

Your Success Is a Product of the Procedures You Follow

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Like many people at the time, I was pretty fascinated with the first trial of O.J. Simpson. The court days were long, droning on--and I never could watch for more than an hour or two at a time. One thing I remember quite well about the trial, however, was the emphasis that the defense placed on the procedures followed when the police arrived at the crime scene where Ron Goldman and Nicole Simpson were found brutally murdered. Numerous times during the trial, various videos were shown, highlighting the fact that the police officers on the scene had allegedly not followed proper procedure in their collection of information at the crime scene.

Several police officers were questioned by the defense, and the crux of the defense team's argument was centered around whether or not the investigators had followed the correct procedures and protocol. Based on what I could tell from the trial, numerous police procedures were not carried out properly in the investigation of the murders. After the trial, when I listened to one juror during an interview, he stated that he had been very upset that the police had not followed correct investigative procedures.

There are a multitude of procedures that police, detectives, prosecutors, and other [law enforcement professionals](#) are supposed to follow in the investigation of any crime. When these procedures are not followed, our sense of justice is offended. Confessions can be tossed out and murderers are allowed to go free when correct protocol is not followed. There are certain procedures for questioning suspects, certain procedures for collecting evidence, other procedures when someone is taken into custody. In fact, there are so many procedures related to the investigation of crimes that they fill entire text books in criminal justice courses called *evidence*. For some individuals this is an entire body of study. We consider procedure so important that we abhor and are also fascinated with societies that do not follow correct procedure. A front page article in the June 30 *New York Times* reads:

DIEPSLOOT, [South Africa](#) — The two robbery suspects had already been viciously beaten, their swollen faces stained with rivulets of red. One of them could no longer sit up, and only the need to moan seemed to revive him into consciousness. The other, Moses Tjiwa, occasionally stared into the taunting crowd and muttered, "I didn't do anything."

The suspects were awaiting the final cathartic wrath of the mob, the torment of being burned alive, wrapped in the fatal shawl of a gasoline-soaked blanket. Then suddenly they were saved from that hideous death by the brave intervention of a local politician. "Let the police handle this," he implored.

As usual, the police arrived late on that recent evening, and many in the mob angrily objected to their being there at all. Finally, one police inspector shouted: "Get back or I'm leaving this place and never helping you people again. I hate Diepsloot!"

When procedures are followed in society, we are said to be in a "civilized society". Revolutions and other social movements are typically caused by or accompanied by a lack of procedure in the society. When a society does not trust the procedures of the people who investigate the crimes, or the people who run the society, there is a breakdown of order. For example, in many countries like India and Mexico the police are not trusted by the people. Stories of police taking bribes in Mexico to assist drug lords can be seen in the papers on an almost daily basis. In India, many police will not investigate a crime unless they are paid off first. Procedures are not just confined to how police operate, however:

- There are procedures for how officials are elected, procedures for how the Congress, Senate, President, and the Supreme Court share power on a national level.
- There are procedures for the division of power between the state and federal government.
- There are procedures for how state and local governments run themselves.
- There are procedures for how companies run themselves.
- There are procedures for how departments within companies run themselves.

The election between George Bush, Jr. and Al Gore and the "voting chad" controversy was an issue of procedure. Every single time we sense there is something wrong with procedure, we become fascinated with this, and we are simultaneously appalled if the procedure has been abused or circumvented in any way. The United States was founded primarily on the belief that it had a better procedure for government than the British Commonwealth.

I remember when I was the President of my fraternity in college. I kept a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* on my desk during meetings at all times to ensure that we were following proper procedure. Even a group of rowdy college kids follow procedure. Most groups spend a great deal of time making sure they are following clearly defined procedures in everything they do.

If procedure is so important to groups, what role does it have in our own lives as individuals? For the most part, once we become adults, we are expected to come up with procedures and rules that allow us to succeed on our own. This is a huge challenge for many people. Our ability to come up with various procedures and to modify these procedures to suit our individual goals and lifestyle ends up having a massive impact on our success or failure in life.

