

## You Need to Be in the Right Environment

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

For the past several years my wife and I have kept a saltwater aquarium. We did not get one of these intentionally, but when we moved into a new house several years ago, it had a saltwater tank built into the living room wall. Outside, there was a huge Koi pond with waterfalls. We could not watch television and enjoy the house if we had a bunch of dying fish, so we immediately found a fish service.

In each house I have owned over the past decade, the previous owner had a series of hobbies that I took over upon purchasing the home. Before the one with the fish tank, we had a house with a ton of rose bushes in the front yard--hundreds of them. When I would come and go, it was not uncommon to see groups of Japanese and other tourists taking pictures directly in front of the house. I can even recall stopping on a few occasions to help people with their cameras and so forth on the way to work in the morning.

Both the fish aquarium and the roses needed a tremendous amount of care and work.

The previous owner of the house with the roses had been the President of the Pasadena Rose Society. He had met another woman who was a rose aficionado, left his wife, and moved to Santa Fe where he carried on a relationship built around roses. The divorce forced the sale of his house. And that is how I got the house with all the roses. There were literally hundreds of rose varieties and the gardeners would come once a week, working most of the day on them. I lived in the house for a few months before I ever received a bill. The roses required constant trimming and watering at different times of the day, various amounts of shade or no shade, fertilizing, and all sorts of other things. Those owners even had a special refrigerator in the house for young roses.

One time I switched gardeners because I thought the existing gardener was too expensive. Within five or six weeks, the roses stopped looking good, and some started to die. I called the old gardener back to resume his ritual of caring for the roses. It was a labor of love for him and required an incredible amount of work. I was amazed at how much time and effort it took to keep roses looking like this.

In the next house, there were tons of fish. The saltwater aquarium was massive and took up a large part of the television room. The equipment was built into the basement, where the pumps, heaters, coolers and other things made the aquarium work.

As time went on, my wife and I learned that only certain types of fish could live together, and that the water and conditions of the tank needed to be kept ideal. We learned about "chillers" that cost thousands of dollars, which cool the water to an ideal temperature. Also, we learned that the aquarium needs to be partially drained and replaced with fresh salt water two times a month. There are complex plants and corals that need a certain pH in the water to survive, too.

A saltwater tank is a complete ecosystem. Even feeding the fish is a science because if you over feed them you can kill them. There are diseases that can infect the water and you must prevent algae by maintaining the water in a certain manner.

When we moved into yet another house a couple of years ago, we decided to bring our fish with us, and we had a new tank built. My wife has become somewhat obsessed with the care and maintenance of a perfect ecosystem for the fish. Our fish people also take care of Axl Rose's fish. Apparently he is a real saltwater fish fan as well. The fish are really cool. I like them a lot, but how on earth are saltwater fish and roses relevant to your career? They have everything to do with your career and, more importantly, your life.

Whether you are maintaining roses, or saltwater fish, the most important thing is to create "ideal conditions" for them. The roses need to have the right soil and light. The fish need the right water and water temperature needs to be just such for them. If you mix the wrong fish in your fish tank, they may not all get along. Some may get sick and even die from stress. The most important thing you can do for fish and roses is to maintain an ideal environment for them. In the proper environment, the fish will thrive and grow and be happy. In the proper soil, roses will thrive as well.

Everyone knows that plants, fish, and other things need ideal conditions. This is probably one reason why fishing, gardening, animal husbandry, and the like appeals to so many people. We know that by controlling the conditions of things like plants and fish, we can make them happy and thrive. It should be no surprise, then, that when we are in ideal conditions in our work and personal life, we too do much better.

How important are the conditions we are in? They are everything. The finest colleges and schools are more about the conditions people learn in than what is actually being learned. In a top college, you will be surrounded by other top achievers, which will make you stronger and help you thrive. Children who grow up in good neighborhoods typically do much better in life than children who grow up in really bad neighborhoods. It is better to be in a good economy than a bad economy. It is better to live in an area of the country where there is a lot of opportunity, as opposed to hardly any opportunity.

People, just like plants, fish, animals and everything else, thrive when they are under the right conditions. You too need to be under the right conditions.

