

## Do Not Be Influenced by Others' Negative Opinions of You

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I have kept a journal for years. Today I opened the journal and found a quote that I had written down on July 4, 2002. I had written this quote down because at the time I had just gotten out of a relationship in which the person I was with had decided that I could do absolutely nothing right whatsoever. At that time I was reading a self-help book about recovering from bad relationships, and this particular quote had really hit me with tremendous gusto, because I believed it really described what I had been going through. I was sitting in my backyard in the afternoon after the breakup, feeling quite depressed but still looking hard for answers. When we are in the eye of the storm, we often do not realize it until someone tells us we are.

Emotional abuse is the systematic diminishment of another. It may be intentional or subconscious--or both--but it is always a course of conduct, not a single event. It is designed to reduce a child's self-concept to the point where the victim considers himself unworthy--unworthy of respect, friendship, and the natural right of all: love and protection.

Inevitably, victims are made to feel guilty--made to believe the abuse they suffer is their own fault.

No one ever has the right to abuse you, whether you are a child or an adult.

Everyone deserves someone to be crazy about them--to nurture them.

--Unknown

What stuck out for me so much about this quote was that I had been told how awful I was for years. In the relationship I was in, I was told I would never be a good businessperson, never be worthy of respect in the world, never be a good father, and never be a good husband. These kinds of messages have the tendency to be self-reinforcing because the more we hear negative information about ourselves, the more we tend to believe it. I can remember that when I was in this relationship, all I wanted to do was escape emotionally and physically. Were I still in this relationship, you might find me as one of those lonely men who sit on a bar stool night after night somewhere. I'll bet many of the men who crowd bar stools all over are emotionally abused. Somewhere in the backgrounds of many unhappy and unsuccessful people is some kind of emotional abuse--and it is probably ongoing in their lives.

The reason I am sharing such deeply personal information with you is that in some respects you yourself might be emotionally abused, and I want to offer you insight and support. You might be, or you might have been emotionally abused in a relationship, by a parent or relative, or by an employer. Someone around you, or some group around you, might be telling you that you are negative and incapable. For whatever reason, you may be led to believe that you are incompetent and unworthy. When I think about emotional abuse, I also think about our jobs and what many people experience in certain jobs. Many people simply are not appreciated in their jobs. They are told that they are doing a bad job, they are threatened constantly with termination, they are made fun, of and they are systematically passed up for promotions. As a result, they feel a constant sense of inferiority in their jobs.

There is so much happiness and success available for the taking in the world that whenever I see people extraordinarily unhappy with their lives and unappreciated, I want nothing more than to intervene with knowledge and guidance. In my life, once I got out of that abusive relationship, everything miraculously changed. I started excelling in my job. I became happier. My relationships with everyone around me suddenly became fulfilling. I met a wonderful woman who became my wife, and today I am living the life of my dreams. This all came from spending the majority of my time with someone who believed in me and supported me, instead of someone who was fighting against my dreams and me.

Sometimes the best thing you can do for your emotional and [psychological health](#) is quit a job. People who are abused and not valued by their employers should seek other jobs. Criticism can achieve a useful purpose and can motivate you to improve. However, there are also circumstances under which individual employees of various businesses are so severely and commonly abused that it rises to an extremely unhealthy level. In these cases, the criticism actually serves to diminish the employees and it makes them feel as if they are not worthy of their job.

When you read stories about employees going on rampages, the story is usually about an employee who was systematically abused and was made to feel inferior by the employer. One of the reasons we often hear about this in places like post offices is that the employees there feel trapped, and they feel as if they have skills that would simply not be valued elsewhere. Given the good-size pensions postal employees receive and the fact that the pay is not that bad, postal employees often feel trapped in their jobs. If you had delivered letters for the past 15 years, what else would you feel qualified to do? If you are ever in a situation in which you feel trapped or abused, the best thing you can do is look for another job. No one should remain in a job or position wherein they are demoralized and feel inferior.

