

Avoid the Lawyer Mentality

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Steven Covey wrote in a June 2007 article in Entrepreneur Magazine:

Consider the example of Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett in acquiring McLane Distribution--a \$23 billion company--from Wal-Mart. A deal of this size involving public companies would typically take several months to complete and cost several million dollars in due diligence. But because both parties operated with high trust, this deal was made with one two-hour meeting and a handshake. In less than a month, it was completed. Buffett wrote in his annual report: "We did no 'due diligence.' We knew everything would be exactly as Wal-Mart said it would be--and it was." Imagine--less than one month and no due diligence costs. High trust, high speed, low cost.

I love this example and recently heard Steven Covey give a speech, citing the same example again. Covey uses this example to show that it is incredibly important to have trust in business and that this can reduce the costs of transactions and make it easier to advance. I, however, like this example for another reason as well--a reason that I feel is far more significant: This example shows that without focusing on minutiae, and arguing back and forth about innumerable small details, a great deal more can be accomplished. In fact, when you stop looking at small details and, instead, look at the big picture and the person or organization behind the big picture, you can often accomplish more and in a much better way.

An obsession with details can be a very dangerous thing. Lawyers, for example, make their living obsessing over details. While this has its place, and may often be necessary, obsessing over details is not always the smartest thing when it comes to your life and your job search. Instead of focusing on every small detail, you are often better off approaching things from another state of mind, one that takes into account the big picture, and keeps people, places and things all working together smoothly. More importantly, when you are in this state of mind you will seek to work with, spend time with and be someone who has a fundamental trust and interest in just doing the right thing.

I am a lawyer and I work with lawyers all day, every day. I speak with lawyers looking for jobs. I speak with the numerous lawyers who I work with. I speak and communicate with the former lawyers who have worked for me. I speak with lawyers who represent me. I am up to my eyeballs in lawyers and I have seen and dealt with them so much that I cannot believe it. Everywhere I turn, I am getting a contract from a lawyer, an email from a lawyer, a voicemail from a lawyer, a job application from a lawyer, a threat from a lawyer ... it literally never ends. And the thing that makes all of this so ridiculous is that I was trained in law school and by attorneys to do the very same thing. For years I had this or that lawyer stuff drilled into me. It was incessant. The whole lawyer personality and way of approaching work is incredibly polarizing and dangerous to your job search.

When you start focusing on small details, you act in a way that demands your corresponding action, agreement, or so forth only if one or more conditions about something are met. You give a bit only if a little bit is given. This can hinder progress and prevent growth. To keep your career and life moving forward you should avoid this sort of lawyer mentality.

THE LESSON

Obsession with details can prove extremely negative; rather than focus on details, you would be much better served by a frame of mind that emphasizes the big picture and keeps things running smoothly. In focusing on the details, however, you make your work and success contingent on a list of conditions, hindering your growth.