

## The Kick-Ass Marketing Secret of the Most Successful Job Applicants and Employees

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I've been going to conferences for one thing or another at least a couple times a year for the past several years. I've spent thousands of dollars attending marketing-related conferences. If I go to one more conference where someone talks about USPs (Unique Selling Propositions), I will probably get up and leave. I'm going to teach you in the next few minutes what the best marketing minds in the world would charge you thousands of dollars to tell you about how to market yourself.

You will learn how to position yourself for incredible success—in life and in your job—in the following way:

First, I am going to tell you how to [get jobs](#) that more highly qualified competitors don't get.

Second, I'll tell you how to get jobs you're not even qualified for.

Third, I'll show you how to appear to be the most logical choice to be interviewed when you [apply for a job](#).

Fourth, you'll learn how to make every interviewer talk about you enthusiastically after interviewing.

Sound impossible? It's not. However, it requires that you know something about marketing and that you really understand one marketing concept: the USP, or whatever you want to call it. It's not hard to understand, but you do need to think through the idea a bit to really grasp it.

I've been getting up and leaving lots of conferences lately. I left one last weekend, and I left one a couple of months before that.

The reason I'm leaving these conferences is because very few of the people at conferences have any idea what they are talking about. What these people typically do at the conferences is learn some marketing ideas about this or that, create a horrible course then try to get people to pay hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars for them. In addition, most of these people aren't just wrong; they're completely clueless. I usually end up leaving when I hear them pronounce some famous marketing person's name incorrectly or call some marketing concept by a name it shouldn't be called.

The reason people keep showing up to these marketing conferences and paying all these gurus money to listen to them bastardize marketing concepts they don't even understand is this: when a marketing concept really works, it can be incredibly effective.

- I know one guy in his twenties who came out with a brand of liquor, created some buzz around it, and a couple of years later sold it to some giant liquor company for hundreds of millions of dollars.
- I know of another guy who did the same thing with a stuffed animal. I represented him when I practiced law. He made several hundred million dollars.

How effective is this marketing stuff? People who really understand it at a deep level can make hundreds of millions of dollars. If people can make hundreds of millions of dollars with a simple marketing concept pitching a bottle of booze or a stuffed animal, imagine what you can do with this stuff in your career.

The most effective of all marketing weapons out there is the USP. The term USP has been around a long, long time. I would define USP in the following way:

Your USP is that unique aspect of yourself that sets you apart from every other "me too" employee and job seeker in the market.

Your entire career can be built almost exclusively around your USP. The key word for your USP, however, is "unique." Your USP is what differentiates you from your competition and makes you a must-have hire and employee in the job market.

*You should be able to explain, in a single phrase, why someone should hire you and want to work with you and not someone else, or why they need to hire you at all.*

For job seekers, the USP is among the most important things you need to have, even before having a résumé, in my opinion. Your USP is what you offer, and it's what you want to stick out and be memorable about your candidacy. Your USP is that important. The possibilities for creating your USP are unlimited; however, it is best to adopt a USP that dynamically addresses something that a potential employer is probably not getting that you can give them. Be careful, though, because you need to be able to fulfill whatever it is you are promising in your USP.

Before telling you how to go about creating your USP, let me first describe something that characterizes most job seekers. First, when I ask people I'm interviewing why I should hire them and not someone else, most of them have no decent response. Why? Because most people have never thought through their own USP. Most people have no USP and instead, have only a rudderless, nondescript candidacy that depends on the momentum of the market. For example, if the market is doing well and there are lots of jobs available, they may get hired. If the market slows down and these people need another job, they will wait for the market to pick up again. Most people offer no real benefit to employers and nothing distinct or unique. No great service or value is promised either implicitly or explicitly—just "hire me," for no particular reason.

It's no surprise then that most careers are merely average and not exceptional. People accomplish only a small share of what they could accomplish in their [job searches](#) and careers due to not fully developing their USP. Why would you want to hire someone who is just average with no unique benefit? Or would you prefer someone who is the absolute best at what they do?

Let me tell you two quick stories.

Some time ago, I hired an assistant whose former job had been to be an assistant to uneducated, has-been movie and rock stars and others who were on tight budgets and needed to keep their secrets out of the limelight. I reviewed her résumé and

saw all of the famous people she had worked for over her career and felt very privileged to have this person working for me as well. However, she had never actually been hired by these people. She had been hired by their [business managers](#). The job of business managers of stars and others when their clients get late into their careers is to make sure they (1) don't run out of money and (2) aren't featured in the press in unflattering ways. This is what they looked for in her when they hired her. Her job had been to be an assistant; however, more than this, her job had been to babysit these people and make sure they didn't spend too much money or get into trouble. In addition to this she was an assistant; however, her real skill was running people's lives and keeping costs down.

