

## The Butterfly Effect, Pacifiers, and Interconnectedness

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I am in my late 30s and I keep seeing all of these women who are around my age, or a little bit older, getting plastic surgery. Yesterday, one woman I know, who is pretty famous, sent me a link to an online video of her being interviewed on a national news program. I scarcely recognized her. I had not seen this woman in six months and she is in her mid-40s. She has undergone so much plastic surgery that I actually had to stop the video--because I was not sure it was her. I thought for a moment I might have been watching the wrong video.

There are many universal laws that define our lives and careers. One universal law that simply will not go away is that each person's life will end sometime. Everyone dies. It is inevitable and unavoidable. We will all age and will eventually cease to exist on this earth. Those whose careers are based heavily on their looks are profoundly affected by this progression known as aging, wherein wrinkles become more pronounced, the hair goes thin, and it becomes a struggle to maintain a naturally athletic shape. Whether it is Joan Rivers, Kenny Rogers, Cher, or any other star, we see so many celebrities struggle with aging, as they attempt to remain young looking, in an effort to keep their careers going. This is a losing battle, though, because the universal law of aging cannot be suppressed or circumvented. The more we fight universal laws in our career and life, the unhappier we are likely to be.

While aging is a universal law that everyone understands and accepts on some level, another universal law that is a bit more difficult to understand is the law of *interconnectedness*. Just as people resist the universal law of aging, so too do people resist the universal law of interconnectedness. People become extremely unhappy, though, when they resist interconnectedness, meaning they resist the fact that their place in this world depends largely on their relationships to other people, and vice versa. There is nothing in our careers and lives that causes more unhappiness and greater sorrow than trying to resist this universal law, but still many people do it.

Separateness is something that defines most peoples' existence. Unhappiness and failure are often caused by our belief that we are separate from our surroundings and by our persistence in maintaining this illusion. Contentment and [success in any career](#) or life path generally come out of realizing that we are connected to everyone and everything around us.

Separateness, independence, and the idea that we are all alone--are fictitious beliefs. In fact, many of the problems we see in Western civilization and in our own lives are related to our believing and acting as if we are *separate* and *different from*, rather than *connected to* others. The independent businessman, the lone cowboy, and other iconic figures are seemingly celebrated for their independence. However, in reality, all people are connected to each other by their actions, and it is impossible for anyone to achieve anything completely alone.

If you are sitting in front of a computer reading this, it is important to realize how many people were needed to make this simple activity possible:

- First, people had to invent and evolve the computer, and all of its internal and external workings. People had to figure out how to make the words I have written translate onto the computer screen, and then they wrote the programs to do so. People had to set up functionalities for sending this information over the Internet to you (i.e., they created the World Wide Web).
- Second, people had to teach you how to read and how to use the computer.
- Third, let's not forget I had to write this.
- Fourth, people needed to transport your computer from China or wherever it was made to the United States.
- Fifth, some other people shipped the computer from a port, where it eventually came to the store, from which you bought it.
- Sixth, someone needed to sell you the computer.
- Seventh, people made the car in which you traveled to and from the store, where you bought the computer.
- Eighth, someone needed to give you the money or credit that you used to buy the computer.
- Ninth, people provide the power in the house, or office, where you are using the computer.
- Tenth, people had to build the structure you are sitting in as you look at the computer.
- Eleventh, someone needed to build the desk you are sitting in.
- Twelfth, someone else built the chair you are sitting in.
- Thirteenth, someone needed to install and build the lights that are probably on in the structure where you are sitting and reading this article.
- Fourteenth, another person had to install the air conditioning or heating system in the structure you are in.

Literally millions of decisions needed to be made, and actions executed, by thousands of people--all in order for you to be sitting where you are right now reading this. Each single moment is the unique product of an unfathomable amount of thought, action, and energy output. And so many people have contributed to each and every moment in our lives that it boggles the mind.

*Interdependence is the nature of all things and of the universe. Inseparability is the true nature of our reality, and we are all part of the same whole.* None of us has any completely independent experience in our own right. Each moment in our lives is dependent upon so many other moments that have come before.

When we breathe, so many things are occurring simultaneously. Our lungs take in oxygen and push out carbon dioxide. Our cells need oxygen, and expel carbon dioxide as waste, but the trees are a bit different: the trees release oxygen as waste and take in carbon dioxide. When you think of your body, you should not just limit the concept of your body to the weight of

your flesh. The trees and the trees are also part of your body. The soil is also part of your body, because trees are dependent upon the soil, which helps the trees to create the air you breathe.

I am sure you have heard the term "butterfly effect." The origin of this term and its precise meaning is fascinating: The term "butterfly effect" itself is related to the work of Edward Lorenz, and is based in chaos theory and sensitive dependence on initial conditions, first described in the literature by Jacques Hadamard in 1890 and popularized by Pierre Dubem's 1906 book. The idea that one butterfly could eventually have a far-reaching ripple effect on subsequent historic events seems first to have appeared in a 1952 short story by Ray Bradbury about time travel, although Lorenz made the term popular. In 1961, Lorenz was using a numerical computer model to rerun a weather prediction, when, as a shortcut on a number in the sequence, he entered the decimal .506 instead of entering the full .506127 the computer would hold. The result was a completely different weather scenario. Lorenz published his findings in a 1963 paper for the New York Academy of Sciences noting that "One meteorologist remarked that if the theory were correct, one flap of a seagull's wings could change the course of weather forever." Later speeches and papers by Lorenz used the more poetic butterfly. According to Lorenz, upon failing to provide a title for a talk he was to present at the 139th meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1972, Philip Merilees concocted *Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas* as a title.

