

## Confront Problems and Do Not Be a Dabbler

By *Harrison Barnes*

How many people have you known in your life who started something then decided to stop it and try something else? A lot of people do this their entire lives, and it's a process of starting, stopping, and trying something else again and again and again. Pretty soon, their career is over, and they are left with a career of mediocrity where very little was achieved.

There are a lot of people out there who "dabble" and who never commit with anything. They try a little of this, then a little of that, but never really commit to their work. They may do the same thing with hobbies, relationships, and friends as well. They try something and enjoy it for some time then get frustrated and stop doing whatever it is and try something else. This is something that's very dangerous to do with your career because each time you start something new, you need to learn everything all over again. What occurs when you stick with something is it makes you incredibly strong over time:

- The more you learn about something and how to do it, the more efficient you are in the future.
- The more you do something, the more committed you are and the more you have invested.
- The more you do something, the less you can be shaken by problems.
- The more you do something, the more efficient you get with your actions.

When you do something over and over again, you become better and better and better at it. In your career the worst thing you can possibly do is "dabble" with anything. You need to be committed to your career and profession and push through. The reward for dabbling is a lot of different jobs, a lower salary over time, never reaching expert status in anything, and not being among the best. The reward for full scale massive commitment is becoming the best you can possibly be at anything.

I have tried a lot of sports in my time. These sports include golf, squash, badminton, and a whole host of others. What always occurs when I try one of these sports is I get good at them pretty fast. This is what happens to most people the first time they try a sport. When you start out at the sport, you're horrible and don't do well at it and it's difficult for you. However, very quickly most people get much better at whatever sport they are playing, until they plateau and stop getting better.

Then they need to practice and the gains from this practice aren't as great as the initial "spurt" that people experience when they first start doing something. For example, the first 10-20 times playing tennis you may improve very rapidly. You will enjoy this improvement and it will be very fun. However, then you will plateau and the improvement won't be as rapid and you may not even notice you're improving at all. It will take a lot more work to get to the next level than it took to improve initially. It won't be as fun for you, and you won't improve as much.

This is exactly where you should keep pushing and trying, and it's also exactly when many people stop. Not just at their jobs but at many things--relationships, jobs, and more.

When most people start a romantic relationship, everything is generally incredibly fun and uplifting for a period of time. We enjoy the person's company a great deal, and every time we see the person we feel like they're sharing something new with us and we are sharing something new with them. The two people may feel as if they are becoming closer and closer and getting to know each other better and better. They feel as if there is a tremendous bond between them, and there's a sense of growth and progress. Then, however, everything starts to slow down. The two sides get more familiar with each other. A fight occurs. The rapid growth and improvement in the relationship slows down.

This could be after a few weeks, or it could be after a few months for many people. However, this generally happens. At this point, many people decide to move on and find another relationship. They sabotage the relationship and believe it's something they're no longer interested in. They find another person and then repeat the process.

Again

And again.

And again.

The same thing happens with people and jobs. So many people go and start one job or another and they improve at it for some time. They will figure out a way to get a job in this profession or that, and manage to convince interviewers this is something they have wanted to do. These souls will move between numerous professions and may do this for years, decades, or their entire careers. Each time they try something new, they will initially declare it is their "dream job" and be incredibly enthusiastic about it. They will also experience a rapid improvement in their work. However, after the honeymoon period is over and when they stop growing rapidly, and when things start to get a little rough they will become frustrated again. Then they will become discouraged and give up. They will stop applying themselves and start thinking about doing something else. They will talk about how other jobs out there seem better suited to them. They will start fantasizing about doing another sort of job. Eventually, they will find themselves doing another job and then they will repeat the process.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Most of my career, I have worked directly with attorneys. Attorneys typically start their careers out inside of law firms. Working inside of a law firm requires attorneys to write down their hours at the end of each day, and to detail how many hours they have worked on a given client matter. The attorney is typically judged and evaluated by how many billable hours they work each year. Incredibly, this is most often more important to the employer than the quality of the work the attorney does. There are other pressures of working inside of law firms as well. These pressures include having to work for multiple attorneys, bringing in business, and more.