Because our current economy is in a recession, everything we read about these days involves the struggle to recreate "ideal conditions" wherein the economy can do well. We watch the President passing one economic stimulus act after another to help stimulate the economy. We watch the Federal Reserve with considerable interest to see what they can and will do to stimulate the economy. We follow the financial pages closely to see what is going to happen to stimulate the economy. When we pick up the papers, we read about what is going on in Iraq. We read about fighting in the streets and what is being done about it. We read about terrorists and Guantanamo Bay. What we are reading about and learning about, of course, is really the struggle to create ideal conditions in the world.

Everything is about the struggle to create ideal conditions. We go to work so we will have money to live. Many go to religious services each week to find peace in this life and the next. We take courses to improve ourselves, and we go to school. We watch our diet. Whatever we do, it is all about the struggle to create ideal conditions for our existence.

*Being There* is the last Peter Sellers film released during his lifetime, and is among the best movies I have ever seen, and believe I will ever see. The movie is about Chance (played by Peter Sellers) a middle-aged man living in the townhouse of a very wealthy old man in Washington, DC. Chance has lived his entire life with hardly any contact with the outside world and his entire education has come from watching television in the house of the wealthy man, and from observing the demeanor of his caretaker. His job at the townhouse for his entire life has been the gardener. He is also cared for by Louise, a maid who cooks meals for him. She views him as a grown man who is still a child. When the old man dies, attorneys visit Chance and force him to leave the house.

Chance wanders the streets aimlessly and ends up being hit by the car of Ben Rand, a [wealthy businessman](#). Rand's wife (played by Shirley MacLaine) invited Chance to come back to their home (a huge mansion) to recover from his injured leg. When he gets to Rand's home, over dinner he describes attorneys coming to the house he lived in and shutting it down. However, due to Chance's impeccable dress (he is wearing the old man's clothes) and upper class demeanor he picked up from the old man, Rand assumes that Chance's business has been shut down and sympathizes with him. Based on Chance's cough from drinking alcohol for the very first time in his life, Rand believes that Chance's name is really Chauncy Gardiner.

Most of Chance's statements to Rand are about gardens and are simple; however, these are interpreted by Rand as profound allegorical statements about the state of business in the United States. Rand is an advisor to the President of the United States and introduces Chance to the President a short time later, and soon, Chance's remarks about gardening are interpreted by the President as political and economic advice. The President mentions Chance's comments in a speech and Chance quickly becomes a major celebrity and one of the most popular figures in Washington circles.

One of my favorite scenes from the movie is when Chance appears on a major television show, the Gary Burns Show, after being quoted by the President at a major conference:

76 INT. TV STATION - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Chance is intrigued by the surroundings as MORTON HULL guides him through the corridor.

HULL

Of course, Mr. Gardiner, your position in the financial community carries a lot of weight, but what caught Gary's attention was your down-to-earth philosophy.

CHANCE

I see.

They walk a while through the corridor.

HULL

(making conversation)

Do you realize that more people will be watching you tonight than all those who have seen theater plays in the last forty years?

CHANCE

Yes. It's a very good show.

Hull takes Chance into the makeup room.

77 EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

AIR FORCE 1 taxis to the ground.

78 INT. AIR FORCE 1 - NIGHT

The President sits on a couch in one of the compartments on the jet. With him are six of his STAFF, Kaufman included.

PRESIDENT

What do you mean, no background? That's impossible, he's a very well known man!

KAUFMAN

Yes, sir - we are aware of all that, but still, we haven't been able to...

PRESIDENT

(interrupts)

He's an advisor and close personal friend of Rand's! For Christ sakes, they have volumes of data on Benjamin!

KAUFMAN

Yes, Mr. President, I plan on contacting Mr. Rand as soon as...

PRESIDENT

(again interrupts)

I do not want Benjamin Rand disturbed! You have other ways of gathering information than to trouble a dying man. Use whatever agencies are necessary to put together a detailed history of Chauncey Gardiner, if you run into problems, alert Honeycutt.

(he stands)

Have it in my office at seven in the morning.

(he starts for door)

I've got to take a leak.

KAUFMAN

Right, chief.

As the President goes to the Men's Room, two of the aides reach for telephones.

