



Winning in Your Job Search and Life Means Going Forward No Matter What Criticism You Think You May Receive

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Every day when I sit down to work in the morning and turn on my computer, I receive several emails and comments about the companies I run and about me personally.

- Some people write to tell me I'm the stupidest person they've ever encountered.
- Other people say something very positive and tell me how something I've done has benefited them and thank me for this.
- Some people write to tell me they hate a company I run.
- Some people write and enclose pictures of their families and tell me I have changed their lives through something one of my companies has done.
- Some people post a comment on one of our websites saying they love a company I run.
- Some people write me psychotic emails that insult me and my family.
- Other people write emails telling me the advice I've given them helped their families.

In addition to stuff that appears on my desk, the same thing happens out in the world. People go onto forums and talk about how much they love me and my companies while others do the opposite.

You can't please everyone.

Most of us are hungry for praise but detest and fear criticism. If you attempt to go out in the world and do anything productive; however, you're going to be hated and you're going to be criticized. In many respects, I feel that the biggest achievers in our world are the people who aren't afraid to act and aren't afraid of criticism. Acting and going forward in the face of "criticism" and despite the "fear of criticism" is something that separates the winners and the losers of the world. You need to act and do things you know are right for you, your family, and the world regardless of whether or not you believe you may be criticized. If you're never criticized, you aren't being noticed, and the price for not being noticed is most often much greater than the price of being noticed.

One of the most interesting things in the world is reading about politicians in the newspaper each day. Since I've been reading the newspaper each day for the past few decades, I've noticed that there are numerous patterns with politicians and others who come into elected office. For every group of people that admire a politician, there is always a group of people who hate the politician. The haters write this and that about the politician and hurl one insult after another at them. I can remember several years ago when George Bush, Jr. was first elected to the Presidency. I was working in an office tower in Los Angeles one Sunday afternoon. I opened my window and there was a giant protest of thousands of people going on beneath me in Pershing Square. People were shouting over loud speakers that he was a "Nazi Executioner," a "Failure at Business," a "Racist Hick" a "Coke Head," an "Alcoholic," and all sorts of other terrible things I no longer remember.

How would you feel if thousands of people were shouting things like that about you? It wouldn't make me all that happy. Imagine thousands of people doing this? I can't imagine it's something you would be all that happy about. This is what winners do, though.

Winners proceed in the face of criticism. Winners don't care if they're going to be criticized and, if they are, they go forward anyway. Winners know they can't please everyone.

When you try and please everyone, you're going to fail. If a company tries to run a business that pleases everyone, they fail. In order to experience the success you're entitled to in life, you must choose sides and just do what you think is best. You are going to upset some people and may get criticized, but who cares? You can't please everyone. Action is better than inaction. You need to take action and take sides to go somewhere.

Does it feel bad to be criticized? Yes, if you let it.

Will you be criticized if you take a stand? Maybe, but you can't worry about that.

What I've found in my experience of working with thousands of people [looking for jobs](#) is that most people are frozen due to a fear of "how it will look," and "what others will think," if they do something a certain way. More careers and lives have been destroyed by this attitude than I can count. The fear people have of criticism holds them back and prevents them from living up to their full potential. It probably affects you, too. It affects most people. Those it doesn't affect are the people whose lives you watch on television and read about in the papers. They live differently from most because they know something the rest of us don't.

Several years ago, I worked with an extremely talented partner in a major American [law firm](#). This partner had been working at the same law firm for nearly his entire career and didn't really know how to look for a job. This person had a career that had been characterized by a lot of success and, as far as I knew, no failure. The attorney was extremely dedicated and knew what he was doing in the area of law he practiced. He had a reputation that was considered stellar in all respects among other attorneys and the people he worked with.

I'd seen articles about him in the legal newspapers and he worked with many very famous clients and celebrities and knew them personally. His wife was also a very important socialite around Los Angeles. I had seen her in the papers as well. After I started working with him, I recognized her in pictures in the society section of the *Los Angeles Times*. While it was my job to introduce him to law firms, I remember thinking, "I wonder whom he can introduce me to?"

What was missing, of course, was the fact that this particular attorney needed to [find a job](#). It's one thing to be very powerful and know a lot of very famous people; it's another to need a job. When you need a job, the entire world may feel like it's

clammed up. This isn't fun, and can be brutal. It's one thing to be friends with someone and it's another to go to them and ask them about a job.

In the case of this important attorney, for the past 25+ years he'd been brutally fighting with opposing lawyers and law firms all around Los Angeles and had been someone to be feared. That was his job and he was good at it. Then to go to those same law firms and ask for a job I can imagine made him feel as if he was suddenly telegraphing a sort of weakness he never had. This is something I imagine was going through his mind. I don't know for sure, but I expect it was.

