

Allow People around You to Feel and Believe Whatever They Want

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was about nine years old, I was driving down the street with a relative and we saw a huge, pale man who was walking down the side of the road flipping off cars and screaming at them. The man didn't have a shirt on and seemed extremely angry. He was wearing dirty jeans and had long hair that was sweaty. The man was large, probably at least 6' 4" and quite heavy. It was a terrifying sight because the man's movements were exaggerated and he seemed to be in a lot of pain. My relative saw this man, slowed down, pulled over close to him and rolled down the window on my side of the car.

"Hey, screw you A##hole!" my relative screamed at him.

There was absolutely no reason whatsoever for this display, and the man sprinted towards the car screaming and looking as if he would kill my relative (and perhaps me as well). My relative pulled away and the man found a rock and tried throwing it at our car.

I was very frightened and felt as if we were going to be killed. For whatever reason, my relative seemed to really be enjoying himself. I remember how fast my heart was beating and how frightened I was. Instead of driving away, my relative turned around and drove past the man again, screaming and making various hand signs. It was a very disturbing episode and I really felt at that moment as if I might have been killed. It was also an extremely dangerous thing to have done. Had the car stalled or something along those lines, I am pretty sure the man would have gone into a full-fledged attack. The man was crazed and extremely angry about something. This was one of the more frightening episodes of my childhood.

One of the biggest mistakes any of us can make is not allowing people to experience whatever they are experiencing:

- If people want to be angry about something, then we should allow them to be angry.
- If people want to be sad, then we should allow them to be sad.
- If people want to feel intelligent, we should let them feel intelligent.
- If people want to feel that someone has done something very nice for them, then we should let them feel that someone has done something nice for them.

Some time ago, my wife and I had dinner guests over to our home. One of the guests presented my wife with a bottle of wine, declaring that it was a \$100 bottle of wine and we should all enjoy it with dinner. The guest had apparently received the bottle of wine as a gift from a friend, who told them it was a \$100 bottle of wine. Sometime later, as my wife was opening the wine, she said:

"Isn't it nice that they brought such an expensive bottle of wine!"

I looked at the bottle of wine and knew that it was not a \$100 bottle of wine at all. In fact, it was a \$7.00 to \$10.00 bottle of wine (depending on where it was purchased) that looked expensive because it had a bunch of French writing all over it and not a single word of English. I had purchased multiple bottles of this wine for a party of 100 people a year or so before and remembered the wine quite well.

"This is not a \$100 bottle of wine," I said. "It is a \$10 bottle of wine."

Everyone sort of fell silent and I could tell my wife was very upset with me. She said something about how what I said was not very nice. The wine was not a \$100 bottle of wine and it had really bothered me quite a bit that the guest kept declaring this. Instead of just letting it pass, I decided to let everyone know the truth.

What did this accomplish? It certainly didn't endear me to the guests. Instead, it embarrassed the guests. No one cared if I knew the true price of the wine or not. The alternative would have been to let the guest feel good about bringing a \$100 bottle of wine and the fact that her friend had given her a \$100 bottle of wine. Instead, I chose to make her feel bad. It made my wife feel bad as well. It was simply not the right thing for me to have done at all.

When I was [practicing law](#), I would often go into the offices of various attorneys who would give me one assignment or another. When I listened to them speak, occasionally some of them would quote various laws and legal precedents they knew nothing about. I would generally choose to "set them straight" and let them know the real truth. This also did me no good. Instead, it would upset my audience a little bit. Some attorneys enjoy disagreements, but for the most part, this didn't do me much good.

When you look out in the world and see various employers and people in general, most live under one delusion or another. They run their lives under one belief or another that isn't true and believe certain facts that may not make sense. You can see it everywhere. There are an incredible variety of beliefs out there and people have different ways of running their lives and businesses. Most often (not always) the best thing you can possibly do is just allow people to think and believe whatever it is they want to think and believe.

