

## Concentrate on the Process, Not the Results

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Some time ago, I was listening to a seminar about a company that was in the furniture business. This company decided that because it was doing so well, it should expand into the piano business, and also sell pianos. They went out and purchased a Steinway and took the piano apart to study all of the pieces. Then they made the same pieces themselves and built a piano. When they finally had built their own piano and tried to play it, nothing but thuds came out of the instrument. Discouraged, not knowing what they possibly could have done wrong, they decided that they would no longer go into the piano business.

They reassembled the Steinway Piano so they could return it as well. When they reassembled the piano, however, the same thing happened: only a thud came out when they tried to play it.

This is how it is with many people and businesses. We only look at the results, and not the process that goes into creating a particular result. In order to build a piano, you need to have studied instrument-making for some time, and to really understand a lot about the process. You also need to understand and study musical theory. It could take generations for a family to become proficient in making a great piano. There is just so much that goes into it.

This is how it is with everything. You cannot just call yourself a piano company and start making pianos. You cannot just decide that you want to do something and expect immediate success just by trying to copy an outcome. You need to understand the complete process that goes into what you are trying to do.

My first year as a [legal recruiter](#), I generated over \$1,000,000 in fees. This means, essentially, that for the work I did personally, I sent out over \$1,000,000 in bills to [law firms](#) for my services. Since the average bill for [recruiting](#) back then was probably around \$30,000 or so, this means that I made a tremendous number of placements. When you are doing well, it tends to attract more business to you.

Within a few months, I had hired various people to help me with recruiting, and pretty soon the word had gotten around that our team was really good. Soon after that, various local attorneys around Los Angeles started calling me. Several people I know of copied me and went into the business only to fail pretty quickly.

I loved recruiting and I am sure I had some natural skills for it. However, by the time I started recruiting in an office, I had already essentially been doing the job in one capacity or another for almost 15 years. Since a young age, I had run an asphalt business that had required me to sell door-to-door to people, businesses and others. Sales skills were really important in that business. While asphalt and recruiting are very different in many respects, in actuality they have a tremendous number of similarities. Here is the biggest similarity:

*If you emphasize the process over the results in the recruiting and asphalt business, you will succeed.*

One of the biggest mistakes many people make in business is emphasizing results over process, or style over substance. The more people concentrate on the process and substance of their work, the better they do:

- The more people concentrate on their intended results, the worse they do in the long run.
- The most successful job seekers are the ones who have the ability to excel in their work process.
- The most successful companies are the ones who have the ability to excel in their work process.
- The most successful workers and employees are the ones who have the ability to excel in their work process.
- The most successful asphalt contractors are the ones who concentrate on their work process.
- The most successful legal recruiters are the ones who concentrate on their work process.

I am not saying that results do not matter; they do. But what ultimately matters most, and what makes people successful is focusing on the process and how things are done.

A lot of the problems in the American economy have been caused by a massive emphasis on results rather than process. For example, the Wall Street practice of emphasizing quarter-by-quarter profits and gains has been extremely dangerous to our company in numerous respects.

I believe that in business, in your [job search](#), and in everything else--process is the most important thing. It is *how* you do things that matters, and not just the result you hope to attain.

**Process in the Asphalt Sealing Business.** In the asphalt sealing business there is essentially one thing you are doing: *You are putting black stuff on people's asphalt and then leaving.*

This is the result of what happens when you do the work. This is what most contractors and others concentrate on, and it is why most of them fail or eek out poor livings at best.

In the asphalt sealing business, there are a lot of tricks that contractors can do. When you are putting asphalt sealer on a driveway or parking lot, essentially what you are working with is a black coating that fills in cracks and pores and makes the surface look good. More importantly, the coating serves to protect the surface from oil spills and other things. This material is typically purchased from a factory in a raw state, when it is very heavy and thick like molasses. The contractor has to water down the material in order to make it the proper consistency to be used on asphalt.

