



Do Not Stand in the Way of Your Own Progress

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I recently heard a story about a man who was on his deathbed. As he lay in bed, he pondered over what he had achieved in his lifetime, and he came to the conclusion that he had lived his life without making any mistakes whatsoever.

This was by far the man's greatest and most virtuous achievement, having worked hard his whole life to always be right and perfect. He had spent eighty years in this pursuit, as it was really all that mattered to him. The man felt a tremendous sense of relief when he saw the enormity of what he had accomplished and the power of what his life had represented. This moment of realization was absolutely the best moment of the man's life.

In truth, these eighty years were wasted. The man had limited his experiences because, in his pursuit of perfection, he was unwilling to take chances. His life had been cautious and plodding, and he had made sure that he was always correct in each and every action. Think about how many experiences this man must have missed, and how much richer his life would have been, had he been willing to take risks and had he been willing to be wrong. His life would have taken on an entirely new dimension and he would have been a completely different person altogether.

Most people are programmed like this man was, to believe in "safety first" and to always try to be and do *right*. Being a strong person who is effective in the world, however, requires that one understands and accepts his or her true nature and all his or her strengths and limitations. The man, on his deathbed, felt a profound sense of happiness and relief when he realized that he had spent his entire life trying to be right—even though it had been at the expense of living a truly fulfilling life. *Would you feel the same?*

There is another story about a student who comes to a Zen master and asks him to reveal the secret of enlightenment.

The Zen master tells the student that after two years he will reveal the secret. All the student needs to do is come to work for the Zen master. For the next year the student cooks, cleans, and works very hard for the Zen master. After two years, the student asks the Zen master to reveal the secret of enlightenment.

"In one more year I will reveal it to you," the Zen master says.

The Zen master gives the same response the following year and the year after that.

After five years have passed, the student becomes angry one evening and demands that the Zen master tell him the secret of enlightenment. Suddenly, without warning, the Zen master pushes the student off the ledge they are both standing on. The student grabs on to a piece of rock. It is nighttime and he cannot see what is below; he is terrified that he will fall to his death. The Zen master walks away, leaving the student there clinging for his life.

Soon the sun rises. The student looks down and sees he is hanging only a couple of inches from the ground. He experiences a profound shift in consciousness and becomes enlightened. He realizes that *fear* is only *anticipation*—and nothing more. The student had been hanging onto the ledge all night, fearful, due to the false anticipation that something bad would happen to him if he were to let go.

This story is similar to that of the man on his deathbed. The dying man had spent his entire life in fear. He had feared what would happen to him if he were wrong. This fear kept him in bondage and prevented him from living the life he wanted. Just as the student of the Zen master was trapped by a false belief, so too is the man who spends his life trying to be right all the time.

Children, by nature, are extremely vulnerable. Children will fall down numerous times and will often get hurt. They need to be watched very carefully at all times. The reason for this is that the children's nervous systems are unclogged. However, as children grow into adults, their nervous systems become clogged. This creates numerous defenses, and people begin constantly calculating how not to get hurt. As full-grown adults, people go to therapy or yoga; they exercise excessively; they drink, use drugs, and do all sorts of things in order to unclog their nervous systems. What is the drunk person, other than someone who has intentionally unclogged his nervous system for the time being, making himself vulnerable—and perhaps less fearful of making a mistake?

The journey for you to become successful begins with an awareness of *where you are*, and not an obsession with *where you should be*. To reach your potential you must be willing to take a chance and to be wrong, and you need to understand the nature of who you are. For example, when we look at the leaders of the world around us, we generally see that they share a couple of common characteristics:

- First, they have the ability to make a decision. People who have the ability to make decisions are leaders. It is not important what the decision is, it is just important that the leader is able to make a decision.
- Second, they give themselves the opportunity to be vulnerable. Leaders make themselves vulnerable to the world. Even a turtle is able to pop its head out of its shell now and then, making itself vulnerable.

Let us take President Obama, for example. Obama has made a decision that he is going to reform healthcare in the United States. This is a decision, love it or hate it. Making decisions like this is the president's job. In response to Obama's decision, over the past several weeks, various politicians have been leading "town hall meetings" around the United States to discuss Obama's healthcare plan. As it turns out, they are being viciously attacked in these meetings by their constituents. These politicians are being leaders, though, and in the course of being leaders, they make themselves vulnerable to attack or opposition. This is a major part of their job.