For several years, I lived next door to a couple of kids from mainland China, whose mother had brought them over to the United States to attend school. The father had remained back in China. Several times a month I would hear the mother yelling at the kids. My neighbor on the other side, who was also Chinese, told me that the woman was saying things like: "If you do not study, you will be a failure! Do your homework!" and so forth. My neighbor had extremely regimented procedures that she had implemented with her kids. She would pull out of her driveway to take her kids to school at the same time every day. In addition, she carted them to tutors and to piano lessons.

I was living in San Marino, California at that time. San Marino has extremely good schools. Back then, the area's population was also nearly 50% Chinese. This is not just a neighborhood with a large Asian population. It is an area where most of the parents have spent most of their lives in China, and where even a substantial percentage of the children were born in China.

After a year or so, I started interviewing students planning on attending the University of Chicago, and San Marino was one of the areas where I interviewed kids. I was amazed at the test scores and grades, as well as the massive variety of extracurricular activities the kids from San Marino undertook. Each of the kids looked like he or she was headed for greatness. In fact, if the kids were from Michigan where I was from, I am sure they all would have gone to Ivy League schools for the most part.

The kids in San Marino, all for the most part, stuck to very regimented schedules. Many of their parents got them up for school each day, took them to school, mandated that they study at certain times, got them tutors during the week, and sent them to academic camps during the summer. Most of the women had been taking piano lessons since the age of 5 or 6. The parents had just so many procedures in place for these kids I could not believe it.

But there was another thing I noticed that was extremely interesting. A lot of the kids had older siblings, and I was always eager to ask the students what their brothers and sisters were doing. Most of the brothers and sisters had gone to good schools like UCLA, Brown, and so forth. However, I started noticing a disturbing pattern after some time. Lots of the kids would tell me that their brothers or sisters had dropped out of school, having gone completely wild when they got to college. It happened so many times I could almost predict it. Many times the student's older brother or sister had moved back home from a prestigious school, and were now finishing up school at a community college. This surprising occurrence did not make sense to me at first--not at all.

When I started to think more about it, though, I started to realize what must have been going on. Many of the kids I was meeting and interviewing from San Marino had never learned to develop their own procedures for how they studied and ran their lives. When they got to college they found themselves on their own for the first time; their parents were no longer there telling them when to do this or that. When I got to college, I saw this in so many other students--from all backgrounds. The fewer procedures these kids had in place for themselves, the less successful they generally were.

And this brings me to you and your career. If you examine your career closely, you will generally find that your success, or lack thereof, is related to the procedures that you have in place for how you run your life. Most people who experience a lack of success in their lives believe that success is some sort of secret, or something sent by God. Success is, for the most part, based upon the power of the procedures that we follow. All you need to do to become more successful and prosper at whatever you do, is to investigate the procedures you are following in your life and strengthen them where appropriate.

For example, if your job were to [sell computer systems](#) to businesses, one method of doing this might involve driving around the country, stopping at every business you found, and trying to sell them a computer system. Here are some ways you might incrementally step up your procedure in order to become more productive and successful:

- You could concentrate on just doing this in large cities.
- You could pre-qualify people by calling businesses on the phone to see if they needed a computer system--before driving out to see them.
- You could make sure you had the most desirable computer system to sell before calling to pre-qualify. This would be even more effective.
- You could test the script you would use when calling, in order to determine which script would work the best.
- You could send a packet of information to the business before visiting them.
- You could send someone ahead of you to do a study and assessment of the current computer systems at the businesses before visiting.

The list of procedures that you could follow and refine is almost limitless. But the point I wish to make is that your success or failure as a [salesman of computers](#) is going to be almost entirely dependent upon the strength of your procedures, and how consistently you integrate them.

The success or failure you may experience in your job search is always directly related to the procedures that you follow. The better your procedures are when [searching for a job](#), the more success you are likely to find. If you are not finding success in your job search, then look at your procedures and either (1) strengthen certain procedures, (2) drop certain procedures, or (3) create new procedures.

Your success in your [job search](#) and career is a product of the procedures you follow.