From the consumer's point of view, it does not matter how much water you put into this concoction, within limits. After the material dries on someone's asphalt, it is generally going to look quite similar, regardless as to how much water was used in the mix. Contractors can save a tremendous amount of money by watering the material down more heavily. This is something that many contractors do. The difference is that a few months later, the material that has been applied ends up looking very bad, which does not do the customer much good.

There are other tricks of the trade as well. One of the most outrageous scenarios involves people traveling from city to city purchasing used motor oil (which used to be practically free) and then putting this on peoples' driveways and parking lots. They would get paid for the work, and the customer would have a piece of pavement that looked decent when the "contractors" left, but the asphalt would never dry and the job would end up having been a complete waste of money and time.

Here are some other tricks of the trade:

- There are chemical thickeners you can buy to bulk up watered down sealer, for example.
- Using a squeegee will apply much more sealer than a brush, but it costs more.
- You can fill cracks with sand instead of tar (which is more expensive).
- It is better to put the material on when the asphalt is cool because it can cure longer (but this means you cannot work when the asphalt is hot, unless you have cooled it).

I could create a long list of the various things that contractors do to cut corners when they are doing this work. However, it is really never a good idea to cut corners. This is what most people and contractors do, however.

Asphalt contractors who emphasize the process of the work they are doing always do much better in the long run. They come back and work for people year after year. There is a certain confidence they exude in their work. They are craftsmen, not [salesmen](#). They take pride in their work. They build careers, and meaningful careers at that. You can do very well financially (and in many other ways) as an asphalt contractor. However, very few people truly do well in the asphalt business. In fact, not only do most asphalt contractors fail, the contractors who do not fail end up making mediocre livings at best.

Every year tens of thousands of people go to [law school](#). They all graduate and compete for the same jobs. How many people choose to become asphalt contractors? Hardly any. You could learn most of what you need to know about this job in less than a week. There are some complex areas of the job that require engineers to work on roads and stuff, but basically anyone can do the work or run a business doing this. When a state or city needs to build a road out of asphalt, they will get bids from a contractor. Most times there are only a few people bidding on many of these jobs because there are just not a ton of people in the business with credibility. The reason is that most people get a single job and simply try and make as much money as they can as quickly as they can. They cut corners. The people who do not cut corners get good reputations and end up doing better in the long run.

**Process in the Legal Recruiting Business.** In the legal recruiting business, there is essentially one thing you are doing: *Finding an attorney and making an introduction between the attorney and a law firm or a legal employer.*

This is the result that occurs when you do the work. This is what most legal recruiters in the business concentrate on, and it is why most of them fail to even moderately reach their full potential.

When I got into the legal recruiting business, I quickly noticed people cutting corners, just like people do in the asphalt business. If you were looking at the profession from a distance, without any form of understanding, you too would likely think that all that recruiters do is find people and make introductions. I remember one of the most upsetting interviews I ever had was interviewing someone for the job of being a recruiter, who told me that the job sounded great. He told me that he thought he could spend time out on the golf course doing the work, forwarding résumés around on his Blackberry between strokes. This person simply thought that all the job involved was forwarding résumés from one person to another.

Incredibly, the more I learned about the business, the more I saw that most recruiters seemed to feel this way. In fact, this sort of idea was indeed how most recruiters seemed to approach the entire business. They would put a little advertisement on a job site, or in a legal newspaper, and then forward someone's résumé to an interested employer. Others would simply cold call attorneys. The idea was that they were simply going out and plucking people from one firm, and sending them over to other firms.

This simplistic understanding of the job characterizes the way many people approach it. Without going into too much detail, however, there is a much more in-depth way of looking at the work:

- The best recruiters are constantly writing and lecturing about recruiting-related issues and their industry.
- The best recruiters put together very compelling and in-depth presentations about their candidates.
- The best recruiters meet with employers on a weekly basis.
- The best recruiters know about the industry and the most important things happening in it.
- The best recruiters are constantly networking at industry events.
- The best recruiters have highly developed research skills to find jobs.
- The best recruiters have highly developed research skills to find candidates.
- The best recruiters never compromise their integrity.
- The best recruiter help people, even when it does not mean a short-term reward.
- The best recruiters are committed to working hard throughout their careers.