As a recruiter, one of the most common calls I received from attorneys was "I want to go in house." In house is working inside of corporation's legal department. Inside a corporation, attorneys typically don't have to worry about billable hours and they also do not have to worry about bringing in clients--the company is the client.

When the attorney starts work with the in house legal department, they are initially generally very happy with their job.

- They like where they work and they like the people they are working with.
- Whenever we start a new job, we also very typically get very positive feedback at first.
- People like us and it is fun.
- We are learning something new, it is fun and we are getting good feedback on many of our new assignments.
- It is fun meeting new people and learning new things.
- We are improving aspects of ourselves that we had not addressed before.

Nevertheless, after some time everything begins to slow down.

- The people are no longer as exciting.
- The work is not new and is no longer as exciting.
- The challenges and growth we experienced initially begin to go away and we are not growing every day.
- People may start to become critical of us.
- We may get a performance review that is not as complimentary of us as we would like.
- We may see negative things about the employer that we did not see before when we were interviewing and first started the job.

Attorneys who work inside of corporate legal departments have a whole host of other things they have to worry about that they may not have worried about when working for a law firm. They are still attorneys and many of the same problems and issues attorneys have in every job are still with them when they go in house. When an attorney first goes in house they are liable to say to themselves that they love their new job and it is wonderful, they should have done it sooner, and more. However, within months they start finding fault with their new job as well. While the anger about the job is about something different, they once again find themselves in a position of not liking what they are doing.

The attorney may then decide that they would prefer:

- working for the government
- working for a nonprofit
- working for a different type of corporation
- starting their own legal practice
- working overseas

You name it. The attorney will start looking for other places to work and other things to do. I have literally seen attorneys spend their entire career--decades or more--jumping around like this, trying different things. They start something and enjoy it for some time and then they stop it. Lots of people do this. In fact, many people do this their entire lives ...

I have seen people do this with relationships.

I have seen people do this with jobs.

I have seen people do this with hobbies.

All around us there are dabblers who are always trying this or that and will never, ever allow themselves to just settle down and get really, really good at something. The secret is that everything we do, regardless of what it may be, is going to get difficult and not as fun at some point, and we are not going to enjoy it as much as we did when we started doing it. It's at this point it's most important that we begin making the greatest effort of all, because once we push through this we go to the other side where we can make massive improvements. Then there will be more improvement until we reach a plateau again. Then we need to push through again when we reach a difficult point. Then we will need to push through yet again. And again. And again.

Why is it that so many people are dabblers? Why is it that so many people cannot push through when the going gets tough?

One of the biggest reasons for this is that many people absolutely thrive on positive reinforcement. When they first start a job they enjoy it tremendously and everyone is nice to them. They get better and better at the job and feel like they are growing. The people around them tell them they approve of them and their work. They get along with everyone in the office. They feel like they are continually improving and getting better and better ... the work is fun.

At some point, however, the drudgery sets in and nothing is as fun anymore. The positive reinforcement stops and we no longer feel as good about what we are doing anymore. This is when people quit and decide to move on to another job. People are motivated by progress, and progress requires constant reinforcement. What most people are missing is that progress is often right in front of them. It's when the landscape starts to get challenging in a new job, relationship, or hobby that the real opportunity for a breakthrough occurs.

Dabblers love constant positive feedback and when this feedback slows down they start to worry and find themselves getting frustrated. Dabblers by their very nature are never all that happy. In order to feel good about progress they are continually moving from one thing to another. When a dabbler encounters stress in his/her work, relationship, or something else, his/her solution is to look for greener pastures. This search for greener pastures is something that never ends because the secret is there are always going to be various stresses in any work environment.

