

Do Not Create Too Many Rules

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of the biggest mistakes people make when they are looking for a job, working in a job, and in life is this: They have too many rules.

- They have rules about the jobs they can apply for.
- They have rules about how they apply for jobs.
- They have rules about where they can apply for jobs.
- They have rules about whether they will or will not use recruiters.
- They have rules about how many jobs they apply for.
- They have rules about the type of work they will do.
- They have rules about the hours they will work.
- They have rules about the wages they will start making.
- They have rules about the sort of health insurance they need to receive.
- They have rules about the reputation of the employer they are working for.
- They have rules about the diversity of the employer they are working for.
- They have rules about the challenge of the job they are working in.
- They have rules about the vacation policies their employer should offer.
- They have rules about the challenge their job should offer.
- They have rules about the sorts of people they will be working with.
- They have rules about the style of the people they will be working with.
- They have rules about the accomplishments that people they work with should have.
- They have rules about the academic degrees the people they work with should have.
- They have rules about the material possessions the people they work with should have.
- They have rules about the neighborhoods the people they work with should live in.
- They have rules about whether or not the people they work with should have families.
- They have rules about the organizations the people they work with should belong to.
- They have rules about the race the people they work with should be.
- They have rules about the training they should get on the job.
- They have rules about the attractiveness of the people they work with.
- They have rules about the religion of the people they work with.

This list is probably less than 10% of the sorts of rules that you have about what your current or next job should be. We make up so many rules for what should exist where we work and in the work we do. These rules are constant and we continually create numerous, numerous rules about what our jobs should be like. We also do this with our lives. We believe we should be more wealthy, more religious or spiritual, have more friends, have closer intimate relationships and more. We, in fact, continually create rule after rule for ourselves and about what we desire and want for ourselves. The problem with this line of thinking is that it prevents us from ever finding fulfillment in what we do right now.

For most of my entire time growing up, both of my parents were single. It was amazing to me watching them go in and out of various relationships because after each relationship one would say something like, "I need someone who is more educated." The next relationship they were in they would find someone who was educated. When this relationship would end they would say something like, "I need to find someone who is not so interested in ideas and is more interested in sports and taking care of their body." The next relationship they would find someone who was very outgoing with sports. When that relationship ended, they would say something like, "I need someone who knows how to relax." They would get into another relationship and, in my mother's case, she found a guy who liked to watch television while eating all of his meals. Then she said, "I need someone who has better manners," when that relationship ended. To this day, I see my parents coming up with impossible combinations of rules for who their ideal mate should be and the rules are "refreshed" and modified and added to as each relationship ends and another begins.

For the close to 40 years I've known my parents, they've been making new rules about mates on and off at least once a year. I'm not being critical of them for doing this because we all do it. We constantly making new rules about so many things in our lives. We make these rules over and over and over. We constantly creating one rule or another about how something should be this or that in order for things to be as we feel they should be. If the world doesn't match what we seek, then we choose not to feel good about ourselves, feel some sort of angst, and aren't happy.

The result of these rules is they serve to isolate us in many respects. The rules give us reasons for not feeling like everything is perfect and that something is wrong. The rules prevent us from working on what's in front of us at the moment and making the most of it and being happy. The rules separate us from people, jobs, and opportunities. A major key to happiness in life and success in your chosen calling is doing everything within your power to not have so many rules. The more rules you have, the less happy you will generally be. Rules are something that create a blueprint for how we believe our lives should be. The more blueprints we have about the way life should be, and the less our life conditions match these blueprints, the less happy we will be.

Several years ago, I had a mix of people who were very young and others who were quite older (in their 60s) working for our company. In our company's younger days, the young people were extremely enthusiastic about it. Desks were doors, for example, and we used the area where a door handle should have been for cords. The young employees went out after work several times a week. We had a pool table that doubled as a ping pong table in the office. A foosball table. Darts. In general, the office was an extremely fun place to work and had the atmosphere of a carnival. The company attracted the best young people and young people loved working for us because we were young and energetic and quite excited about the world and doing very well. In the 2001 recession, our revenues continued rocketing up. For the young people in our company, it was a great place to work and matched their expectations about what a young California company with a strong online strategy should be.

As the company grew, we started hiring older people who had a lot of experience and in some cases, had retired and were coming back to work. These people brought a lot of experience to the table but didn't share the same enthusiasm for working for a younger company.

One day, I heard one of our older employees, in their 60s I believe, arguing with one of our star younger employees who was much more intelligent than the older employee. I couldn't believe what the older employee said to the younger employee: "If you were so talented, you wouldn't have to work in a small company like this and would be working in a large company like I did when I was at your age!"

This argument was amazing to me. Essentially, what the older employee was saying, was that it was not a good thing to be working at a smaller company. His idea and his model for the world was that it was a bad thing to work at a small company instead of a large company. I could tell the older employee wasn't happy with their job but I never knew it was for this reason. In effect, the older employee was trying to share with the younger employee a "rule" about how he should feel about his job based on the size of the company he was working at. We all have these rules. These rules control so completely for many of us how we feel about our careers and lives that it's profound. People believe they need to work at a certain place in order to be happy. Once someone works in this or that place, they believe they need to be doing a certain type of work there in order to be happy. Once they do this certain type of work, they believe they need to be making a certain amount of money. The list goes on and on ...

I can say unequivocally that the smartest people I've known in my life have most often been the ones who are the most unhappy. The reason for this, I believe, is due to the fact that these smart people are continually using their intelligence to create rules and not feel happy. They look at the world around them and can see all sorts of reasons they shouldn't feel fulfilled and happy. This thought process then ends up making them continually feel unhappy and unfulfilled with the world around them.

When I grew up in Detroit, people always seemed to be comparing this or that to something in a large city. They would say "this is a New York-style art gallery," or "this food is just as good as California cuisine in Napa Valley," or this is similar to that. This comparing and contrasting is also a form of rule making and it's something we all do, I think. We say to ourselves that where we live must be just as good as somewhere else. We do this with everything. Our jobs. Our mates. Our lives ...

There is nothing wrong with having certain standards about the sort of work you would like to do. There's also nothing wrong with having standards for your job. However, there is a tremendous amount wrong when these are not standards but rules which control whether or not we find the job we are after and whether or not we can enjoy the jobs we are in. Your life and career will never be fulfilled if you have too many rules governing it.

One of the strangest things to me is every time I go to New York City and spend time with connected and wealthy people. I love New York City and I love the people there in so many ways. However, unlike any place in the world I've ever encountered, the people there have learned to create so many rules. There are rules about where the best places to live are. Rules about the best places to eat. Rules about the best places to sit in restaurants. Rules about the best clubs to go to. Moreover, what's so completely confusing about New York is these rules are always changing like the ether. A rule about something one day is completely different the next.

A giant secret to being successful in your career and job is making sure that you have rules that empower you and don't cause you frustration. Rules about how to get a job and how to enjoy the work you're doing are something that can cause you a tremendous amount of harm. You need to choose rules that empower you and give you the strength and power to push forward and enjoy what you do. Not rules that hold you back and continually cause you frustration.

THE LESSON

It's important to establish rules for yourself that empower rather than frustrate you. Creating rules about your goals prevents you from finding fulfillment in your current situation. Rules create the impression that your life is imperfect, and you will never find happiness in your life and career. Instead, make sure you have rules that motivate you to move forward rather than hold you back.