself more real when you start to do the things the person you want to be would do. Your life is defined by your beliefs and convictions about who you are. You can always change your behavior, but never your perception of who you are. The first step to making a meaningful change is to become aware of your unconscious beliefs about who you are and change them. You need to be able to believe and think positively about yourself and your capabilities and not be held back by negativity. Negative beliefs about yourself will harm you.

See the following articles for more information:

- [The Pygmalion Effect and Setting Incredible Expectations for Your Career and Life](#)
- [Be Around those With High Expectations of You](#)
- [People Around You Can Shape What Happens to You: Avoid the Negative Affirmations of Others](#)

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