Several years ago, I was speaking with an old man I knew who ran a [gas station](#) in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, which was on a small corner that was not very busy at all. He hardly made any money selling gas because there just wasn't any business and not enough cars drove by. His best business was buying and selling cars, and he made more money doing this than anything else. He would purchase a used car, polish it up, fix small mechanical things wrong with it, then sell it for a nice profit. One day, I was speaking with him and he was telling me that the business of [selling](#) cars was slow. He told me he wished he had more customers. He had around 10-15 cars he was selling at the time, and I looked around his little lot and noticed that you couldn't tell any of the cars at all were for sale. They were all sitting there and it looked like they might even have been in the process of having work done.

"You ought to put a sign up that you sell cars and then put the prices in big letters on the windows of the cars," I told him. To

me, it looked like a pretty obvious thing. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that for years he had been sitting on that corner with no pricing information or any other sort of indication that the cars were for sale. It did not make a lot of sense to me. It was something that he hadn't seen.

The man got extremely angry and told me that I needed to mind my own business and shouldn't concern myself with stuff I knew nothing about. I ended up leaving because he was so angry. A few weeks later, I drove by and saw he had put up a sign announcing that he sold cars and that each of the cars had prices and little descriptions like "RUNS LIKE A TOP!" written across the windows. He had taken my advice, but it had cost me a friend.

In James Harvey Robinson's book, *The Mind in the Making*, he writes:

We are incredibly heedless in the formation of our beliefs, but find ourselves filled with an illicit passion for them when anyone proposes to rob us of their companionship. It is obviously not the ideas themselves that are dear to us, but our self-esteem, which is threatened. We are by nature stubbornly pledged to defend our own from attack, whether it be our person, our family, or our opinion. A United States Senator once remarked to a friend of mine that God Almighty could not make him change his mind on our Latin-America policy. We may surrender, but rarely confess ourselves vanquished. In the intellectual world at least peace is without victory.

Few of us take the pains to study the origin of our cherished convictions; indeed, we have a natural repugnance for so doing. We like to continue to believe what we have been accustomed to believe as true, and the resentment aroused when doubt is cast upon any of our assumptions leads us to seek every manner of excuse for clinging to them. *The result is that most of our so-called reasoning consists in finding arguments for going on believing as we already do. ...*

The "real" reasons for our beliefs are concealed from ourselves as well as others. As we grow up, we simply adopt the ideas presented to us in regard to such matters as religion, family relations, property, business, our country, and the state. We unconsciously absorb them from our environment. They are persistently whispered in our ear by the group in which we happen to live. Moreover, as Mr. Trotter had pointed out, these judgments, being the product of suggestion and not of reasoning, have the quality of perfect obviousness, so that to question them.

"... is to the believer to carry skepticism to an insane degree, and will be met by contempt, disapproval, or condemnation, according to the nature of the belief in question."

In our jobs, interviews and elsewhere, we are constantly given the opportunity to question those around us. The people we meet come from all different sorts of backgrounds. The odds are very slim we are ever going to change anyone's mind about anything they feel or want to believe. You will begin to experience far more success in your job and your [job search](#) when you let people around you believe what they want to believe and feel, and don't question them.

People generally get fired from law firms and employers not for making serious errors, but for lying about them.

When I was practicing law, I remember there was a girl who had failed to file a very important paper in a certain case called a "Response to Requests for Admission." This was a devastating mistake due to the fact that if you fail to file this document, the information that is requested is deemed admitted. She had made a mistake in not filing this and, consequently, the client of the [law firm](#) (a large and important client) lost a very important case. Despite such a serious error, the girl didn't lose her job and the rest of her career was perfectly fine.

THE LESSON

The people we meet come from all different backgrounds; they live their lives according to facts that may not make sense or appear to be true. People are unlikely to change each other's minds about their respective core beliefs. One of the biggest mistakes is opposing people from believing whatever they want. You will experience far more success by stepping back and allowing people to follow their own beliefs without questioning them.

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