

You Need to Stop Competing and Seeing Differences Between You and Others

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

If you are [looking for a job](#), trying to improve in your current job, or simply wish to experience a better life, there's one thing you need to do: *You need to be friends with everyone you meet in business, and stop competing and seeing differences.* This is a statement that falls on deaf ears for most people. In fact, this is the exact opposite of the way most of us think. Instead, we view others as competitors and the slices of pie as limited. We view opportunities as few and limited, and feel the need to compete for what little there is.

What are the rewards for looking and seeing commonality between you and others? They are incredible. In the year 2000, I started a [legal recruiting firm](#). I didn't start the firm until around March of that year. I had no legal recruiting experience and knew absolutely nothing about the market. Since I'd been a practicing attorney for years, the fact that I was now recruiting seemed almost surreal to me in many respects. I'd decided to just enter a zone where I didn't care what happened to me. When you are in the recruiting business, what typically happens is that [law firms](#) will call you in a very formal way to tell you they have no interest in a candidate of yours. The conversations will typically last no more than 30 to 45 seconds.

"We are calling to let you know we have no interest in John Smith," they might say.

"Thank you," would be the standard response.

After several weeks of this, I began to feel the entire situation was somewhat absurd. This is what recruiters do all over the country. I decided the best thing I could do was mix it up.

"We're calling to let you know we have no interest in John Smith," a caller might say. The callers were typically women in their mid-20's to early 30's who were called "recruiting coordinators" inside law firms.

"You know, I was just outside having my third Diet Coke in the past hour and I realized I haven't heard your voice in some time. I really like your voice, how are you?"

"Fine," they might say, still a little stiff.

"I'm not sure how much longer I'm going to be doing this recruiting thing. It's really exhausting. Law firms are really uptight. Do you enjoy making all these calls? It must be a real buzz kill just calling a bunch of recruiters all day. I cannot believe you and I are doing the jobs we're doing."

This is what I would do with every caller. Eventually, I would get into my personal life and they would start to talk about themselves as well. A few months into this, I was astonished when some of these women called me on the way home from work on their cell phones just to chat about random stuff, unrelated to work. One woman's husband was going to be building a deck on the back of her house that weekend; one man who was a recruiting coordinator was going sailing; another girl was leaving her job because she wanted to ride a motorcycle across the United States.

I did the same thing with my candidates. I actually ended up marrying one of them a few years later. My candidates and I would talk about the most random stuff. Only about 1-2% of my time on the phone with my candidates and law firms was ever about anything having to do with actual business. I enjoyed what I was doing and made numerous friends. I looked at the entire process as something that was meant to be fun, establishing connections and nothing more.

Prior to [becoming an attorney](#), I'd been an asphalt sealing contractor around Michigan for over 7 years. Much of my job involved going door-to-door and selling my service. Someone I'd never seen before would answer the door and I might say something like:

"Hi. I'm here to sell you the service of putting some asphalt sealer on your driveway but I'm not in a very good mood right now. My girlfriend from school is working in Washington, DC, and she just broke up with me so she can see other people this summer. I'm not too happy about it." This is the last thing people expect from a salesman.

I would show up at the home of the person, well dressed, and looking professional, and invariably the person would start talking to me about my personal situation and offering me advice. I would never have to sell the person anything. I would slip in how much the service was going to cost and the person would always agree. The next year, I would show up at the person's front door and they might ask me about my personal life and I would tell them what was going on, and they would do the same thing. Using this particular method of selling asphalt sealing, I was able to become probably the largest residential asphalt sealing contractor in Michigan in less than a couple of years. It is all about treating people as your friend.

I never talked about the service. I just disarmed myself, exposed a vulnerability of some sort and let the person start consoling me and offering advice. I liked getting the advice.

In the [legal recruiting](#) industry, I was amazed at how fast the business grew by me just mellowing out and being disarmed. By the end of 2000, with less than 7 full months of recruiting under my belt, I had made 29 placements, which had generated over \$1,000,000 in fees. The most prestigious and well known [recruiting firms](#) at the time all wanted me to merge my recruiting firm with their recruiting firm. The phones were ringing off the hook with referrals and people wanting to work for me. I had people flying to Los Angeles to meet with me and seek my advice about how to [get a job](#) from places as diverse as New York and San Francisco. It was as if I could do no wrong in the work I was in. None of this was just due to the economy being really good, either. In the year 2002, I ended up placing every single candidate I worked with. The legal market was horrible in the year 2002.