Whoever you are and whatever you do, you have skills and personality traits that are in demand somewhere. You need to do everything within your power to take advantage of these skills and traits, and to put yourself in a situation wherein you will be appreciated. You have skills and abilities that merit profound appreciation. You just need to be working for an employer that realizes this. The more positive news and affirmations that you receive, the better you will typically become at your job.

About a year ago I was at a conference and spent some time with a man who had apparently lost more than 50 pounds during the previous year, had quit drinking on a daily basis, had stopped taking stimulants on a daily basis, and had gone from emotionally withdrawn to incredibly happy and motivated. Since I did not know the person as he was before I met him, I was very curious:

"How on earth did you do this?" I asked him.

"I decided whom to spend my time with and whom *not* to spend my time with," he told me.

When I thought about this statement, I realized that it was no different from the experience I had years earlier. People's negative opinions of the world and about us can have a profoundly negative influence on our lives. This is especially so when we are not appreciated and loved.

Several years ago, I was working inside of a [law firm](#) and there was another attorney who had been there for at least 10 years. I could not figure out why the law firm had kept him around so long--or why he had stayed. All anyone did was talk about how stupid this guy was and constantly make fun of him. The associates who had just gotten out of [law school](#) even talked about how stupid he was and made fun of him. The partners did the same thing. Despite the fact that the law firm was going through what seemed to be a full-time downsizing of laying people off and firing them, this guy was never let go. Incredibly, despite mergers and other events at this law firm, and countless firings, he is still there today. I figure that the law firm must just enjoy keeping him around to harass. In actuality, this attorney is not that bad at his job. He is, however, someone who has tolerated incredible abuse throughout his career.

What makes this so incredible is that this particular guy was earning (10 years ago) probably more than \$250,000 a year. He has since been promoted, and despite all the abuse he has suffered, he has continued to do very well in his job. I never understood why this guy tolerated so much abuse. From what I have seen, there are people like this in most law firms and companies. I remember another law firm I worked in that had hired a similar kind of person. There are people inside nearly every organization who are systematically made fun of and abused, while others around them enjoy poking fun at them. These people become like the court jester, and it is as if the organizations pile on them all of their issues and insecurities.

In addition to people who are directly put down and made fun of inside organizations, there are also people who experience a more subtle form of abuse. They are systematically degraded and put down, their dreams crushed over and over again by their employers. In the years I have spent studying human performance and what it takes to succeed in a job, one fact that occurs to me is that there are situations in which getting out of this pattern of abuse can be extremely difficult. For example, if you are working in one of many American small towns, it is often very hard to [find a job](#) as good as the post office and with as many benefits. Despite having to endure various types of abuse (often by customers) many people stay employed in the post office year after year.

Recently I saw a special about General Motors and the problems this company has been experiencing for decades. As part of the special, they were showing the numerous suppliers and others scattered throughout the United States who were dependent upon GM for business. What made this so interesting was that the suppliers were often in small towns with no other employers, and in some cases a supplier might only employ a few people. I thought about this and what it would mean for someone who works for one of these suppliers. Some of the people that were featured on the show had worked for certain suppliers for 20 or more years. They had lived in small communities that had existed for a long time, thriving on the income solely generated by the suppliers. In addition, many of the people working in these factories only knew how to do one thing. For example, they might operate a certain machine that makes bolts.

- Imagine doing something like this for 20 or more years.
- Imagine still if you did not like your job and did not have any other skills.
- Imagine if the people at work were not nice to you and you felt abused. Feeling trapped in such a position would be absolutely horrible.

You might be in a situation right now, wherein you feel as if you are being abused and not treated the way you should be treated. You might not feel appreciated in your current job. If you are being diminished and your work not taken seriously, you should probably look for a different situation. It does not do you any good to be in a work situation in which you are not appreciated and cherished for who you are. Two of the most important things you have in your life are your self-worth and your sanity. You need to realize that you are an important person worthy of immense and genuine respect.

### **THE LESSON**

Your skills and abilities merit profound appreciation; you must therefore place yourself in an environment where you will be so appreciated, and not subject to the negative opinions of others. People tend to believe the negative information that they hear about themselves. A work situation where you are unappreciated will tax your two greatest assets, your self-worth and your sanity.

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