Her USP on her résumé when I interviewed was something along the lines of "effective in controlling confidential clients' spending and keeping them out of media in a variety of challenging circumstances." I found this bizarre at the time, but she was extremely personable and interviewed exceptionally well. In fact, I hired her during the interview.

Once she started work, she shaped up everyone around her. She demanded that they not gossip and recommended in the harshest possible manner that I fire certain employees who were gossiping. She looked around the office and determined everyone from the person who came into water the plants to the cleaning woman should be fired and replaced with cheaper alternatives. When I travelled, she rented me ridiculous little Asian cars I could scarcely fit into and put me into the cheapest hotels she could find that were miles from where I needed to be, just to save money. I didn't like this.

When I protested, she would talk to me like a child.

"It only costs an additional \$3.00 a day for a regular size car," I might protest.

"Now, what did I tell you about behaving?" she might respond.

She was incredible at what she did, but it wasn't for me. Had I been a spendthrift, out-of-work actor on a fixed income, this would have been exactly what I needed. The people around me wouldn't have gossiped about me to the press, and I wouldn't have run out of money.

This woman had a USP and she stood for two things (1) saving money and (2) keeping the person she worked for out of the press. She did this instinctively, and this is why she is someone who was probably never unemployed in Los Angeles for more than a few days. Ever.

The reason? She had an incredible USP and it was exactly what business managers and others wanted in someone doing a job like she did. She was absolutely perfect in every way for the particular job that business managers needed her for - older, non-working entertainment clients.

This is the example of a USP in action. Imagine if you were managing a former movie star and had the two goals of keeping the person's dirty laundry out of the limelight and also making sure the person didn't spend money. The person I hired would be the absolute first person you would hire. This person stood for something and followed through on what they stood for. I'm sure she will never have a difficult time [finding a job](#) in Los Angeles, no matter what the economy is like, as long as she has this particular USP.

Can you see what an appealing difference a USP can make in establishing someone's image to a potential employer? It's ludicrous not to have a clear, carefully crafted USP that is in the very fabric of your candidacy with any firm.

The next story I am going to tell you about USPs is so ludicrous it's hard to believe, but it's true.

When I was growing up, there was a guy down the street from me who was incredibly wild. He once got suspended from elementary school for throwing a desk at a teacher. As he progressed through high school then college, he continued to get more and more wild. One time, he was over at my friend's house and had used so many drugs that he sat on a chair for, what I understand, was something like 36 hours staring at a wall. He was a wild guy, and still is.

However, despite all this wildness, he is actually extremely uptight. His mind works like a vice grip and he is so detail oriented it's hard to believe. When you're around this guy when he's not spaced out on drugs it makes you uncomfortable. He perceives every little detail about everything, and these details make him visibly agitated if anything is ever out of place. He starts sweating sometimes if anything seems off too much. His face turns red. This guy is way, way too wound up and always has been. He almost flunked out of college because he was using drugs and partying all the time. However, he still ended up getting tons of jobs.

Employers meet this guy and they know that absolutely nothing whatsoever will ever slip by him. He's never been unemployed. His résumé says something like "unbelievably detail oriented" and it's absolutely true. The guy is considered one of the top quality-related guys in the United States. He works for a big company and makes a hell of a lot of money studying something like quality control. He gets calls from recruiters all the time. He was rich by the time he was 30. He works in a labcoat in ridiculously expensive production lines that make things like computer chips. He's an absolute star at what he does.

This guy's entire identity is based around being incredibly detail oriented on the job. People truly understand this around him. This is what this guy does, he does it well, and everyone who comes into contact with him knows this.

The point is you need to focus your USP on one gap, niche, need, or segment of the market that the market needs. The market needs guys who are detail oriented and assistants who control the spending and public perception of people in the entertainment industry.

You need to come up with a USP and have something that sets you apart in the market. Before you can incorporate your USP into your résumé, interviews, and work style, however, you need to figure out what it is (or what you want it to be) then refine it and make sure you focus it as cleanly and directly as you can. You should be able to articulate a crystal-clear USP in less than a paragraph.

Your USP is the nucleus around which you will get a job and define your career, so you better have one and you better be able to state one. If you cannot state a USP, the people you work with and/or whom are interviewing you won't be able to define it either. Clearly conveying and marketing your USP will make your success in the job market close to inevitable if it's strong enough. But you need a USP before you do anything.

When you create a meaningful USP, you take the vast details of all of your experience, education, and character and put it into one or two sentences. More importantly, these sentences typically have the force of salesmanship in practically every single word. You don't need to care how this USP reads, either. It doesn't have to sound good. What it needs to do is stand out and create positive tension in the employer's mind.

