



See Things The Way They Are

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

During the summer of my second year of law school, I worked in a law firm in New York City. One day, I was in the library of the law firm, and I found a report about the law firm which had been written by an outside consulting company. This is what strategic advisors and various consultants often do for various organizations such as law firms, accounting firms, and others. They analyze the facts, numbers, people, attitudes, market, and other things about an organization, analyze the market they are operating in, and provide advice based on the fact that they find.

The facts these consulting organizations provide are often not that fun for people to be aware of. They are full of negatives and information many people would simply not want to hear. However, it's the fact these reports provide such negative information often makes them sought out. These reports can often cost the organization requesting them millions of dollars to have done. The idea is the organization that receives these reports will be able to see how things actually are and then act on this advice.

- Not how the organization would like things to be.
- Not how the organization thinks things should be.
- Not how the organization thinks things are.

But as they are.

In fact, many organizations are able to make incredibly transformative turnarounds based on studying these reports. These reports allow them to look in the mirror, so to speak, in order to really understand everything that's going on with them. They can see their weaknesses and their strengths and act on this. This is something we all need to be able to do, and the more we look at the reality of what is, the more we can improve, and the better we can do.

As I started to read this report sitting in the law firm library, I became very depressed. Attorneys typically will work the summer in a law firm after their second year of law school and then hopefully end up spending the rest of their career at the law firm after law school (at least this used to be "the ideal"). As I started reading about the law firm I was going to work in, I couldn't believe many of the things I was hearing. For example, the report said:

- most people didn't like working in the law firm,
- that the law firm had no culture,
- there was a perception that there was very little opportunity in the law firm,
- that the law firm appeared to be "dying" and losing business,
- that the management didn't appear to know what they were doing,
- that most associates in the law firm were looking for other jobs,
- that the staff felt under appreciated and under paid,
- that the firm didn't have a leading reputation in the community.

The criticisms literally went on and on for over 250 pages if I remember correctly. These criticisms I was reading were, in many senses, all true; however, they weren't the sorts of things you would see unless you looked hard for them. Here, however, everything was laid right out in the open for everyone to see.

The law firm I spent my summer working in, around 15 years later, ended up collapsing and going completely out of business. When I'd worked in the law firm, it was the oldest law firm in New York City. The collapse of the oldest law firm in New York City was a dramatic implosion, and I remember at the time many of the things were being said about the law firm after its collapse were also in the report I found in the library that day.

Interestingly, the report in the library when I found it appeared to have been scarcely read. The law firm probably commissioned it at the time because they felt like it was something they should have, but never acted upon the advice that was in the report. Instead, they simply put the report in a corner of a library and didn't pay attention to it at all. I bet if the law firm had paid attention to what was in the report, they might be in different straits today. In fact, the law firm might have ended up surviving instead of going out of business.

One of the best management tools out there is the ranking of people, grades, and so forth. When people are ranked against one another and measured against one another they can see how they are doing. The ranking of people against one another then provides them room to grow and improve and get better and better at what they are doing. Organizations that don't rank people often end up keeping the performance of their people down more so than they would if they, instead, ranked the people within their organizations. Ranking is something that can really drive us to improve.

However, one of the the biggest mistakes that many of us make is avoiding being ranked, judged, and so forth. Instead, we seek to avoid knowing the truth out there about how we stack up and keep ourselves in a "comfort zone" as long as we can. The comfort zone is among the most dangerous things you possibly can be in because the longer you try and keep yourself in a comfort zone, the more issues and problems you are likely to have in the future. You need to understand what's going on out there and be aware of the challenges you are facing in order to constantly improve.

When we think about dying companies, dying governments, and others the image we have is of leaders who surround themselves with people who are likely to provide them with positive feedback and information instead of negative information. Most of us want to hear positive, and not negative, things.

One of the greatest things that happens when we are aware of how we stack up and how we are doing is that it will allow us

to move forward. We always need to be moving forward in every single thing we do and should never stand still and not move. To be successful, you always need to make progress going forward. You shouldn't seek out comfort spots and, instead, should do everything within your power to continually operate outside of a comfort zone and move forward. Continuing to do something in the absence of significant progress going forward is not something that's in your best interest. You need to constantly push forward. You need to measure where you are now and also where you want to go and where you want to be.

You need to see things as they are. There is nothing more important for your career and life than seeing things as they are.

The more you see things as they are, the more you are going to have the ability to improve where you're at and where you're going. The more you can improve where you are and where you are going, the better your future is going to look. You always want to make your future better than your past. The best way to do this is to have a concrete program for making sure that you know the way things are.

See things the way they are. When you see things the way they are, you are infinitely better off all the time. It's extremely important that you see people, places, and things the way they actually are because the second you see things the way they really are, you will know where you stand. So many people live their lives and careers in a protective shell without seeing things the way they actually are. You need to see things the way they are.

THE LESSON

Ranking people, assets, opportunities, etc. is one of the most powerful practices you can implement. Ranking people against one another motivates them to grow, improve, and get better at what they do. Ranking naturally motivates people to improve, and companies who fail to do so often find themselves mired in mediocrity. Many people, however, mistakenly avoid rankings and the implied judgment of their abilities. You must use rankings as a means of escaping your protective shell and seeing the truth about yourself and your situation.

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