In January of 2000, I quit a job I had with a law firm. While I'd originally given two weeks notice, the law firm told me that I should stay on for the next 12 weeks and at least line up another job if I was unhappy. I'd planned on opening up my own legal practice; however, the law firm encouraged me to speak with [recruiters](#) and others to see if I might be happy working in another law firm. They explained to me that it would be very difficult for me to find a job with another large law firm if I left a large law firm without another large [law firm job](#) lined up. Based on this advice, I started calling recruiters and also friends of mine in other law firms looking for jobs.

I remember how embarrassing it was calling friends in other law firms and explaining I was looking for a job. I explained I'd quit my job and the people I spoke with didn't seem to believe me. I think they thought I was fired. After calling a few friends and going through these motions, I decided that I didn't want to deal with it anymore. One of the strangest experiences I had was a meeting with a Russian man whom I believe was running a Ponzi Scheme and wanted me to work for free for him putting together various investment documents in oil wells he controlled in Russia. He said I would then get paid out of investments he and I solicited from wealthy people in Los Angeles. It's not fun looking for a job, and I didn't enjoy this "job interview," in particular. Relying on friends to some extent to assist me in looking for a job was embarrassing and it allowed all sorts of rumors to start that weren't warranted--or true. At some point, I decided I didn't want to rely on friends to help me look for a job.

There are good people out there who can help you get jobs, and using friends is a great way to look for a job in some circumstances. However, the real mistake I made was even caring what people thought about the fact that I was looking for a job. This is the same mistake that the partner I was working for was making. He was too concerned what people in the community and other lawyers would say if they found out he was looking for a job. He feared the criticism that might come from this information getting out there.

If you are a very highly paid attorney, it's not always the easiest thing to do to find a [highly paid job](#). All of the skills that make you a highly paid attorney don't always translate into getting a job. A highly paid attorney is often feared and some make more enemies than friends. Not all law firms can afford an attorney of that caliber.

After he lost his job, the firm was kind enough to give him around four months to [find a new job](#) before he had to leave the firm. During those four months, I spoke with him every few days. We met for lunch a few times and went over various scenarios. However, in all of our meetings this attorney was somewhat detached. I could imagine that the people who worked for him must have feared him a great deal. He was imposing and someone I could tell was extremely talented intellectually. However, when it came to what he was doing in terms of looking for a job, I could tell that he was absolutely terrified of what other people would say. He didn't know how to look for a job, and I would tell him what he needed to do and he would sort of sit there looking at me not absorbing what I was saying.

If I suggested one law firm for him to apply to, he would tell me it wasn't as prestigious as the one he was currently working at. He was concerned about what people would say if he went to work in a less prestigious firm.

For some reason, he was also embarrassed to be looking for a job. He was worried what people would say if they found out. We met in out-of-the-way places that he'd investigated in advance where the only people who would be able to see us in the restaurant would be the waiters. I think he was embarrassed to be seen with a [legal recruiter](#). He also wanted to ensure no one would overhear anything being said. I certainly always take those precautions; however, the attorney seemed overly paranoid in this instance.

The problem with meeting with this attorney and discussing his [job search](#) was that he never took any action. Two months into his search for a new job, he hadn't even applied to a single law firm yet. I was unclear if anyone even knew he had lost his job--including his own family.

"If you are going to get another job, then you need to apply some places," I eventually told him with a considerable amount of exasperation over lunch one day. "You can't get a job unless you apply somewhere."

Eventually, I was able to arrange two meetings with him at law firms. They were unusual meetings that occurred in dark restaurants if I recall around 8:00 p.m. in the evening. Only after he realized that the law firm would almost certainly hire him after a few hours of dinner and drinks did he agree to meet with the law firm in their offices during the day. Before he met with each law firm, he made sure he knew exactly whom he was meeting with and that he didn't know any of these people. He ended up receiving job offers by both law firms, but he also ended up making about 50% of the salary he'd made at his former firm. If he hadn't been so afraid of what others would say and so afraid of criticism, then he probably could have doubled his salary and gotten 10+ offers at really good firms. He was afraid to put himself out there, however, and was terrified of potential criticism.

The reason this story is so interesting to me is because this was one of the more important attorneys in America, and he was terrified of criticism and people saying bad things about him in terms of the way he looked for a job. He was a tiger and feared in court, and some of the most famous and powerful figures in the world would seek him out for representation, but when it came to his own life and career, he was terrified. The difference between not caring what people think in terms of how you look for a job and caring what people think is something that will give you massively different results:

- I've seen attorneys who led the offices of major law firms be unemployed for years because the way they looked for a job was controlled primarily by their fear of criticism.
- I've seen numerous attorneys leave the practice of law after very good careers because they were afraid of being criticized in the way they look for a job.
- I've witnessed people who went to the best law schools in the United States graduate from these schools and never find a job as attorneys because they didn't know how to look for a job and were afraid of criticism.