If you are going to change and reach your potential in your career and in your life, it is important to know the weaknesses that prevent you from becoming the person you are capable of being. Taking control of your career and life means taking *self-leadership*. In deciding to take self-leadership, you will need to become vulnerable. Being vulnerable means seeing and often exposing parts of ourselves that we may not be comfortable with, and it means getting out of our shells—like the turtle.

When you stop growing spiritually, emotionally, financially, and otherwise, you are not far from death. You need to see yourself as you really are and to confront this self so you can grow and evolve. Once you understand who you really are, and where you are in your life, then you can begin to grow. Finding and confronting the truth of who you are will set you free, and avoiding the truth will cause you suffering.

Learning about yourself demands that you *become a warrior*. What makes a warrior is a willingness to confront. The warrior has ruthless authority and knows how to take charge. The warrior encompasses the characteristics of decision making and vulnerability of the leader, but also has an aggression of thought. If you want to achieve success and breakthroughs in your life, it is important that you learn to take charge of yourself and your mind, and be a warrior.

You are probably standing in the way of your own success. I know that if I spend a short time getting to know you, I could start telling you exactly what is preventing you from becoming the person you are capable of being. This may be a very arrogant thing for me to say, but I have spent most of my life studying people and thinking about careers, and I have developed a pretty good sense of what is limiting people. And what is limiting most people is an unwillingness to learn to think in new ways, and an unwillingness to learn new things about themselves and the world around them.

I was with Anthony Robbins at a small event not too long ago and there was a man there who was extremely wealthy, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. We were in a room of about twenty people and Tony made the man stand up, and he started asking him questions about himself. For over the next hour or so, Tony questioned the man in depth. Tony is incredibly brilliant, and at the end of the hour it became pretty obvious why this man has had numerous relationship problems, why he has had health problems, why he has had several addiction problems, and why the man has been living an unfulfilled life. This man had spent tens of thousands of dollars to be at

this meeting with Tony, having flown all the way to Fiji. The next morning the man hired a private plane to take him off the island, and he disappeared from the rest of the intimate meetings with Tony Robbins and the group. He was simply gone and had decided not to return. The reason, I am sure, was that Tony had forced the man to confront an aspect of himself that he did not want to see.

This is what is necessary for personal growth and to become the person you are capable of becoming. You will need to confront parts of yourself that you may not want to see. You may not even realize these parts of yourself exist, until you start to look deep within yourself.

I was at an event this weekend watching an Indian spiritual leader speak. The man started talking about how we do not make the most of our careers and our lives because we do not have clear enough goals. The lack of clarity of our goals is something that holds us back. As the man kept talking about this, I began to think of my own goals. I had set very aggressive goals for myself a couple of years ago and met most of them. However, since that time I have not set any new compelling goals. The more the man talked, the more uncomfortable I became. I told myself I was tired. I told myself I was hungry. I told myself that I did not need to hear any more of what the man was saying. Within an hour of having these thoughts, I was in my truck driving home. I had left an excellent seminar, having walked out due to the fact that I was being forced to confront an aspect of myself I did not want to confront.

Most of us are seeking achievement and fulfillment; however, we get in our own way and sometimes we prevent ourselves from becoming the person we are capable of becoming. I got in the way of myself this weekend. The man I met at the Anthony Robbins meeting got in the way of himself. Most of us run away from confronting who we are because we are not leaders or, more importantly, warriors. You need to be a warrior to confront the parts of yourself that are limiting your progress.

Why is knowledge of who we are important? The reason is that without a knowledge of who we are, we cannot achieve what we are capable of, we cannot change or grow, and we cannot be fulfilled:

- Achievement is about becoming someone different, someone important and significant, who is vulnerable and a warrior. The need to feel significant is an important part of who we are. It is a need of the mind. Because it is a need of the mind, it is something that must be honored. There is nothing wrong with pursuing achievement. Some people may not believe that achievement is important, but for most of us it is something valuable to pursue in order to have a healthy, happy self. If you have a need and do not meet it, this is a problem.
- Fulfillment could be described as *discovering the nature of who and what we are*. This has to begin with an acceptance of ourselves and awakening what we are. Truth will set us free, and avoiding the truth will cause suffering. We suffer when we do not accept or realize who we are.

