

A Success Turnaround Formula That Works

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I did so poorly in ninth grade that I still cannot believe it. I did not fail completely, but a problem was brought to my attention by a school guidance counselor when I got to eleventh grade. I was called into the counselor's office and was told the following:

"You got all A's in tenth grade. Your academic performance this year has been amazing. Combining this with your being an officer of the [student counsel](#), and a varsity athlete, you have really turned a corner. The only problem is that you had a 1.7 grade point average in ninth grade. If we were to *forget about* ninth grade and remove it from your transcript, you would be able to apply to any college you want. However, if we keep ninth grade on your transcript you will not get into good colleges. I suggest you spend an extra year in high school, and we can call your tenth grade year your freshman year on your transcript."

And so it was. I agreed and my ninth grade performance was completely purged from my transcript. I was a completely different person in ninth grade than I was in tenth grade. I had not been a varsity athlete in ninth grade, nor an officer on the student counsel. I did not perform well academically and had hung around with the wrong crowd; at least one of my friends from ninth grade later went to prison.

What happened? How did I turn a corner so rapidly?

First, a little backstory: I had been refused readmittance into a very prestigious private school for my eighth grade year. This had been a complete shock to me and looking back on it I still do not think it was fair. Nevertheless, the expulsion happened and it had upset me greatly.

The way I came to learn that I was being kicked out was a real shocker as well. The school I had attended had a middle school and a high school, each of which was on its own separate campus. One day the middle school students were all bussed over to the high school to pick their classes for the following year, walk around the campus, and sit in on some classes. The middle school did not let me participate for that day's special activities and made me sit alone in a classroom the entire day. I was given no explanation whatsoever. Since I had not been kicked out yet, this really gnawed at me. I did not understand what was going on. Only later would the school formally tell me that I would not be invited to return the following year.

As anyone who has ever been kicked out of a group, dumped in a relationship, or fired from a job knows, this creates a lot of insecurity when moving on to the next group, relationship, or job. Not knowing what is going to happen next, whether one will be accepted or rejected can become a huge source of anxiety.

When I got to ninth grade, I was no different from someone who has been fired from a job and does not know how to cope. My self-esteem was extremely low. I wanted to fit in, but I was also very nervous and fearful because of what had happened to me the previous year. I chose friends who were not very intelligent so that I could feel better about myself and in control of my life. I sat in class not paying attention most of the time, trying to feel and be cooler than the other kids. With the exception of a few classes, I received Ds and failing grades, in direct correlation with the effort I had put into school at the time.

One of the most pathetic moments in my life came when I decided that I needed to start skipping school. School was not fun for me because I was doing so poorly, and I did not feel like I was fitting in the way I wanted to. I used to have to take a bus to school, and the bus would leave before my father and stepmother left for work. I would leave at the same time every day and my parents could see me walk across the street to the bus stop and stand there with the other kids, waiting for the bus.

One day I walked across the street and stood at the bus stop where they could see me, and then hid behind a tree when the bus pulled up. I hid in a nearby bush, nearly frostbitten, watching until my family left for work, then I went back into the house. At that point I would call my mother (my parents were divorced and I lived with my father and stepmother), and she would call the school and say I was sick. For the rest of the day I would sit in front of the television, eat Poptarts and basically do nothing. I slept on a fold-out couch each evening, and one day my stepmother came home to get something right after I had come back into the house. I hid under the couch for several minutes while she took a long phone call that she had received. It was a real low point in my life.

By the end of my ninth-grade year, I had become addicted to chewing tobacco (my friends were not that classy), and I had started drinking on the weekends. In short, I was turning into a real loser. From the age of 15 until the age of 33 I chewed tobacco all day, every day, and would spit into a cup. It was a disgusting habit that I picked up from hanging out with the sorts of kids I should not have ever associated with in the first place. It was also an extremely hard habit to break.

How does someone undergo a transformation from a *loser* to a *leader*, and an academic and athletic success? The change that I eventually underwent was nothing short of remarkable, and looking back, I think I know how I was able to rebuild my life.

It all comes down to control. I gradually learned to control one element after another in my life and in doing so I was, after some time, able to control them all. There are all kinds of problems that occur in our lives, which can leave us feeling confused and in a complete state of chaos. When there is so much going on, and we find we are not in control of any of it, we often end up withdrawing and shutting down. This is exactly what I did in my ninth-grade year.

When I look back on everything that happened, I believe that I was able to control the situation by simply focusing on one thing at a time. When I entered tenth grade, I decided that I would pass algebra. One day I sat down and told myself that I would not get an F in the class. I would not be repeating it a second time. I told myself I would do everything within my power to control this situation, and I studied algebra religiously every night, never failing to do my homework. I studied and worked as if my life depended upon it. Within a short time, I was earning A's and B's in this subject.

I did the same thing with my Spanish class, which required me to memorize words every night. I memorized words and did my homework as if it were the only thing that mattered in my life. Pretty soon I was passing this class instead of failing it. The self-esteem I got from passing algebra, then Spanish, then other courses, started helping me improve every single area of my life. This was how I gradually gained control over my own life: I focused on one area of importance at a time.

After the school had not invited me back for the following year, I withdrew. I stopped doing things after school. I limited the number of friends that I had. I tried to limit every input from my surroundings by missing school as much as possible.

When people face problems or become upset and confused, they typically withdraw, just as I did. The person who loses a job and is continually rejected from one job after another often withdraws. After withdrawing, the person feels a great sense of loneliness, and the world just keeps passing him or her by. When you see the unhappiest and the most unsuccessful people in the world--the people who are defeated--what you find is that they choose to withdraw. This is how most people cope.