79 INT. TV STATION - CORRIDOR/MAKEUP ROOM - NIGHT

A PAGE through the corridor carrying a glass of water. He turns into the makeup room to reveal Hull sitting next to Chance in front of the mirror. The makeup man, COLSON, works on Chance as he watches the guest preceding him on a TV monitor that is reflected in the mirror.

PAGE

(gives Chance water)

I thought you might need this about now, Mr. Gardiner. It gets real hot under these lights.

CHANCE

Thank you. I am very thirsty.

The Page leans against the door jamb, smiles if anyone looks at him.

HULL

(briefing Chance)

Now, if Gary wants to interrupt you, or ask you a question, he'll raise his left forefinger to his left eyebrow.

CHANCE

(to Colson)

Nurse Teresa did Ben's makeup.

COLSON

(laughs)

Oh? Did she do a good job?

CHANCE

Yes, very good.

On the TV, GARY BURNS finishes with his guest and the band goes into a hot instrumental number.

COLSON

(a last minute dab)

Okay, Mr. Gardiner, looks like you're up.

Hull leads Chance out of the makeup room. Colson sits and watches the TV monitor. The Page, his back to Colson, carefully picks up Chance's water glass so as not to smear the fingerprints, then leaves the room. On the TV monitor, the band plays, the audience applauds as Burns introduces Chance.

80 INT. RAND LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

BURNS (on TV)

I always find it surprising, Mr. Gardiner, to find men like yourself, who work so intimately with the President, yet manage to remain relatively unknown.

CHANCE (on TV)

Yes. That is surprising.

BURNS (on TV)

...Well, your anonymity will be a thing of the past from now on.

CHANCE (on TV)

(doesn't understand)

I hope so.

BURNS (on TV)

(a beat)

Yes...of course. Well, I assume, since the President quoted you, that you agree with his view of the economy.

CHANCE (on TV)

Which view?

Applause and laughter from the TV audience.

81 INT. ALLENBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Allenby watches, concerned as to which way it will go.

BURNS (on TV)

(a beat)

Well, the President compared the economy of this country to a garden, and stated that after a period of decline a time of growth would naturally follow.

CHANCE (on TV)

Yes, I know the garden very well. I have worked in it all my life. It is a good garden and a healthy one;

82 INT. RAND'S ROOM - NIGHT

Rand is in bed. Eve sits in a chair next to the bed, squeezes Rand's hand in the excitement as they both watch Chance on television. Teresa and Constance watch in the Background.

CHANCE (on TV - cont'd)

its tress are healthy and so are its shrubs and flowers, as long as they are trimmed and watered in the right seasons. The garden needs a lot of care. I do agree with the President; everything will grow strong, and there is plenty of room in it for new trees and new flowers of all kinds.

The TV audience applauds Chance and Constance quietly leaves the room.

83 INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The President and First Lady are in bed together watching the show.

BURNS (on TV)

So you're saying, Mr. Gardiner, if the Stock Market collapses, and unemployment keeps increasing, that this is just another season, so to speak, in the garden?

The First Lady cuddles up to the President.

84 INT. RAND LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

Chance continues to watch himself.

CHANCE (on TV)

Yes. In a garden, things grow - but first some things must wither; some trees lose their leaves before they grow new leaves...

85 INT. THOMAS FRANKLIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Franklin, the attorney that evicted Chance, comes out of the bathroom brushing his teeth. His wife, JOHANNA, is in the bed absorbed in the show. Franklin sits on the end of the bed.

CHANCE (on TV - cont'd)

...And if you give your garden a lot of love, and if you work very hard and have a lot of patience, in the proper season you will see it grow to be very beautiful...

More applause from the TV. Franklin leans closer to the set.

FRANKLIN

(puzzled)

It's that gardener!

JOHANNA

Yes, Chauncey Gardiner.

FRANKLIN

No! He's a real gardener!

JOHANNA

(laughs)

He does talk like one, but I think he's brilliant.

BURNS (on TV)

Well, that's very interesting, Mr. Gardiner, but, what about the bad seasons?

86 INT. CHANCE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Constance is in Chance's closet searching through his clothing. Finding nothing, she checks the labels on his suits, copies them in a notepad.