I am telling you this to show the power of chilling out, going with the flow, and treating everyone you deal with as a friend and not a competitor. Make yourself vulnerable and figure out how to deal with everyone you encounter in a pleasant, happy way. Your career depends on this. You have no competitors. The world is yours for the taking, but you cannot take it in a way, which views the world as having limited resources and opportunities.

the competition in law firms to become partners has always interested me, because I am an attorney and also have spent the majority of my career in the legal industry. When most people think of becoming a partner in a law firm, they view the competition as internal between them and different attorneys in the law firm also competing to be partners. The young attorneys almost invariably view themselves as competing for a limited slice of pie. The idea in most law firms is they can only make a limited number of partners per year. Accordingly, the attorneys inside the law firm will work as much as they possibly can and play one political game after another to get the people they are competing with off of the partnership track, getting themselves ahead. The competition these attorneys go through with each other can last years and it's brutal.

Few attorneys in this competition really ever step back and take the time to realize what they are competing for: *They are competing for a share of the law firm's profits.* In this respect, however, law firms only make money when they have clients who are willing to pay for the law firm's services. The easiest way any of these attorneys could virtually guarantee she will make partner, would be to bring in a tremendous amount of business and concentrate on this the second he/she got out of [law school](#). An attorney with enough business can work in virtually any law firm out there, and they will be welcomed as a partner in almost any law firm.

If you have enough clients, it doesn't matter where you go to school and it doesn't matter how good you are at political games within your firm. The person who brings in the money and the client is the one who ultimately controls everything. In fact, one of the largest law firm collapses of 2009 (Heller Ehrman) happened because one partner with a tremendous amount of business left the firm. As a January 26, 2009 story in the *Wall Street Journal* recounted:

Heller's management focused on trying to merge with a bigger, stronger competitor, concluding that it was the only way the firm could stay alive amid continuing lawyer defections. At a shareholder gathering last spring in Colorado Springs, Colo., Heller's chairman, Mr. Larrabee, said the firm had plenty of choices of merger partners. Last summer, Baker & McKenzie LLP, one of the nation's largest firms, emerged as a serious candidate. But after weeks of negotiations, the deal cratered in August, partly because of business conflicts. Heller lawyers had sued many of Baker's clients.

A new suitor soon emerged. On Aug. 21, Heller gathered 40 key lawyers at the San Francisco Ritz-Carlton to discuss its potential white knight: Mayer Brown LLP, an 1,800-lawyer firm. The mood was upbeat.

But another problem cropped up. Robert Fram and Robert Haslam, whose intellectual-property group was among the firm's highest grossing, had said they were considering heading to another firm. Heller attorneys implored Messrs. Fram and Haslam to stay. If they left, some lawyers believed, the Mayer deal would crumble.

M. Laurence Popofsky, a Heller lifer who was the firm's chairman from 1988 to 1993, recalls telling Mr. Fram over lunch: "People's pensions are in jeopardy. Employees are at risk....If you do this and don't give the merger a chance, you will hurt an awful lot of people."

Mr. Fram says Mr. Popofsky and others tried to persuade him to stay. But his team, he says, didn't want to join Mayer and then jump ship if they were unhappy. "We didn't feel like that was something we were ethically comfortable doing," he says. On Aug. 29, Mr. Fram informed Heller that he was leaving.

Here, one of the oldest and most respected law firms in the United States collapsed primarily due to the departure of an important partner. The importance of having business inside of a law firm is paramount and of incredible importance for an attorney's success. The entire success of a law firm can hinge on whether or not it has business. What this means is the competition inside law firms between people seeking to be partners doesn't really have to be internal. The only thing the associates seeking to be partner need to do to guarantee their success is go out and get as much business as they can. Indeed, their true success or failure is almost entirely based upon their ability to bring in business. There are no internal opponents and no external ones either. There is a huge pie of opportunity out there (business waiting to be claimed) and all someone needs to do is go out into the world and claim this opportunity for themselves. The attorneys engaged in brutal competition with one another at law firms all over the country would be well-served to step back and realize all they have to do is stop competing with the people inside their own law firm and go out into the world and get clients.

You need to understand you have no opponents. Your success will largely be determined by your ability to go into the world, find commonality, and make friends with the people around you. Establish commonalities and don't look for differences.

Using this one simple idea in business can have profound rewards. It can literally change your career and life. You must abolish from your mind the idea that the people you deal with in your career and in business are your competition. You must eradicate the idea from your mind that you even have any competition. A quote from Wallace Wattles in *The Science of Getting Rich* is instructive in this regard:

Intelligent Substance will make things for you, but it will not take things away from someone else and give them to you. You must get rid of the thought of competition. You are to create, not compete, for what is already created. You do not want to have to take anything away from any one. You do not want to drive sharp bargains. You do not have to cheat, or take advantage. You do not need to let any man work for less than he earns. You do not have to covet the property of others, or look at it with wishful eyes; no man has anything of which you cannot have the like, and that without taking what he has away from him. You are to become a creator, not a competitor; you are going to get what you want, but in such a way that when you get it every other man will have more than he has right now.

