

Your Brain and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In our [job searches](#) and careers, there are a variety of forces that can hold us back. However, in almost every single case, the thing that can hold us back more than anything is ourselves and our own minds. In fact, your brain and what it's doing--how it thinks and the way it processes information--is the single greatest determinant of what will end up happening to you in your career and life.

I would like to go a "little deep" with you today and discuss something with you that's pretty far out in terms of your career but, at the same time, is the largest single thing determining what happens with you and your career: your brain. This is a crucial determinant in your success or failure. What is most interesting about your brain is that you may be benefited or held back, on either an organic or a psychological level, by your brain.

Natasha Richardson, a well-known English-born actress, died after a skiing accident in Canada. She apparently fell down and lightly hit her head. After the injury, she declared she was fine and refused any medical care and went back to her hotel room. However, around an hour later, she started complaining of a really bad headache. She was then taken to a hospital in Montreal and then a short time later, flown back to New York City, where she ended up dying. According to *Scientific American*:

"...The tragic story, if confirmed, is a reminder that even minor blows to the head can lead to devastating bleeding that can cause strokes or otherwise damage brain tissue. One possibility, sometimes called "talk and die" syndrome, is that the actress had delayed bleeding between her skull and her brain stem, which sits at the top of the spinal cord and regulates consciousness, breathing, and the heart and connects the brain to many of the body's sensory and motor nerves. Another possibility is that there was a tear in the inner lining of her arteries, causing blood clots. To find out more about Richardson's potential injury, we spoke with neurosurgeon [Keith Black](#), chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles...."

How fragile life is and how quickly things can change for people at the blink of an eye! Richardson apparently died of what is called "talk and die syndrome." In "talk and die syndrome," someone hits their head and initially they are OK; however, they eventually end up dying when blood gets between the skull and the brain, which is called an epidural hemorrhage. What ends up happening is that there is a pressure on the brain as the blood builds up, and this pressure eventually can end up killing the person.

I think this episode is chilling because it's a metaphor for the experience of many of us in our lives. There is something horribly wrong with some of us but we don't know it and continue forward in our lives as if everything is fine. What is wrong with us is often invisible. We cannot see it and others may not know about it either. Yet, here we go through life with some weakness, some fatal flaw, or something else that will end up killing us. It is something that is small at first; however, it ultimately ends up being something that has a massive impact on our entire lives and may actually kill us. For others, we may be impacted by seemingly small events that took place years ago and we do not even realize they are impacting us today.

I am sure, 100% sure, there are both positive and negative things that may have happened to you in the past that are working their way through your career and life right now. These things are affecting you and how well you do in your career and how well you do in your life. These things are psychological in nature and affect your entire view of the world. The good news about these things is you can fix them. You can learn about these weaknesses and how they affect you in the world right now and can do everything within your power to fix them. This will take care of the situation right then and there. The bad news is for people who have suffered traumatic brain injuries, for example, is many times there's nothing they can do to fix these injuries. They are in a state they can't easily snap out of.

While Richardson didn't survive this incredibly tragic injury, many people who experience brain injuries do end up surviving. These brain injuries can have traumatic results on their lives. I'm not sure of the reasons for this. However, I have seen this happen with people throughout my life and read story after story of this. A bad blow on the head can do tremendous damage to people and their lives.

For as long as I can remember, I've been incredibly interested in the brain and how it functions. One of the main reasons I've been so interested in the brain is what happens with our brains can have an incredible impact on not only our lives, but our success and other factors. My career has been dedicated to human achievement and helping people make the most of themselves, who they are, and what they can accomplish. It is for this reason that the most upsetting thing for me of all is when people are impacted by their brains in a negative way.

Several weeks ago, I was speaking with a neurosurgeon in his late 80s who showed up at my daughter's birthday party. He told me a very interesting story about a man whom he had treated when he was a military doctor several decades ago. He had been stationed at a base where there was a soldier who'd turned quite mean. The soldier had been a nice, quiet kid from the Midwest whose personality had undergone a complete metamorphosis.

He became quite violent and had to be restrained in his bed 24 hours a day. The soldier would buck around so much that the hospital had to weld the bed to the floor. For hours a day, the man would scream obscenities and mean things at anyone who came near him. He was an incredibly evil man and had become very, very angry. His family had tried visiting him on more than a few occasions but were given such a barrage of savage insults and mean statements that they stopped coming to see the guy completely. For the past few years, he had been in this military hospital, strapped down to a bed and was "the meanest son-of-a bitch" anyone had ever seen. He could hurl one insult after another at various people, and the only thing he seemed to care about was how he could insult people.

The neurosurgeon, however, had to sleep in a part of the base where he was woken up by this guy's blood curling screams

each morning. While his job was not to treat patients who had apparently gone mad, he decided after months of listening to this man's screams and being awoken by them each morning, that he wanted to investigate what was wrong with the guy. The doctor, I also sensed, was a very good person and wanted to help everyone he could.

He tracked down the man's doctor. Apparently, the man had been injured in a simple fall on the base and over weeks and weeks had become progressively meaner and meaner. No one seemed to know what was wrong with him, and the man was now incredibly isolated and alone. He was just angry and perpetually so. The neurosurgeon asked to look at the man.

At the time, there weren't modern CAT Scans, so the neurosurgeon arranged for the man to have his head x-rayed. When the x-rays were developed, the neurosurgeon discovered there was a blood clot that was isolated over a portion of the soldier's brain. This small blood clot was activating the portion of the brain associated with anger. Incredibly, the surgeon was able to do a small operation on the man and relieve this blood clot. Over the next several weeks, the man returned to complete normalcy. He had been so incredibly mean to certain members of his family, however, that many people refused to ever speak with him again.