I see this sort of thing all the time, and I see it because of the job that I do. My job is to find people jobs, and it's something I take seriously. Every day, when I turn on my computer, I also receive emails from people looking for jobs that have somehow found my personal email address and want me to find them jobs. When I check my voicemail each day, there are

messages from people who have tracked me down (despite the fact I haven't been a recruiter in years) and want me to find them jobs. Although I'm no longer actively a legal recruiter, for years I spoke with all of these people, and I believe that I've enabled myself to really get a good understanding of what it takes for anyone to get a job. I understand this isn't because I'm smarter than anyone else or have any special knowledge or powers: I see this only because I've seen what works and what doesn't work.

I believe that finding a job is among the most important moments in our lives and careers. When everything is going well, we can go about doing our jobs and be happy. When we lose our job, a new set of skills come into the realm. The skill of finding a job is dependent upon not caring what other people say or will say. You need to do whatever you can within your power to find a job, and the more you do and the less you fear criticism, the better job you will get and the more jobs you will get. You need to lead and not follow.

There are few benefits from doing things the way everyone else does and caring what everyone else thinks all the time. One of the more interesting experiences I have is when I drive down the street--any street--anywhere in the United States. Here, you will see countless locally owned businesses that are small and have been sitting in the same location for years, if not decades. It may be a hot dog stand, a local carpet store, or something else. There was a ski store that did this on the corner of the street I grew up on. Across the street from this ski store, was a small hardware store. And a short distance away from this, there was a small bike store and pet store. A few years ago, I was back in my hometown and went into each of these stores after not having stepped foot in them for over 15 years. What I noticed is that all of the people who owned these small businesses were still working hard and had aged considerably, but nothing else had changed.

These businesses are metaphors in my mind for the lives many of us lead. We work, follow the rules, do our best, and nothing ever happens. We stay exactly where we always have been. The reason this occurs is very few people aren't afraid to step out and take a stand and do things in a way that will subject them to potential criticism. Most people are "in hiding" and not really subjecting themselves to everything they are capable of. It's like the partner of a major American law firm meeting for dinner and drinks in a dark restaurant with people who might hire him. He was in hiding. Most of us are in hiding.

If you're doing anything worthwhile that's likely to really set you apart to lead, then it has to be worth criticizing. Most businesses and people are boring, and that's why nothing ever happens to them. People who follow the rules and spend their time wondering what others think rarely achieve very much. The same thing goes for companies.

Most people are terrified of criticism. I hate getting criticized, but try as I might, it comes every day.

- "That is the stupidest blog post I've ever read."
- "People are saying bad things about you."
- "I've spoken with others, as well, and we all agree that we don't like you."
- "You're an idiot for saying that."
- "I feel sorry for your children."

But here is the thing: Despite the criticism, I keep going. I push harder and I do more of what I'm doing. I also get more praise than I do criticism, and the praise keeps coming every day. The more I do what I believe is the best thing, the more praise I receive and also the more criticism.

Most people choose not to be everything they are capable of because they fear criticism. They fail to apply to jobs they know they could do. They fail to call friends who could help them with their job search. They fail to run their businesses in a way that makes people take notice. They fail to dress the way they want to. They fail to marry people who they like and are attracted to. They fail to drive the sort of car they want to drive. They fail to live where they want to live. They fail to do the sorts of things they want to do in their spare time. They fail, and they fail, and they fail to do what they should be doing to live the lives they really want to live. *People limit themselves and their lives because they are more concerned about what other people think than what they think, believe and want to do.*

Most often, just the fear of being criticized is enough to paralyze people. For most people, the criticism doesn't even need to happen for people to be deterred from doing something. People won't do something or be everything they're capable of being due to their fears about what others will say. I admit that when people say bad things about me, it is upsetting. But this doesn't make me upset for very long. I know that people notice something I'm doing. Lots of people like what I do and a few don't. By and large, however, most people in this world are ignored. I would rather be noticed when I am trying to do something positive for the world than to be ignored.

You need to be noticed in order to get a job. You need to be noticed in order to succeed in a job. If your heart and intentions are pure, then you shouldn't fear what others think. If you're criticized, so what? When I'm criticized for something I write, or a business I run, I realize that if I'd done something ordinary that didn't stimulate people to think, there would be no criticism. No one would care. The things we talk about are the ones that are worth talking about.

As you contemplate your life, you need to ask yourself if taking action is worth being criticized. If the side effect of being criticized is that you'll lose a job or an important relationship, then maybe the answer is you shouldn't do whatever you're contemplating. However, if the worst that can happen is you will feel bad about the criticism that may or may not come, then you have to compare that feeling with the incredible benefits you may derive from taking an action that could change your career and life. The rewards for being the best you can be, getting the best possible job, and succeeding are huge. A slight or criticism is something that you will soon forget about. The rewards for conquering your fear of criticism are huge, and the penalty for fearing criticism is huge as well. If you fear criticism and run your life around this, you will have an unremarkable career and life and will never be everything you want to be. How can you run your career, life, and job search in a way others will criticize?

The winners in this world are the ones who act despite what others may say, or do say. The losers are the ones who are paralyzed with fear and afraid to take action because of what others may say.