

Plant Yourself in Good Soil

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

There is nothing more important to your long-term success than finding and keeping yourself in a healthy environment. I have known so many people out there with incredible talent who insist on remaining in the wrong environment and, consequently, they never end up reaching their full potential in their careers and lives.

If you work alongside or spend your time with people who are negative or lazy, who lack motivation, dislike work, and do not believe there are great possibilities for them out there--you will begin to absorb this negativity. You simply cannot spend time around negative people if you hope to have a positive life and career. If the people you spend your time with are angry, depressed, and defeated, then the odds are you too will feel this way. You need to be honest with yourself; you are never going to pull these people up. But they can definitely pull you down, and will do so whenever they have the opportunity.

Several months ago, I met a very powerful and wealthy real estate developer from Texas. He had lately seen one catastrophic setback after another in the real estate business, and he had spent the previous months on the phone dealing with attorneys, tenants who had no money, discouraged real estate agents, and the like. The situation was so dire that he started drinking every night just so he could stop worrying and forget about all the negativity in his life. Only this way could he actually get some much-needed sleep at night.

One day this man woke up and decided that he did not need all the negativity anymore. He stated that he now planned on going to at least one self-improvement seminar per month for the next year and spending a lot of his time listening to various self-improvement tapes. He refused to be dragged down by the negativity in his environment and, instead, wanted to make sure that he would thereafter surround himself with happy and inspired people. When I met this fellow, he told me he believed that this decision had transformed his life.

Something most of us look forward to all year is taking vacations. Vacations are periods of time when we travel out of town and escape our normal everyday lives. Have you ever gone on a vacation and come back, looked at the people around you, and seen stress, anger, and negativity? I have. It is amazing because once you get back into the thick of daily life and work, your entire outlook can change very rapidly. Oftentimes, taking a vacation makes it feel as if you have escaped from the world of negativity and unhappiness, giving you a momentary reprieve. Many people come back from vacations, look at their surroundings, and decide to quit their jobs. This is a very common occurrence, and I have seen it happen more times than I can count.

Like the guy from Texas, I have learned to keep my spirits up as well through inspirational reading and self-help seminars. Anytime I attend a self-help seminar that is a week or so in duration, wherein the seminar participants break up into groups to discuss their lives, I commonly encounter people who suddenly declare that they are going to return home and end a marriage or quit a job.

The reason this happens is that being away from the daily grind of life, and being surrounded by positive messages, helps people realize that they may be in destructive relationships or other situations that serve to keep them down, frustrated, and depressed. I have also met many people who returned from seminars after a week or so, then started giant companies or lost a hundred pounds or more--or made other absolutely incredible transformations. The reason these people were able to make these transformations was that they took themselves out of negative environments and put themselves into positive environments.

Several years ago, I began dating someone who was incredibly negative. She had some very attractive attributes despite her negativity; however, she was probably the most negative person I have ever met. We did not travel in the same social circles and she attended a different school than I did, so I did not know a lot about her when we started dating. When I had met this woman, of course, she was not at all negative and seemed like a very nice person who was lovely and great to be around.

Within a few weeks of starting our relationship, however, the woman told me that she had spent a summer in a "stress camp/mental hospital" when she was younger, because she had been extremely depressed and angry. She had apparently been in the hospital for cutting herself with a razor, and had struggled with numerous psychological issues over the six or seven years preceding that dramatic event. The problems this woman had had in the past seemed to be much more serious than I ever could have guessed.

"I'm all better now," she told me matter-of-factly. "I got a really smart psychiatrist and he helped me figure out all of my problems and issues."

As our relationship progressed I would notice that occasionally she would lie to me, or not tell me about certain things. She would do the same to others. This to me seemed like something I should stay away from, but for whatever reason I wanted to make the relationship work. Over the next few months, I started to feel really depressed all of the time. If I would call her on the phone in the evening to chat, she would invariably spend twenty minutes telling me about how this person or that person was horrible, and that she would never speak with them again. When she would call me it was always to report something negative that had happened, or something negative someone had said, or something that I had done wrong. It could be as simple as my forgetting to throw a Diet Coke can in the recycling bin in her kitchen the previous evening. While this may not seem like a big deal, an offense such as this would be framed in the gravest of terms and would leave me feeling deflated and regretful for hours--so much so that it was difficult to even concentrate after the heavy reprimand.

Sometimes when I would speak with this person about something unrelated to her, she would launch into a hysterical rage, as if I had been directly criticizing her. The more I was around this person, the more it wore on me. People who knew me told me that my posture and expression had changed. I began to gain weight. To top all of this off, I started hearing rumors that my girlfriend was seeing someone else behind my back, despite the fact that she had told me she loved me and that we had

an exclusive relationship. Unable to balance multiple secretive relationships, she eventually broke up with me, giving me a list of reasons for her doing so. I had never heard any of these criticisms of me before, and I have never heard them since. However, these criticisms and all of the negativity at the time sure did hurt.

Nevertheless, once I was out of this negative environment and I was no longer listening to this person's constant criticism and negativity, my life changed. Everything very quickly improved for me. I became the happy, optimistic person I had been before. Had I stayed with this woman, I am almost certain I would have experienced a very difficult life in all respects. This is how it is with negative people: They can rub off on you and influence the course of your life, for the worse.

This sort of negativity is not confined to individuals. It is also common to many organizations, companies, families, and other groups. You simply cannot spend your time with negative people and inside of negative organizations--and have a good life.

The differences among people in the world are transparent and obvious if we just pay attention. Kids are the easiest example of how people separate themselves out into distinct groups. This weekend, I went to a high school football game in a small town. This is the sort of town where the entire city shows up for the game. What is interesting is how all the kids group themselves together. There are the stoners who look at the players and make fun of the situation and make negative comments. Then there are the other athletes, who cheer and try to be positive. There are also the smart kids, who sit together as a group and watch. This is what kids do in high school and it is also what adults do in life. People group themselves together according to their outlook on life and their values. Some people have a very positive outlook and are enthusiastic about the future, and others only see negativity.