BURNS (Cont'd)

(on TV)

Such as prolonged droughts that have wiped out crops, disastrous winters, hurricanes? Doesn't a country need to have someone in charge that can see it through such crises? Don't we need a leader capable of guiding us through the bad seasons as well as the good?

CHANCE

(on TV)

Yes. We need a very good gardner.

Constance continues her work in the closet.

87 INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The President and First Lady are very attentive.

BURNS

(on TV)

I realize this might be a difficult question for you, Mr. Gardiner but there are a lot of us around the country that would like to hear your thoughts on the matter.

CHANCE

(on TV)

I understand.

BURNS

(on TV)

Do you feel that we have a 'very good gardener' in office at this time, Mr. Gardiner?

PRESIDENT

...That bastard...

CHANCE

(on TV)

Oh, yes. It is possible for one side of the garden to be flooded, and the other side to be dry... Some plants do well in the sun, and others grow better in the cool of the shade.

The First Lady moves closer to the President.

88 INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

A group of ELDERLY BLACK PEOPLE sit in the lobby, watching the show on an old black-and-white TV

CHANCE (on TV - cont'd)

..It is the gardner's responsibility to take water from the flooded area and run it to the area that is dry. It is also the gardner's responsibility not to plant a sun-loving flower in the shade of a high wall...

During the preceding speech, Louise, the maid from the Old Man's house, chatters.

LOUISE

Gobbledegook! All the time he talked gobbledegook! An' it's for sure a White man's world in America, hell, I raised that boy since he was the size of a pissant an' I'll say right now he never learned to read an' write - no sir! Had no brains at all, was stuffed with rice puddin' between the ears! Short-changed by the Lord and dumb as a jackass an' look at him now!

Yes, sir - all you gotta be is white in America an' you get whatever you want! Just listen to that boy -gobbledegook!

There is a chorus of "Amens" as she finishes.

89 INT. RAND LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

Chance watches himself.

CHANCE (on TV - cont'd)

...It is the responsibility of the gardner to adjust to the bad seasons as well as enjoy the good ones.

Chance changes channels to a Game Show.

90 INT. PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The President and First Lady still watch Chance.

CHANCE (on TV - cont'd)

If the gardner does his job, everything will be fine.

PRESIDENT

Oh, Jesus...

Audience applause is heard on TV.

BURNS (on TV)

Before we take a break...What sort of gardner would you be?

CHANCE (on TV)

(with confidence)

I am a very serious gardner.

BURNS (on TV)

I'm sure you are, Mr. Gardiner.

(looks at camera)

We'll be right back.

As a commercial comes on, the President rolls over in bed. The First Lady reaches out, puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

91 INT. RAND'S ROOM - NIGHT

The commercial is on TV.

RAND

He's a remarkable man, remarkable...

(to Eve)

You're fond of him too, aren't you, Eve?

EVE

(a beat)

...Yes, I am, Ben.

RAND

That's good... that's good.

Rand looks up as Constance comes back into the room.

RAND

Constance! Where have you been? You missed the whole show - Chauncey was wonderful.

This remarkable exchange on the talk show is captivating because most of us all have a profound understanding of "ideal conditions" and know that these ideal conditions will make all the difference. All Chance says throughout the movie, in effect, is that it is important that conditions always be good, and that care is taken to create good conditions for economic and other sorts of growth. Without corrupting influences and with little knowledge of the outside world, Chance speaks of nothing else but gardening. The brilliance of the movie is that it says something we already know, but easily forget.

In your life there is nothing more important than putting yourself in the ideal conditions for your growth. My mother once spoke of a friend, and she said something I will never forget: "He will never be as successful as he could be, because of his wife. She does not want him to do well, because if he does, she is afraid that he will leave her." I did not know the people she was talking about that well, but I had observed the wife continually criticizing and putting down the man. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how correct my mother was. There was no way this man could ever be successful anywhere near his capacity when he was being put down and criticized at home. He was always being told he was wrong and that there was something wrong with him. Moreover, I remember also observing that every time this man would leave home for an extended period of time, he would immediately get happy and within a few more days, his wife would get sick or create some sort of commotion, and he would need to come running back home. This process repeated itself over and over again. The conditions were wrong for him.