Although a butterfly flapping its wings has remained constant in the expression of this concept, the location of the butterfly, the consequences, and the location of the consequences have varied widely.

The phrase refers to the idea that a butterfly's wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that may ultimately alter the path of a tornado or delay, accelerate or even prevent the occurrence of a tornado in a certain location. The flapping wing represents a small change in the initial condition of the system, which causes a chain of events leading to large-scale alterations of events. Had the butterfly not flapped its wings, the trajectory of the system might have been vastly different. While the butterfly does not "cause" the tornado in the sense of providing the energy for the tornado, it does "cause" it in the sense that the flap of its wings is an essential part of the initial conditions resulting in a tornado, and without that flap that particular tornado would not have existed. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly\\_effect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect)

The underlying idea of the butterfly effect is that there is nothing in the universe that really has an independent existence of its own. However, the ideas of separateness and of *the separate individual* are sensations that we all feel from time to time. When you see the interdependence of all things, though, you realize that you are never alone and never separate in anything that you do.

Personal transformation in most religions and self-help movements involves moving from a position of being self-centered to a position of caring about others.

- A person moves from his or her safety, security, and significance, to a position wherein he or she cares about others, and has a desire to help and contribute.
- The most effective companies and organizations typically are those that are able to move from their safety, security, and significance to a position wherein they also care about others and have a desire to help and contribute.
- The most effective politicians typically are those who are able to move from their safety, security, and significance to a position wherein they also care about others and have a desire to help and contribute.

Transformation occurs when people, organizations, and others stop living life for themselves and start living their lives *in connection with others*. This is the journey and the transformation: To go from a position of selfishness to a position of contribution.

You cannot rise without others. You cannot succeed without others. Nothing you do can reach its potential without others. You cannot grow without others helping to nurture you. You cannot become the head of an organization without the support and assistance of others. You cannot get a promotion without someone appointing and believing in you. You cannot make more money without others. You cannot have good work relationships without others. There is literally nothing you can accomplish without others.

When my daughter got to be around two years old, she started getting possessive with various things. If I picked up her pacifier she would yank it out of my hands and say:

"That's my little passy!"

She also carries a little blanket around with her, and if someone picks up her blanket she will say:

"That's my blank blank!" and yank it back.

If she does not get either the blanket or the pacifier back quickly, her reaction is generally to start crying.

As she ages, I am pretty confident society's programming will teach my daughter to become more possessive with more of the things around her. She will feel possessive toward not just pacifiers, blankets, and other material objects, but also people, presumed entitlements, and all sorts of other things too numerous for me to even think about. In this world, most of us are extremely possessive about many things. We view ourselves as separate, and we also view the objects around us as separate--unless we possess them.

What is most significant about my daughter's behavior, however, is that she has begun to see things as separate from her. If the blanket is not with her, it is separate and belongs back with her. If the pacifier is not with her, it is separate and belongs back to her. The need to possess things is the belief that without these things there is separateness. In addition, my daughter is beginning what may become a lifelong pattern that many people have of wanting their sensory and material needs tended to at all times, and placing a great deal of importance on this. It is a pacifier and a blanket today, but we all know that pretty soon it will be many, many other things.

There is nothing wrong with having a pacifier, or a blanket, and enjoying these things. But the mistake my daughter is making, is believing that her peace of mind and happiness are related to possessing these things. Peace of mind and happiness should be where the emphasis is. Peace of mind comes when you are freed from emotionally upsetting states. The need to possess a blanket or a pacifier comes from an ego-centered emotion, and it is a sign of the sensation of separateness, which all human beings are inclined to feel.

When we find ourselves in an ego-centered state, we will continually feel tension and anxiety. To alleviate tension and anxiety, we will often look for distraction. We can distract ourselves through this or that, but whatever we are doing to alleviate this tension and anxiety will be temporary, and soon our tension and anxiety will return. The secret to happiness and

success is not being in this state of tension and anxiety, and therefore not needing to avoid it. This is how *one* truly becomes a part of *all*.

In your career, the more you see how your actions are connected to others, the more successful you will be. The most successful people understand that connectedness is a universal rule and that hurt, separation, and so forth will occur when we act as if we are not connected to others. Because connection is a universal law, the smartest thing we can do is to act in accordance with this law and to conduct our lives as such. The more we do this, the happier and more successful we will be.

### **THE LESSON**

Everything in the universe is connected, and nothing exists completely independently. Since all people are connected by their actions, you can accomplish nothing without others. Do not resist this universal law of interconnectedness, and avoid the unhappiness that comes from the belief that you are separate from others. Connection is a universal law, and one with which you need to act in accordance.

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