

Always Ask and Observe: "How Long Have People Been Around?"

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

There is one very easy and almost fail-safe way to evaluate companies, individuals, and various groups of people. It can save you a tremendous amount of worry in business deals and it can also ensure that you end up working in places that are likely to be good for you in the long term. In fact, the longer I have studied and implemented this method, the more impressed I have been with the results. It is as follows:

- Investigate how long people have stuck with the company, person, or organization. For example, are they surrounded by people they recently met? Or are they surrounded by people they have known for decades? In addition, how are those surrounding people doing in their careers and lives?
- When you look at companies, how long have they been around? When you look at the people in the companies, how long have they worked for the company? How do they appear to be doing in their careers and lives?

There is nothing more to it. If you do this one thing, you will be able to make excellent decisions in your career and life. You will almost always choose correctly regarding which organizations to join, which people to associate with, and more.

Some time ago, I was in business negotiations with someone who was extremely wealthy (to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars), who had what I thought was a very good reputation in business. I was extremely impressed with this individual, but the more I looked at his situation, the less impressed I became. It was not because of anything the person did or said; it was because of the people around him. With hardly any exceptions, all of the person's [business advisors](#), employees, and others had been with the person anywhere from a few weeks to less than a year. For someone worth hundreds of millions of dollars, who is considered an incredible businessperson, this just did not seem right.

While there is nothing wrong with having one or two new employees, when someone is getting on in years and is surrounded by people who have worked for him only a short time, it is a real warning sign. When you see the same thing with the person's personal relationships, it is a warning sign as well. If people are continually finding themselves around new people, they are almost certainly doing something wrong to drive others away. I have seen this time and time again and when you see this, it is cause for immediate concern.

When I was growing up, I had a relative who would have a new best friend (and only friend) every six months to one year. She would make friends with the person and then something would happen. There would be some sort of disagreement that would occur and the two sides would part in a bad way. I watched this occur for something like twenty years. I have seen this with lawyers I know who get this or that new client. The client and attorney at some point get into some sort of disagreement, and the attorney is soon only working with newer clients.

So, the general line of questioning that runs through your head when meeting a new prospective employer or [business associate](#) might go something like this:

Where did all the employees go?

Why is this person surrounded by all new and not old friends?

What kind of disagreements have led to this person not inspiring loyalty from the people around them?

Is this person's reaction to any disagreement simply to fire people?

What is going on here?

What would this mean for my business?

You get the idea.

Some time ago, I had made friends with someone who was around ten years older than I, who was an exceptional businessperson and a very intelligent individual. This person had been involved in numerous lawsuits throughout the years, having been sued by one person after another. He had also sued many people. In addition, many of the people close to this person had been party to numerous lawsuits. Much of our conversation often involved me sympathizing (as a friend does) with how this person had been "screwed" by various people and so forth. One day this person called me about some legal issue that was stressful for him and said something I will never forget:

"I am so glad you are here to listen because I do not have any friends or anyone else to talk to about this." At the time I was taken aback by this statement and became a little uncomfortable. I had not realized that I was this person's only friend. I was more than happy to listen, although I did feel a little uneasy: I wondered why I was this person's only friend. It just seemed unusual to me.

A few weeks later, I discovered that this person did something behind my back in business, something brutal and dishonest. I was shocked. What he did made absolutely no sense and seemed completely unnecessary. However, looking back on this I should have realized that the person could not be trusted. I should have realized there was a reason that people avoided him. I should have realized that there was a reason this person was involved in so many lawsuits. I should have easily seen these warning signs.

Say what you want about him, but many of the people who work for Donald Trump have worked for him for decades. If people are loyal to Trump for that long, the chances are very good that he is doing something right. It is like this with any person and any business:

- If you know people who have had the same friends and acquaintances for decades, the chances are these people are doing something right.

- If you have had the same friends and acquaintances for decades, the chances are you are doing something right.
- If you are working in a business where people have worked there for 10, 20, or 30 years, the chances are the business is doing something right.
- If you are considering being friends with someone who is surrounded by people he or she has been friends with for years, the chances are that person is doing something right.

There are numerous businesses out there that are simply a "flash in the pan." For a spell they may look like the next great thing. When these businesses pop up out of nowhere, they often attract many employees to them, including employees from older and more established companies. They may look good to potential employees because there is less supervision, the company pays more money, or something similar. However, the odds are often very slim that a company such as this will end up being around for long. Most companies fail pretty quickly and almost all of them are gone within five years. It is the established companies that are able to keep people employed for long periods of time and that retain employees over the long term--these are the companies that should inspire real interest.

An established company has had to make countless adjustments over the years to remain competitive and to hold on to its people. When you are evaluating employers, this is something far more useful than simply judging whether the employer looks attractive at the moment. *Long-term results are much more important than what looks good in the present.*

THE LESSON

Ascertaining factors such as how long a company has retained its employees and how many friends a person has will help you determine beforehand whether you are dealing with the right sort of people. The right kinds of people are those who have lots of old acquaintances and are liked by large numbers of people. Understanding relationships can alert you to important potential warning signs.

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