The secret to long lasting happiness and doing exceptionally well at anything is to learn how to confront these stresses and push through. The saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough gets going" is something that applies to everything. In everything we do there comes a point when the positive reinforcement stops and it becomes harder and harder for us to make progress. It's at precisely this point that you need to start working harder and harder and harder so you can make the next breakthrough to go to the next level.

The greatest achievers in anything are the people who are able to push through and deal with the stress when things start to get a little difficult--any they always do. You need to learn how to push through and keep going, because the point where

things get boring or harder to do is the same point when most people start giving up and find other things to do. Incredibly, the people who face stresses like this decide to literally start over doing something else instead of continuing at something and pushing through to the other side where they might be successful. You need to push through this.

I'm in my late 30s and when I'm out and about in the community, at various conferences, and so forth I'm always meeting single women my age who've never been married. It's been happening a lot recently, and I like to make as many friends as I can everywhere I go. The interesting thing about meeting these women is many of them are extraordinarily attractive and years ago when they were in their 20s and early 30s could have married any man they chose. One girl I met even dated a guy who won a show called *The Apprentice* with Donald Trump.

When I meet these girls, I'm always wearing my wedding ring and within an hour or so of meeting them, almost all these girls confess to me they are looking for husbands, want to have children, and have a sense of urgency about getting married in the next year or two. They ask me if I know of anyone and advice about relationships as if I had some to give. The interesting thing about virtually every one of these girls I've met in the past several years--and there have been several--is that they all have a pattern of ending relationships with men just when things might have gone to the next level. That is, they are people who are "triggered" to end relationships. They move on when there are various stresses in the relationship. I have seen this pattern enough times that to me it is an indication there is something to it.

Many people end relationships when the stresses become too much. In the case of women who have never been married in their late 30s, the danger of them being triggered to end relationships due to stresses is they will never have children in many cases.

There are so many people out there who are constantly searching and looking for something and always want things to be as good as possible, for there never to be negative feedback in the environment and for them to always be happy. I'm not sure what it is; however, I would go so far as to say that there are lots of people out there who expect a job, relationship, or hobby to fulfill something inside of themselves they have been looking for forever. The truth is the job is never going to fulfill this and, instead, the person is going to need to be at peace with themselves. A job cannot necessarily bring people this sort of fulfillment. Notwithstanding, many people seem to believe that some part of themselves can be fulfilled through a job or something external.

Some time ago, I made the decision I wanted to start playing a lot of golf. I will never forget going into a golf store one day while I was looking at clubs and what the guy in the store said to me.

"Golf is a lifestyle. You need to play several times a week and you are only going to get better with a lot of practice over time."

When I started taking lessons the pro I was taking lessons with recommended I take a two hour lesson every Sunday for the rest of my life. In addition, he told me I should do everything within my power to play absolutely as much as possible during the week. What he meant, of course, was I would always be learning and always getting better and this would never, ever stop. This is how it is when you want to get good at something.

One of the biggest mistakes people make in their careers is they dabble and never start doing something with commitment. There are a lot of reasons for this, and the reasons have everything to do with your ability to start something and thrive on positive feedback then continue going even when the going appears to get tough.

Most people fail and quit because they don't like problems. Problems, however, are a part of life and they are something we all have. You cannot avoid problems, and they are going to be with you forever and throughout your career. You simply cannot avoid problems--you can run but you cannot hide from them. Problems are everywhere and they are all around us and we never can avoid them. The best thing you can do is to confront problems and take them on. This is the key to improving.

Confront problems and don't be a dabbler.

## **THE LESSON**

Don't be a dabbler, or someone who turns away in the face of stress. The secret to long-term happiness is to instead confront and push through these stress factors. Don't be discouraged by difficulties, but find ways to persist and deal with the stress. Confronting problems head-on is the key to improvement, and will take you much further than the dabblers who fail to approach their careers with commitment.

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