There are actually thousands of little things like this that the best recruiters are constantly doing in order to excel at their jobs, and all of these details are what make them incredibly good at their job. Most of these things are not, however, related to simply emailing résumés. They are related to the deeper process of recruiting.

When you speak with recruiters who are process rather than results oriented, you can always tell. They are not focused so much on getting résumés out the door or making money. They are doing a [good job](#) at all "touch points".

The importance of process in recruiting also has a huge impact on the bottom line. The best recruiters do well in all economic climates due to their emphasis on process and not results.

**Process and Your Career and Job Search.** Just as a successful piano maker, contractor or recruiter needs to concentrate on the process in order to be successful at their trade, so too do you in both your career and [job search](#). Good results only come about when you concentrate on the entire process of what you are doing, refine each step of the process, and ensure you are getting better and more skilled each step of the way.

A job search ideally should not start, for example, when you are looking for a job. There are thousands of data points that go into finding a job and ensuring that you get a good job when you are looking for one. For example, you need to consistently be

building relationships, and building every single relationship you can over time. The more relationships you build both inside and outside of work, the more people you are going to have to call upon when you are interested in getting a new job.

The harder you work in your existing job, the more people are going to be interested in helping you when you are looking for a job. People will come to your defense and do everything they can to help you when they believe that you are someone who will work hard. When you do the right thing and always make a good effort, this will come back to help you.

This is the opposite of what many people do, however. Many people are only out for short-term rewards and "quick fixes" at every turn. They do not think in terms of building long-term relationships with those around them. In your career, you need to be consistent, to give results and perform over time--not just in the short term.

When you are looking for a job, the quality and the depth of work you put into your résumé matters. The quality of the letters that accompany your résumé matters. Whether or not you apply to enough employers, to increase your odds of getting a job, matters. Your interviewing skills matter. The entire process that you follow matters and the better that you do at each step, the more likely you are to get the results you want.

Think about the [manufacturing](#) of a world-class piano. A lot of thought goes into each little component of the piano. Whether it is the wood used, the thickness of the wood, the polish of the wood, where the wood comes from, how the wood is sanded, how the wood is fitted into the piano, the glue that is used in the piano, the dexterity of the person working with the wood, the machine that the wood is compressed on (if it is compressed) and more--the thought that goes into each part of the process matters. Every data point is refined and studied and probably has been refined and studied for a long period of time.

You need to make sure that you continually improve every single data point that is involved in the process of your seeking a job, or growing your career.

Several years ago, in the late-1980s, I was taking a test drive of a Corvette with the President of a German car company. He thought the American Corvette was a piece of junk, and did not like the car at all. He told me a story about how his company operates, contrasted with how a typical American automobile company operates.

He said that American car companies build a car model, and then completely change up the model the next year. They may throw a different transmission in the car, a different engine, radically change the styling and so forth--the idea being that they are trying to show progress and innovation, although, in reality not much is really changing. In contrast, he told me that when his company builds a car, over the next decade or so they keep refining it and making it better and better. They figure out a way to make the transmission better and to make small "almost invisible" changes that continually improve the car. They are concentrating on the process of improvement in building a car, and the result is that when you get in one of their automobiles, it feels very different. The cars also last longer. They run better. There are a myriad of powerful things that make these cars superior, and they are all the result of concentrating on the process.

You need to be focused on the process in your job and job search. Pay attention to the small, *almost invisible* things that collectively make a difference. Think of yourself as an instrument, like a fine piano. It is the attention to everything that goes into you that will ultimately produce the best notes.

## THE LESSON

Concentrate on the process, not the results, in order to succeed in your career. Focus on the entire process of what you are doing, refine each step of that process, and make sure to constantly improve each step. Pay attention to the small, seemingly insignificant details, because they will add up to make a huge difference.