My concern is your success. In order for you to be successful the most important thing you can do is to put yourself in the right conditions. You need to be in the right conditions at all times in order to be successful. Once you are in the right conditions, you will thrive. Everything is about being in the right conditions and your career and life will not thrive unless you are aware of this.

My daughter is two years old and already in our area of Los Angeles, the competition is intense for kids to get into certain schools. This is about getting kids into the right conditions, which parents take very seriously. I sold the house with the fish to a famous producer, Gail Hurd. She wanted a house in Pasadena because her daughter was going to a good private school in

the area. She was seeking to put her daughter in the ideal conditions. When I was a freshman in high school I attended a public school that was not very good. I did poorly in the school. For my sophomore year of high school, I moved with my family to Bangkok, Thailand. I went to a very good school there, International School Bangkok, and got excellent grades and thrived. Everything is about the conditions we are in.

I loved the people in the first [law firm](#) where I worked, and I disliked the people at the second firm. Had I remained in the first law firm (which was very creative and fun), I would have had a good career and done well. Had I remained in the second law firm, I would have had a poor career and been unhappy. It is all about the conditions we are in.

One thing I have learned about raising saltwater fish and roses is that one small change can affect everything in a negative way. For example, if you change the type of food you are feeding the fish, if you move a plant that was shading a part of the aquarium--virtually anything can create a massive change in the health of the fish. If you water the roses more or less each day, this can affect the flowers.

Everything is about environment. Change one thing and you can affect everything. You need to study the environments where you were successful in the past to see what elements existed in these environments that were correct. If things went bad, what changed? One small thing can ruin your environment. You need to be in an ideal environment and if one small thing is wrong with your environment, you should address this.

In your career, and in your life, you will not succeed unless you are in the [ideal environment](#). It just won't happen. You will match like oil and water with certain people and you will match like oil and water with certain organizations. If you are not getting the results you want in your life, you need to find a better scene and/or put yourself in a more ideal scene. There is nothing more important than the quality of the environment you are in. It may require changing aspects of your current environment, not working with certain people, working with certain people, working in a certain manner--whatever it is in your environment that makes you succeed--you need to find it and use it.

Most people spend their lives as critics. They criticize their employer, their bosses, and find fault with their conditions. It may be the government's fault. It may be the fault of the economy. It may be the fault of someone else. Regardless of their environment, the chances are good they will find fault with what is wrong. If the problems in your environment are preventing you from succeeding, the best thing you can do is take action to fix what is wrong with your environment, or put yourself in an environment where things are better.

All around me every single day I am encountering people who have immigrated to America recently. My wife's father is from another country. In my yard, the people mowing my lawn are always from Mexico. The people who work on my aquariums are from Lebanon. People who work in my office are from India. All around me are people who have come to the United States in search of a better environment. They are here because they felt that there was something in their native countries that was holding them back. They are mostly right. Poverty, lack of infrastructure, not enough economic opportunity, lack of work--you name it--all of these things are the sorts of things that have held people back in other countries. People come to the United States because they want to find an ideal environment that will allow them to succeed. People send money home to Mexico or to India when they come to work in the United States because the working conditions here are so much better for them.

You need to do everything within your power in your own country, state, city, and neighborhood to create the ideal environment. There is nothing more important for your long-term success than this. The people who move to the United States in search of more opportunity are those who have taken action. Revolutions happen in countries around the world when groups of people try with all of their might to create the right environment. Our dislike of countries like Cuba, Iraq, North Korea, Afghanistan, and China is tied to the fact that we do not approve of their environment. Oppression of people, street battles, and chaos are abhorrent, and not our idea of an ideal environment.

For some people, being in an environment with a lot of order may be important. For others, being in an environment that allows a lot of creativity may be important. For others, an environment with people they like and know may be important. For still others, working in an environment that is very professional and formal may be important. Everyone has a list of things they believe will make them do well and be productive. It is up to you to do everything within your power to put yourself in a job and environment that will contribute to your long-term success and happiness at work.

You want to be in an environment that allows you to be at your best. Like a plant, or a fish, there are likely to be toxic elements in your environment. You need to do everything you can to avoid whatever is toxic, because it will hold you back from achieving all you can. Your life and success in your career is going to prosper or fail based on the environment you are in.