

Concentrate on Your Contribution

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

There is a secret to being an outstanding performer in any job and [getting more raises](#), more recognition, and more responsibility. The secret is to be 100% focused on your work and to be passionate about your job. This is where your energy needs to go. The secret involves another element that is equally important: don't think about your anticipated reward. If you are committed to excelling at your job, you should not think for a second about what you are receiving in exchange for the work you are doing.

Virtually everyone I know who has succeeded in any calling has shared these characteristics. People who possess these attributes end up getting hired even when the economy is crashing. In fact, if you have these characteristics, you will do well in whatever calling you decide to pursue. These characteristics breed admiration, rewards, and raises, and they also have the potential to make people famous.

One of the best employees I ever hired really epitomized these characteristics when he received an unexpected \$20,000 raise one day. Instead of seeming really happy about this, he simply said "thanks" and continued talking about the work problem he was involved in right before getting the raise. I could tell that deep down this guy did not even care much about the raise because he was so focused on the work. Throughout the years, I have received e-mails from him well after hours on numerous occasions, when he has worked late into the night at the office.

He's never told me about working late into the night. He has never bragged about the work he's done. He has never asked for a raise. Nevertheless, year after year, the raises keep coming. The contribution he makes continues, and he is never focused on the reward he is going to receive.

Interestingly, numerous people have come and gone during the same time. Every month or two they demand a new raise, show me a list of additional tasks they are working on that merit additional compensation, and when required to work late they often refuse, or if they do stay late, they make a big deal about it. Everything with these people is quid pro quo.

One of our employees once received a paycheck that was \$7 less than normal because of a deduction he had set up for insurance. Instead of investigating this and considering the reason behind it, the employee immediately assumed the company had intentionally shortchanged him the seven bucks.

This employee, who was making \$80,000 a year at the time, left me a message on my cell phone demanding the \$7 and calling me dishonest. Additionally, he sent me an e-mail stating that what had happened was "OUTRAGEOUS!!" (the capital letters and exclamation points are his). This employee also spent the morning he received his check going around telling other employees what had happened, spreading fear throughout the organization. At the time, the company had more than 600 employees.

This person did not stay employed with our company for long. He left because he found an opportunity where he believed he could make a few thousand dollars a year more. He lost that job rapidly and after that, I think he did not find work for a couple of years.

That is what happens to people who focus solely on their reward. Despite their potential, they are so focused on protecting what they do have and making sure they have as much as others that they do not concentrate on their work. These types of workers are too focused on themselves, and they spend too much time thinking about how they are underpaid and deserve more from their employer.

While the above example may sound extreme, I have actually seen this sort of situation occur many times throughout the years. Some people are so focused on protecting what they have or deserve to have, they never get into their work.

You need to get into your work. People who are focused on their work always rise. The natural tendency of bosses, supervisors, and companies is to generously reward people who are making an extraordinary contribution. We want to help those who are helping us.

People who are focused on the reward are more problematic. If people are going out of their way to ensure they are rewarded all the time, the tendency is to resent them and feel they have gotten more than they are worth. A dynamic is set up wherein employers feel they need to protect themselves from the employee. Also, a tendency is to want to balance the scales by taking back from these sorts of employees.

When you look at really good entrepreneurs who succeed in business, you quickly understand they are focused on providing value before they receive a reward. Entrepreneurs know they can only receive a reward if they make a contribution and somehow enrich a person's life. Entrepreneurs who fail often do so for the same reason that employees fail in their jobs: they concentrate on taking rather than giving. You need to be focused on giving. Many successful [business owners](#) do not even reap any substantial profits until after several years of being in business and providing exceptional value.

If you look around at people you have worked with in the past, you too will see there are generally two groups of people. The first consists of people who are focused on their job and are doing the best they possibly can. The second consists of people who are constantly evaluating the rewards they are getting relative to their efforts. They are overly concerned with what others are getting paid and, in general, they always attempt to get a leg up, by getting the most they can out of their employers.

Which sort of person do you think ultimately does better? Focusing on the rewards is a huge mistake because in doing so, you are diverting your energy from what creates the rewards in the first place--your work. In every industry employers want people who are focused on the job, not the rewards. When you hire people for any task (whether it is a [doctor](#), a barber, a painter, etc.), you are much more likely to hire people who are focused on the job instead of the rewards they are going to

receive.

We may brag about how our physician is on special committees, and we like the fact the people who are working for us have received awards--these are indicators that someone is committed to the job. The rewards follow from people doing good and solid work, and being focused on the job.

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