Do you see gloom and doom--or do you see a future that is ripe with possibility? Do the people around you lift you up or do they bring you down?

I love the idea of being a farmer because farming is all about creating good conditions so things can grow. The most important element for growing anything is the quality of the soil. If you put something in toxic soil, it will not grow. The conditions for something to grow need to be controlled, and if they are not a certain way, the plant will not be able to thrive. Farmers pay a lot of attention to the quality of the soil. They sometimes fertilize the soil before, during, and after planting. They may create special sorts of irrigation to ensure the crop receives the right amount of water. In fact, they will rarely grow the same crop on a piece of land two years in a row: If a farmer grows soy beans one year, the next year he may grow corn. The reason they rotate crops like this is that the soil will rarely be good for the same sort of crop for several years in a row.

Because humans depend on food for their very survival, a farmer usually comes from a long lineage of farmers, stretching back hundreds of years, who learned early on that nothing could grow without the right soil. If we did not know about the importance of maintaining good soil in farming, civilization as we know it would probably not exist. The expansion and growth of the human race has largely been due to the ability of farmers to plant flourishing crops, and this is utterly dependent on the quality of soil.

If good soil is so important to a farmer, why then is this something that we often ignore in our own lives? Instead of planting ourselves in good soil, we allow ourselves to be around people and environments that pollute our bodies and our minds. You have enough sense to know that if you eat extremely unhealthy food, do not exercise, and abuse various substances, you are abusing your body. I am sure you also understand that abusing your body will affect your mind. Your physical state directly impacts your emotional state.

Several years ago, I lived in a small town where I was working for a federal judge. One of the most popular things for men in the town to do was to go out to the bars for Monday Night Football. One street had about twenty bars that would all get packed with football-watching patrons every Monday night. Virtually every man I knew did this; the men would all sit there, ordering pitcher after pitcher of beer, eating extremely unhealthy food until the game was over. Then they would drink some more. Most of the men had potbellies, and many of them were ineffective the next day at work. Football is a fun sport to watch, but participating in this ritual week after week is not necessarily going to aid you in advancing toward your life goals.

While the example of Monday Night Football may seem extreme, we also do this with the people we know. We fall into destructive patterns of behavior. In our families, we might tend to sit around and eat too much, and be unhealthy. If one person in a family has a bad weight problem, it is likely that others will too. They all participate in bad dieting together. It becomes a sort of bonding activity. If one person in the family smokes cigarettes, it is pretty likely that others do as well. The people we associate with and spend time with, rub off on us, and we generally become like them. Your diet and health is related to your body, and your body is related to your mind.

One of the most amazing things that I have noticed throughout the years is that people who stay together for a long time as a couple generally end up looking similar to one another. Their facial expressions, mannerisms, and overall appearance all end up basically becoming the same. This is no surprise, for it is yet another example of how we become like those we spend time with.

Yesterday, there was a front-page article in the *New York Times* titled "Out of Work and Too Down to Search On," about people who have given up looking for employment. The article seemed to give solace and even glorify many people who have spent the past several months doing nothing, because they have given up [looking for a job](#):

Mrs. Salinas was initially confident that she would land somewhere quickly. She seemed to be doing well, too, scoring interview after interview for senior-level corporate [marketing positions](#). But each of those prospects dried up, usually because of a hiring freeze or some other obstacle.

So, for the last two months, she has not looked at all. Partly, she has been busy, selling their old house, moving into a new one they are renting at half the monthly expense, seeing her daughter off to kindergarten.

She is helped by the fact that her husband, a vice president at an advertising agency, still has his job. After the couple realized that her job search might take time, they decided to cut back on their spending.

She has in mind a specific set of companies, but they are all still not hiring. Unwilling to settle for just any job, she said, she would rather bide her time.

But the process of searching for work and coming up empty has also left her feeling spent.

"I was just discouraged, fed up and angry, feeling like my career had betrayed me," she said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/07/us/07worker.html?pagewanted=all>

To me, an article like this does not help anybody: We should, instead, be writing about those people who end up [finding jobs](#) despite a bad economy.

If you are tempted to give up on your job search, or if you think you cannot do something, *do not* associate with people who will support this negative outlook or you will surely go nowhere. Find people who will push you to do better and to improve-- not people who will encourage your self-destructive behavior. Be very careful about spending time around any person who might put a negative spin on your dreams and aspirations. Surround yourself with big thinkers, people who are going to help you be all you can possibly be.

I am sure that you have friends, coworkers, relatives, and others who cannot imagine you achieving what you really are capable of achieving. I am not saying that these people are bad people. But you cannot afford to waste your time with people who do not fully support your dreams. It does no one any good to spend valuable time with cynical, unhappy, jealous people. If you do not put yourself in an environment that will support your growth, then your dreams cannot come to fruition.

Plant yourself in good soil, and grow into the life you dream of living.

THE LESSON

Regardless of your other talents and qualifications, a healthy environment is necessary for your success. Do not associate with people who support a negative outlook when you are discouraged in your job search or think you cannot do something, or you will prove them right and go nowhere. Instead, associate yourself with people who push you to do better and improve. Surround yourself with those who think big and motivate you to be the best that you can be.

Read More About If You Spend Time With Negative People, Your Organization Will Assume that You too Have a Negative Attitude and it Will Hurt You:

- [Surround Yourself With Positive People](#)
- [Appreciate Those Around You](#)
- [Self Image](#)
- [The People You Work and Associate With Can Either Make or Break You](#)