It's easy to find enemies out there. It's easy to be suspicious of people. It's easy to not take extra time with people. It's easy to find reasons not to be friends with people. This is what most of what the world does. This is what we are trained to do. We look for differences. We want to find how people are different than us and not the same. This is a path that's not going to take you anywhere and won't help you. If you want to experience the most incredible success you have ever known, if you want your career and life to change, you need to find commonalities between you and everyone you come in contact with. People will open doors for you when they identify with you.

Over the past several years, I've watched Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen rise from nothing to become two of the most important and respected best selling authors of all time with their *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series of books. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was the #1 book on the *New York Times*' best seller list for over 100 weeks and is one of the best selling books of all time. Canfield and Hansen have made millions of dollars through the sale of these books, and have also done countless other projects related to these books.

The publication of these books has rocketed them from small time to international stardom practically overnight. I study success for a living so I can share it with you and change your life. I've been to several of Canfield and Hansen's seminars because they typically have pretty good speakers and are somewhat interesting. One of Hansen's most popular seminars is his Mega Book Marketing Seminar, where hundreds of people spend three days learning how they can hopefully write and

sell a best selling book. Hansen has been doing this seminar for years and each year gets up and does a Power Point presentation about what a great marketer he is due to the incredible sales of this book. Sometimes his partner, Canfield, gets up and shows a photo copy of a million dollar check he received from a publisher. On the several occasions I've seen Canfield speak, he also always shows a picture of his house and tells everyone how it cost \$5,000,000.

I like these guys and they really do seem to have a bit of an interest in helping people. Canfield is also featured in the movie *The Secret* where he talks about how he was able to make his book popular by landing an article in the *National Enquirer* about his book.

Yesterday, I found some marketing inside a magazine sent to me called *Radio-TV Interview Report* and saw a testimonial from Canfield and Hansen. Essentially, what this magazine does is allow authors to advertise the fact that they are available for radio and television ads if producers or anyone it interested in interviewing them. The testimonial they put in this magazine really threw me off for a reason I will share with you in a moment:

We've done several things for marketing which worked well, and advertising in *Radio-TV Interview Report* was one of the most effective tools we have used. When our book was first published, no one knew who we were. But all that changed after appearing on hundreds of radio and television talk shows. We averaged anywhere from 3 to 4 radio phone interviews a day for that first year. We're convinced that this ongoing barrage of radio and television publicity helped create the word-of-mouth necessary for our book to become a national best seller!

Our ads in *Radio-TV Interview Report* helped us hit #1 on the New York Times best seller list, and we've stayed there for 100 weeks and counting! But none of that would have happened had we not been willing to do several interviews a day every day on stations large and small--a commitment we continue to do to this day. We highly recommend *RTIR* whenever we advise authors and speakers who want to get publicity easily and inexpensively.

Despite having attended a few of their seminars, this was the first time I realized they had grown their business so fast through advertising in this particular publication. Notwithstanding, what's so interesting to me about this is, according to Canfield and Hansen, most of their success was due to simply chatting on the phone with various radio stations across the country. This is no different than a major cause of the success I experienced as a recruiter or asphalt contractor. When you just mellow out and do everything you can to start relating to people and connecting with them, a lot of stuff happens. If you think about it, three to four radio interviews a day takes a lot of time. In fact, this is how it looks like they spent the substantial majority of their time for at least a year. The key to their success, then, was establishing affinity with others. There is nothing standoffish about this. This ability to connect with people rocketed them to having one of the best selling books of all time.

One of the easiest ways to get a job is to establish lines of communication with the hiring personnel or people who work for the employer you want to work with. Once you establish communication, having the people you are working with feel comfortable and develop an affinity for you is even more important. Once you have achieved affinity and communication, then you are not only in a good position in terms of getting a job, but can excel in the new position as well.

It's very easy for me to tell the relative health of companies and firms. When you go into a firm and see people getting along very well, joking, and having a good time, you are generally in a successful company. The reason is because the people inside the company are communicating, and feel comfortable with one another. When you go inside a company and there doesn't appear to be solid communication between people and groups of people, you are most often in a company that's in trouble to some degree.

Having open lines of communication is among the most important thing you can possibly do, and is something that will consistently get and keep you employed. Be friendly with everyone you meet. Stop looking for differences, and do everything within your power to find affinity with other people. This will change your career permanently and take you to a far different place.

Read More About Not Trying to Identify with The Interviewer and Company During the Interview:

- [The Importance of Fitting In](#)
- [Be Vulnerable and Authentic](#)