How does one go from a failure to a great success in a quick period of time? How do you turn your life around and do so FAST if you are not reaching your full potential? I propose a simple two-step remedy that works each and every time:

- Get control over the most out-of-control elements in your life by focusing on one area at a time.
- Become as extroverted as you possibly can, and do so quickly.

In ninth grade I did not have control over the elements in my life. Specifically, I did not have any kind of plan or focus on doing better in my classes. I did not take responsibility for my own happiness.

Gaining control over one area empowers you to gain control over all the other areas of your life. A failing grade in algebra is an example. By getting control over this one element, I was able to build from there and get confidence and learn to control other elements. This gave me confidence in other areas of my life. Most of us have areas of our lives that are out of control. If we can fix these areas, everything else will fall into place for us.

For example, many people find themselves stuck in bad relationships. They may have a significant other who is unfaithful and who constantly causes them pain and confusion. They may have a significant other who yells at them for no reason and makes life difficult in general. Or, their best friend may call them all day long just to complain about the world.

Whatever the issue may be, when we are faced with a single element in our life that is out of control, everything else in our life becomes much more difficult to handle. We may start to worry about the other person constantly or to feel insecure all of the time.

The cure for these issues is to identify and to take control over the issue that is out of control. It may mean giving our significant other an ultimatum, leaving them, or cutting ties with our friend who complains and makes life difficult for us. Whatever the case may be, once the issue is solved it will result in a great sense of possibility and freedom.

Other people have problems with food or substances that create constant difficulties for them. Once this one problem is solved the person can very rapidly turn a corner and experience incredible improvement in life. Someone may have a job at which he or she is criticized and talked down to all the time. Once this issue is addressed or the person moves into a [new job](#), his or her entire outlook on life can change for the better.

Have you ever witnessed the incredible transformation of people who have addressed an issue in their lives, like leaving someone harmful to them, stopping abusing a food or substance, getting out of a job that is bad for their self-esteem, or addressing another issue? I have. I see it all the time. These decisions can make an incredibly profound difference in these people's lives.

By the time I was 18 years old or so, despite an impressive record of success and having been admitted to some of the best colleges in the United States, I realized that I did not have a lot of self-confidence. I was well liked and fairly popular in school, but I just did not feel like I would ever accomplish much. I felt a sense of lack, an emptiness that I knew would hold me back. I felt nervous around certain people and knew that if I did not change this I would never reach my full potential. Despite having mastered my studies, despite having been a varsity athlete, despite having been elected to the student council and more, I still often felt as if I were not worthwhile.

Self-confidence is a fascinating subject--something that I could write about forever. It is incredibly interesting to me, the power it has to influence the course of our lives. I have seen so many stars, like Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, and others, die from drugs they were taking to influence their emotional state. I have watched powerful and well-known people disintegrate due to not having self-confidence. I have seen so many people stand on the sidelines of life and not accomplish everything they were capable of due to a lack of self-confidence. A lack of confidence is one of the main things out there that holds people back. It is an epidemic of sorts, and it is incredibly dangerous.

At the age of 18 I decided I needed to fix my self-confidence issue because it was out of control and limiting me. I purchased every book I could find about confidence and even purchased a self-hypnosis tape that I listened to daily. I studied and read everything I could about building confidence, and within a few years I had a ton of self-confidence and felt like I could do anything. I have been helped immeasurably in my life by improving my confidence--it enabled me to get better grades, start businesses, and take many, many risks I otherwise would not have. Self-confidence can do massive wonders for you too. However, the lesson of this is that I had a weakness and an area of my life that was *out of control* and I made a decision to fix it.

In the ninth grade I found myself literally hiding under a bed, avoiding school and the world. In tenth grade I decided that I needed to do something, to get out of my shell. I decided to run for student council, to try out for varsity sports, and to get myself out there. I had never run for an office or been a leader in my life. Something inside of me, however, told me that this was something that I absolutely needed to do if I was going to make a change in my life. I took action because it just seemed like the smartest and best thing to do. And it was.

Being extroverted as opposed to being introverted can change your life, and it can prod you to great achievement. You need to get out there if you are going to achieve and make the most of yourself in the world. When you are introverted you are always focused on yourself and looking inward. You will not see the world and the people in the world as they are. This will do you no good whatsoever. When you are extroverted you can view the entire world and everything in it. And the only way to improve is to be a part of the world, not separated from it.

The solution to taking charge of your life and your career is simple:

First, find something that is challenging you in your life, over which you can gain control. Then take charge of it. It could be your self-esteem, your ability to do a certain task, your health, or your ability to get along with superiors. Whatever is holding

you back, the most important thing you can do is grab hold of the issue and control it. Start small if you want, or start with a larger issue. Just start somewhere, because if you do not start somewhere you will get nowhere.

Second, step outside of yourself and become as extroverted as you can. This will force you to stop focusing on yourself and to interact with and participate in the world around you. You need to be a participant in life and the world in order to reach your potential. If you are not participating in the world then you are holding yourself back and will not reach your potential. What is that you say? You are naturally introverted and have a hard time being extroverted? *Well, how much has this helped you?* Chances are, it has not. Find me someone who is happy and successful and I will show you someone who is able to be extroverted. The more extroverted a person is, with few exceptions, the more happy and successful they are.

This success formula has worked for everyone I have ever counseled. It has worked for me and it will work for you too.

THE LESSON

Many people instinctively recoil when faced with things outside of their control; recognizing and combating this instinct will transform you from a loser into a leader. Focus on one area of your life at a time; by gaining control over the most problematic areas of your life, you will empower yourself to further control other areas. Whatever aspect of your life with which you choose to begin, the important thing is that you do so; inaction will get you nowhere.

Read More About Getting Caught Off Guard and Admitting it:

- [Self-Esteem and Lunch Room Tables](#)

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