And this brings me to you: *What sort of person are you?* The sort of person you are will generally be what prevents you from understanding who you are and what your weaknesses are. While there are a variety of people out there, of course, the chances are pretty good that you are either (1) a dabbler, (2) a cynic, (3) a fanatic, or (4) a utilitarian. Whichever one of these descriptions best describes you, it is preventing you from seeing your true self, and from learning who you are.

The most common sort of person is a dabbler. One of the largest weaknesses people have that prevents them from seeing who they are is the practice of dabbling. Many people dabble in jobs, they dabble in relationships, they dabble in hobbies, they dabble in exercise—being a dabbler is a way of life that many people consistently engage in.

Dabbler will only make a little progress in anything they undertake, and once whatever they are doing starts to illuminate who they are, they move on to something else. Most people do at least some dabbling. When I was growing up, I knew a couple of people through my family who were quite psychologically damaged. Therapy was recommended for them and they went. After a few sessions they found reasons to no longer attend therapy sessions. The reason was that they were *dabbling*, and once the therapist started showing these people who they really were, the dabblers just moved on because they did not want to confront those parts of themselves that were difficult to accept and confront. Had these people been *warriors*, had they moved through the pain and the illumination process of discovering who they really were, I am confident the result would have been different for them. They would have grown through self-awareness.

A second sort of person is a cynic. A cynic is someone who believes that everyone is motivated by selfishness. For example, if the cynic sees an act of kindness, they believe there must be a hidden motive. They have a general distrust of the integrity and professed motives of others. A cynic is also habitually negative and believes nothing is possible. They tend to disagree with everything. I am sure you see many cynics out there. They are everywhere. You may be one of them.

Cynics typically find reasons why various things will not work. They look at everything as a challenge and do not believe that a proposed solution can possibly solve the challenge. Therefore, cynics never try anything. If someone suggests an idea to a cynic, the cynic will say it is not possible. Because the cynic is so negative and distrustful, he has a severe difficulty connecting with others, absorbing new ideas, and making progress. This general distrust of others keeps the cynic perpetually isolated.

A third sort of person is the fanatic. According to Winston Churchill, "A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject." The fanatic is someone who believes everything to be wrong except what he believes. There is no openness to new ideas. It has to be the fanatic's way or the highway. The fanatic worships her own ideas and is critical of all other ideas. A fanatic wants to convert everyone, so that they share the same ideas. You cannot learn, and therefore you cannot make progress if you are fanatic.

When you look at different political parties, you often see fanaticism. The more someone is a fanatic the more difficult it is to change. You may be a fanatic as well. If you are a fanatic and unwilling to learn, this is a serious issue. The fanatic believes that everyone else is unwise. The fanatic will do everything and anything within her power to perpetuate her idea. The behavior of the fanatic is easy to predict and to identify.

The fourth sort of person is the utilitarian. Utilitarians believe that the value of something comes down to its utility. Utilitarians are open to learning, suffering, working, and so forth—as long as it is of benefit to them. They will always ask why they should do something in order to understand how, precisely, it will benefit them (or others). Utilitarians are very self-driven, and being a utilitarian is in many respects akin to being a logical businessperson.

However, if we are evaluating the worth of each action, then we are not going to always be open to new ideas—because it is difficult for us to completely understand what a new idea may mean to us if we have not yet experienced it. When we are constantly analyzing, judging, and trying to make utilitarian distinctions, we are generally not making the right distinctions because we do not have all the knowledge necessary to make complete decisions.

In contrast to the utilitarian, the *warrior* and the *leader* plow through, regardless of the results they may be likely to attain. The warrior and the leader do not have complete information about what their results may be, but they persist anyway. *This is the kind of bold risk taking that is needed to grow and evolve, and to experience your life and yourself fully.*

Learning is the process of unlearning. In order to unlearn, you will need to understand your weaknesses, which are preventing you from discovering your true self. The chances are almost certain that you, like me, and like the man at the seminar, are running away anytime your true self is being illuminated. We all resist the people, places, and things that challenge us to look at our true selves.

You can do, be, and achieve anything you want in your life if you understand who and what you are. Do not stand in the way of your own progress.

THE LESSON

See yourself as you actually are, then confront this self so that you can grow and evolve. When you see yourself as you truly are, you will probably find that you are standing in the way of your own success. Once you identify them, confront the parts of yourself that are limiting your success. Once you accomplish this you will no longer stand in the way of your own progress, but rather stand to achieve your goals.