What is so vivid about this example is that everything that happened to this man was completely organic in nature. His brain was able to be easily repaired, and once this occurred, he was right back to normal. We think nothing of approving of a medical intervention like this to operate on someone with a sick brain. Nothing whatsoever. We expect it and know that a simple operation can rapidly bring this person back to normal. Why is it, then, that so many of us are unwilling to look inside ourselves and see what it may be that is holding us back? What prevents us from reaching our full potential? What could we change that would make us the best we could be?

Someone I knew growing up fell down a flight of stairs one day in their house. For the next 30 minutes or so, the person laid unconscious. When they woke up, they went into the hospital. They were put under observation for a few days and eventually the hospital decided they were okay and let them go. While the change in this person was slight, the person lost their job a short time later. They became very hostile and undermined of their superiors. This occurred throughout the person's career, and they never really recovered. To this day, this person is someone who is very hostile to other people like this to the point of spending their days on gossip boards defaming anyone who they perceive is against them. The person is isolated and alone. It is very sad, but all of this is almost certainly the result of a similar brain injury. Our brains are complex and can really mess with us and screw up our lives. What if this person was to get a CAT scan? Would that change anything? Maybe none of this is related, but maybe it is.

A woman I was once very close to was travelling down the freeway one day in a small sports car. I received a call from the accident scene where she had totaled her car. She'd woken up from the accident after being unconscious for around 5 minutes, and her head had been violently thrown against the windshield. When she woke up, she appeared completely normal and was able to speak with people in a coherent way.

A few days later, however, she started acting really bizzare. She started crying a lot and did so about issues based on paranoia. She believed everyone in her neighborhood was talking about her. When she drove down the street, the woman thought people were looking at her. One day, she declared she needed to get the hell out of where she lived because everyone was staring at her and moved out of her house. She lived in one place for a few months then decided the people there were out to get her. The last I checked, she had moved several times. Everywhere she goes, she is suddenly under the belief that people are out to undermine her and get her. Is she crazy? Not exactly. You can speak with her and she can carry on a completely normal conversation. It's what is going on in the depths of her mind that is so frightening. She has changed and become a completely different person.

These episodes are scary to me. They are frightening because they are common. In fact, if you're personally suffering from numerous symptoms, they could be related to issues with your brain that could have occurred due to a fall or some other accident. One of the more interesting books I've read in the past few years was by neuroscientist and [psychiatrist](#), Dr. Daniel Amen, called *Change Your Brain Change Your Life*. In this book, Amen reviews and discusses how our brains are wired and can have a profound impact on our emotions and our thoughts. What Amen does in his studies and clinics is brain imaging studies on people with issues.

For example, many of the common problems people suffer from, such as distraction, worry, anger, and more, are often related to a brain malfunction. People who have anxiety and are plagued by this often have issues with their basal ganglia. People with trouble focusing typically will have issues with their prefrontal cortex. People with a bad temper may have issues with their temporal lobes. People that have issues connecting with others may have a deep limbic problem. One interesting passage of the book relates:

When the limbic system functions properly, people tend to be more positive and more able to connect with others. They tend to filter information in an accurate light and they are more likely to give others the benefit of the doubt. They are able to be playful, sexy, and sexual, and they tend to maintain and have easy access to positive emotional memories. They tend to draw people toward them with their positive attitude.

When the limbic system is overactive, people tend toward depression, negativity, and distance from others. They are more likely to focus on the most negative aspects of others, filter information through dark glasses, see the glass as half empty, and less likely to give others the benefit of doubt. They tend not to be playful. They do not feel sexy, and they tend to shy away from sexual activity due to a lack of interest. Most of their memories are negative, and it is hard for them to access positive emotional memories or feelings. They tend to push people away with their negativity.

Positive Limbic Relational Statements

"We have a lot of good memories."

"Let's have friends over."

"I accept your apology. I know you were just having a bad day."

"Let's have fun."

"I feel sexy. Let's make love."

Negative Limbic Relational Statements

"Don't look at me that way."

"All I can remember are the bad times."

"I'm too tired."

"Leave me alone. I'm not interested in sex."

"You go to bed. I can't sleep."

"I don't feel like being around other people."

"I don't want to hear you're sorry. You meant to hurt me."

"I'm not interested in doing anything."

Change Your Brain, Change Your Life:

The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety,

Depression, Obsessiveness, Anger, and Impulsiveness

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When your brain works right, you work right. If your brain has trouble, you are likely to have trouble. Exercise, sleep, stress, smoking, too much caffeine, negative thinking, and how you think moment by moment can have a negative impact on your brain. Your diet, social connections, and being with other people can help your brain. Is your behavior helping or hurting your brain? Day in and day out, people are either hurting their brains or helping their brains. Focusing on what you love, being grateful, and practicing meditation can help your brain.

When you are [looking for a job](#) and when you are in a position where you may be seeking a job, it is important to understand that your brain is influencing the things that happen to you. If there are persistent issues holding you back in your job search or causing you problems, it is important to understand just how serious these problems are. It is possible, for example, that there is more wrong than what meets the eye. There may be certain variables in your brain influencing what happens to you and these may be organic--or they may be psychological.

My advice to you today is to watch out for your brain. There are psychological things that are likely influencing you, and there may even be organic things that are influencing what is happening with you. Getting to the bottom of your brain and what is going on inside of you may be among the most effective career moves you will ever make.

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