

## Do Not Be Arrogant

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

The longer I have been on this earth, the more I have come to realize that the most arrogant people are often the most uncertain of themselves. Out of insecurity, many people decide that it is important to project an image that they are better than others, and to come across as if they know exactly what they are doing at all times; nothing bothers them; and they know more than everybody else.

A few months ago I was at a seminar in Australia and there was a young man, no older than 25, sitting behind me with his wife. I often try getting to know the people sitting around me at seminars and when I am out in the world in general, because I learn so much from every new person I meet. I find that most people are very eager and enthusiastic to meet other people, and it is always a great way to gain new perspectives.

During a break in the seminar my friend and I went up and spoke to one of the presenters. We chatted with him and he immediately started telling us about how his company was a leader in employee retention, the best at various things, how incredibly important he was, and what a leader he was. I smiled at the man as I listened to him boast about himself, and I complimented him for being so special and successful. Then I said: "That is absolutely fascinating. I'd love to learn more about you and your business. May I have your card?"

I was doing some simple networking because I like to make friends and get to know people wherever I go. If truth be told, he was the biggest asshole I had ever met and I really was not interested in getting his card or learning more about him and his business at a later date.

"No," he said matter of factly, "I do not have a card."

I was taken aback, not by what the man said, but by how he said it--his tone; it was as if he had a business card but he was too important to give it to me. *I do have a card but not for you ...* is what he was actually saying. My friend, standing right next to me heard it the same way. I followed with a natural response:

"Excuse me?"

"No, you cannot have a card," he said. He looked at me dead center and then turned around and walked away. I was pretty astonished by the man's behavior and had never met anyone like him. He was, to be blunt, the biggest asshole I had ever met.

My friend and I puzzled over this for those few days at the seminar. The guy was Malaysian, perhaps he hated Americans. No, that did not seem right. What had we done? He ignored us anytime we were near him. When various groups formed he went out of his way to avoid us. I run businesses that count among their clientele out-of-work attorneys, and I have seen scores of angry people throughout the years--but this guy took the cake.

Our meeting really left a bad taste in my mouth.

Then, a week or so later, I was on another small retreat taking a class from some Indian monks in Fiji, and the same man was at the seminar. One day at lunch I went up and sat next to him and a couple of his coworkers (who he apparently supervised) and said hello and smiled. Both of the coworkers looked at me and smiled and said hello and exchanged some pleasantries; one even attempted to start a conversation with me. Immediately, this guy (who had not said hello to me) interrupted and started lecturing his coworkers about something they needed to do for him when they got back to Malaysia. He refused to make any eye contact with me the entire meal. After around 15 minutes, his coworkers realized they were running late and quickly got up and left me and the asshole sitting at the table together.

I had heard him talking to them about some sort of meditation technique, so I proceeded to ask him about another meditation technique that I knew about, which I have been practicing for years.

"I really like this particular meditation technique," I said, trying to make conversation. "What do you think about it?"

"I think you'd have to be a complete dumb ass and idiot to use that technique. It's been disproved." He then got up and walked away.

I was feeling a little bad about myself after these bizarre encounters with the man. Frankly, I was starting to be unsure of what I might have done to deserve such incredibly horrible treatment. What made it more disturbing was that the guy appeared to have developed a little entourage that he palled around with consistently. Granted they were people who did not appear to have a lot of self confidence, but nonetheless, they all seemed to like him, so it must have been something I did wrong. What had I done to provoke such rage?

I was about a day from the end of the trip when my wife told me that she had been speaking with a [well known actor](#) and actress during a diving trip that day, and that they had mentioned that this particular guy had been incredibly rude to them as well. In fact, they were both extremely puzzled because they were used to people kissing their ass all the time--but this guy went out of his way to be mean to them and make them feel bad about themselves. They both said something like *they meet a lot of assholes in Hollywood and this guy takes the cake*. Had we not been on an isolated island on Fiji, both these people would have been followed by a gang of photographers and reporters, watching their every move and making them feel really important. But here was this person doing everything in his power to make these people feel horrible every chance he got.

What I realized was that this particular guy had decided at some point in his life that if he felt threatened by anyone, he needed to be rude and exude extreme arrogance in response. This man made clear to me that the nature of arrogance is nothing more than insecurity. The most insecure people also tend to be the most arrogant. This is just the way it is.

Obviously this guy was incredibly insecure. Fascinated still by his behavior, I kept probing to find out who he was and what

he did. The more I probed the more I realized that he was just about all smoke and mirrors, and in reality not anyone of importance, wealth, or anything at all. He was on a retreat where there were a lot of very important people and he had cultivated an attitude in an attempt to really try and look important. I got the sense that he believed, he needed to be something he was not.

One of the more interesting things to me has always been Hollywood and the way people often try to act important here. They believe that to be famous they need to show an attitude of incredible arrogance and to look better than people. Because there are so many films, shows, and so forth filmed around Los Angeles all the time, we always list our house with location scouts. It is great money and in most cases they pay us over \$5,000 a day for filming. I get up at 6:00 am for work and am back in the house at about 7:00 pm or so each evening and they have come and gone by that time. It's great.

A couple of months ago they were filming this show *Dollhouse* for FOX at our house. I was at home that day and I walked right by the lead star of the show, a very beautiful woman. I said hello to her and she literally walked right by me and did not say a word. It was pretty remarkable how rude she was. My thought is that this woman will probably not experience long-term success because this level of rudeness is not something that will benefit her over the long run. People who use power to portray an "I'm better than you" attitude generally do not do well.

And this brings me to you. On the road to success the worst thing you can do is act as if you think you are better than everybody else. I have witnessed so many people hurt themselves and others through arrogance. Arrogant behavior broadcasts to the world that you are weak and afraid, afraid for people to see who you really are. It can be detrimental to your career as well as your personal life.

If you hold yourself out as being on a high pedestal, the first reaction that people will have is to want to push you down. If you do not hold yourself as being on a high pedestal, you will not attract this sort of negative attention. You want to be supported, not pushed down. People do not hire people who try and act better than others. They hire people they want to help.

One of the greatest skills we can possess is the ability to make people empathize with us, sympathize with us and, most importantly, want to help us. Some of the most powerful people in the business world have developed an extraordinary ability to make others identify with them, and even feel sorry for them. There is no sense in being arrogant: If others want to help you, the odds of success are going to be much higher. Developing a personality that makes people want to help you can reap huge rewards for you in every area of your life.

Work to develop empathy amongst your peers, not resentment or anger. The more people can empathize with you, the better off you will be. Exuding arrogance is an invitation to others to push you down and it is also a sign of weakness.

#### **THE LESSON**

Arrogance is a trait of the weak and insecure; one of the biggest career mistakes you can make is to act as though you are better than those around you, broadcasting to the world that you are afraid for people to see you as you actually are. Instead, try to hone the skill of making people empathize with you and want to help you. Empathy is a much more beneficial quality to instill in your peers than anger or resentment.

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