The biggest test if you've adopted a really good USP or not is if it could be adopted by another job seeker without being

modified. Here are some examples of meaningless USPs:

- Well-educated teacher.
- Hard-working employee.
- Team player.

These USPs do nothing to separate one person from another in the job market. Lots of people are well-educated and professional. Lots of people are also hard-working. Lots of people are also team players. None of these things are really that unusual. If an employer puts an advertisement out for virtually any job, they will receive applications from people claiming to have these various "unique" qualifications. The truth is, however, none of these qualifications are unique at all. None of these things is really going to make you stick out in the employers' minds when they review your résumé, interview you, and consider hiring you.

You are well-educated? What does this mean? You are hard-working? What does this mean? You are a team player? What does this mean? You need to go deeper and deeper. You need to push harder and find something that make you stand out. How about:

- "Students in my classes get so enthusiastic about learning they often come to me for extra reading assignments to learn more," "Oxford educated teacher," "Former high school valedictorian teacher who speaks Latin and four other languages and makes students incredibly enthusiastic about learning," (for well-educated teacher).
- "My supervisors always tell me not to work so hard," "Known at every employer I have ever worked at as the last one out at the end of the day," "I am the guy supervisors tell to take a vacation," (for hard-working).
- "Am I too friendly and well liked by other people at work?" "When employer's hire me morale rises because I am always the guy who organizes softball leagues, basketball teams, and so forth for the employees," "Pizza parties at my house are a regular occurrence," (for team player).

I am showing you these examples and want you to think about them. Each of them is memorable because they make the person stand out. The imagery is vivid, and we can sense and understand what is being talked about and referred to.

My greatest and most favorite skill is being a [legal recruiter](#). As a legal recruiter, I have written hundreds of profiles for various attorneys out there that I use to help them get in the door at various law firms. At first glance, every attorney is pretty much identical to the others out there in the market. For example, they all go to good [law schools](#), they all work hard, and they are all very ambitious. I have to work pretty hard to differentiate each attorney I work with out there from the rest.

I'm not going to tell you I'm the best legal recruiter in the United States; however, I may well be. I've made more than \$1,000,000 in fees personally from doing this sort of work virtually every single year I've done it. I can honestly say that nothing I do to help my candidates get jobs is more important than helping them have a strong and incredibly persuasive USP. That is why I sit on my ass at all those shitty marketing conferences: I know that the more I learn and understand this sort of stuff, the more I can help various people get jobs. **I have been able to change people's lives by crafting powerful USPs for them and sending them into interviews.** One year, I actually placed every single candidate I worked with and I can say it's almost entirely due to having a good USP for them.

Every attorney and every person has a USP that can be used with employers.

Sometimes it's the obstacles the person has overcome.

Sometimes it's their unique writing ability.

Sometimes it's their passion.

Sometimes it's their character.

The point is, everyone out there has a particular USP. You are different from other people and there is something different about your candidacy and experience than everyone else's out there. You need to say so, and you need to be as upfront as possible about this. Have something in your USP that no one else out there offers.

Tell your story. *"I learned the importance of hard work because I grew up on a farm and got up at 4:30 am to milk the cows from the time I was 7 years old until I went off to college at the age of 18 and never missed a single day. If you are looking for an attorney who works hard, you are never going to find someone more dedicated, hard-working, and consistent than me."*

Persuasive, right? Who would you hire to be an attorney? Some four-eyed, upper middle-class arrogant law school graduate, or a guy who came in with a story like that? I think you would interview the kid of a farmer just for the novelty, and hire him as well.

This is the power of an awesome USP.

Why are you the right choice among all the other choices employers have out there? If you truly want to get a job, you will get in touch with your USP and start standing out to employers. You will be a standout person whose résumé and so forth sticks out to the employer and who is memorable. People will be buying you as a concept and not just hiring an employer.

When you interview with employers, everything you say should clearly reinforce your USP. Think about your own past buying examples. When you are in the market for a product or service, don't you tend to favor the businesses that strongly presents a USP? Of course you do!

You need to understand one thing, though: you can't appeal to everyone out there. In fact, certain USPs are only going to appeal to certain employers and not others. However, this is part of what a USP is: it is a market differentiator. Differentiate yourself in the market, create a USP, and you will never have a difficult time finding a job.

## THE LESSON

Just as a Unique Selling Position (USP) is important to sell a product, your own USP is vital for marketing yourself to potential employers. You must define your USP before even creating your résumé, as it comprises the basic product that you are trying to sell in your interview. Focus your USP on a specific niche, for which there is market demand, and make it thoroughly persuasive.

