

Ducks, Semi Trucks, Upscale Doctors' Offices, and Your Destiny

By *Harrison Barnes*

I have been keeping ducks as pets for some time now. I purchased the ducks when they were full grown, from a woman who raised them with chickens, and I migrated them into the little collection of farm animals that I have. These ducks were born and raised on dry land. They are perfectly happy waddling around on dry land; however, I am sure they would be happier if they were swimming in a pond, doing what ducks naturally do. Nevertheless, these ducks are happy, since they are fed well and have a lot of room to move around.

The few times that I have left the gate open for the ducks they have waddled out, looked around, and then found the pool and jumped right in.

- The chickens I keep have never jumped into the pool.
- The goats I keep have never jumped into the pool.
- The sheep I keep have never jumped into the pool.

Only the ducks have jumped into the pool. What do you think a goat would do if it were thrown in the water? Do you think it would be happy? What about the sheep or the chickens? It is great fun seeing the ducks jump into the pool. They start quacking, splashing and swimming about, obviously enjoying themselves in all respects. They could not be in a better environment. Once they are in the water, their dispositions change. They move a little faster, quack a little louder, and are clearly more content.

The reason the ducks jump right into the pool is that being in water is in their nature and it is something that was programmed into them long before they were born. Despite being raised on dry land their entire life, these ducks know instinctively that the water is a place where they can go and swim. Ducks are meant to swim in water and this is just what comes naturally to them.

I drive around in a Ford F-450 pickup truck. This truck is meant to carry a ton of weight and it is meant to tow huge loads. I usually drive the truck without any loads in it, though. Consequently, the truck is always very bouncy and extremely uncomfortable. The few times I have towed things, the truck has actually ridden very smoothly--like a luxury car. The reason the truck rides so much better when it is pulling a load is that this is exactly what it is made to do. Some engineers sat down and designed the vehicle with this primary intention, and they achieved their desired result.

Have you ever been in a semi truck that is not pulling a trailer? I have. I have relatives who drive semis for a living. The first time one of them picked me up in a semi truck without a trailer attached, I could not believe how bumpy the ride was. I was bouncing all over the place, and every word out of my mouth was a vibration. Like my ridiculous pickup truck, a semi truck is not made to drive around without a trailer. You would go crazy if you had to drive a semi truck around without a trailer all the time. The semi is designed and engineered to have a giant trailer attached to it. This is its nature. This is what it is meant to be doing.

You too have something inside of you that tells you what you are meant to be doing. If you are in a career or living a life wherein you feel that something is wrong, the chances are that you are doing something that does not come naturally to you. You see, every person has some extraordinary and profound gift inside--some incredible talent that comes naturally. You are no exception. There is a profession out there that you could do remarkably well, and feel incredibly comfortable doing. I have spent my career talking to people [looking for jobs](#), and I am very involved in this industry. I have yet to meet a person who does not have some sort of unique natural skill or ability, nor someone who could not undertake some specialized profession with happiness and comparative ease.

I am not saying you have to be the best at something; I am simply saying that there are things that come naturally to you, things that do not come naturally to everyone else. Every duck knows and enjoys swimming. A duck does not swim because he is better than the other ducks at swimming; he swims because this is what comes naturally to him, and he enjoys it. What do you enjoy? I am sure there is something out there that you enjoy, which comes naturally to you. There is something for everyone.

I meditate on most days. When you meditate, you often go back in time and revisit episodes from when you were growing up. For some reason, most of the stuff that comes up for me is from when I was eighteen or younger. I am sure you remember what it was like back then for you too. Some of the lessons from when we were younger are so simple, yet we carry their extremely profound messages with us into adulthood. I remember how I hated science when I was in school, although math was okay, and I loved literature. Had I chosen to become a scientist, it would have been a horrible thing. For some reason I have always disliked science, and it does not come naturally to me. If I were a scientist I would do everything I could to write about science, instead of performing experiments and doing whatever else the job entails. This is just what is in my nature.

When I was in college, there were kids whose parents pushed them to be doctors. These guys hated the science classes they were taking and usually got Bs and Cs in them. In psychology, English, or other classes, they would excel. But if you told these people that they should be in a profession other than in the medical field, one that made use of their gifts and allowed them to do well, they would tell you that they had been studying all their life to be a doctor. Imagine how many people are in professions and are doing jobs they hate, because they believe they should be doing something they do not enjoy.

I am a former lawyer. A large proportion of the attorneys I know hate their jobs. Most make good livings but are afraid to do anything else because they believe they are doing what they should be doing. But if being an attorney is not in their nature and they do not like it, *what are they doing with themselves?*

Whenever I meet and spend time with doctors, engineers, architects, lawyers, executives and others, the one thing I keep hearing over and over again is that they all want to start their own businesses. I can scarcely leave the house for a few days without hearing this, as I meet

various excuses for not having a business. There is nothing wrong with someone wanting to start a business, of course. The problem is that when I hear this, it is usually coming from people who are already doing something that they are very good at, which they enjoy; yet these people seem to believe they should be moving into something that they do not enjoy, for one reason or another.

Recently, I met a doctor who told me that he wanted to build a huge chain of clinics in expensive, upscale neighborhoods. The doctor had a business plan he wanted to share with me and was bragging that the clinics could be making millions of dollars a year within a few years.

"Do you enjoy being a doctor?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I love it. I cannot wait to get to work most days. I feel like I am in the right profession." He began to perk up when he started telling me about how much he enjoyed being a doctor.

"Why did you become a doctor?" I asked.

"Because I always excelled at science, and deep down I feel very compassionate and caring toward others," he said.

"What does that have to do with managing all sorts of people, taking huge risks, firing and hiring, leveraging yourself with a bunch of real estate, marketing your medical services, managing vendors, and purchasing medical equipment and making enough money to keep everything going and growing?" I asked.

There is always a moment or two of a pause when I ask a question like this. Then the person says something like "I can do it. That stuff is easy!" Then the person generally gets a little uncomfortable and walks away.

Most of the people who start businesses like this fail. I am not saying it is impossible to start a business; it is not. But people who start businesses that become successful have generally had a passion for doing the things that go along with running a business, for their entire lives. It is natural to them. People need to focus on what comes naturally to them.

Having your own business requires a completely different set of skills from what is required for most jobs. It requires a different mind-set from being an excellent employee. Most people know instinctively whether or not they would be good at a certain job. There is nothing wrong with the doctor being a doctor. There is nothing wrong with the doctor who really deep down does not want to be a doctor as much as he wants to run a chain of clinics. The point is, however, that the doctor who wants to run a chain of clinics needs to make sure he feels as comfortable with all the risks, administration, and other responsibilities involved in running a chain of clinics, as he would be simply being a doctor. If the doctor were to start a huge chain of clinics, he would no longer be able to spend the majority of his time being compassionate toward others. Instead, he would be bogged down with all the issues that go along with running clinics.

Think of the duck on dry land. The duck is perfectly happy waddling around on dry land, but it is much happier when it is in the water. You see, deep down, there is something that innately excites each of us. You need to follow your instincts and to do the things that excite you the most—those things that come most naturally to you.

There was recently a very interesting article called "Companies Headhunters Avoid," in *Business Week*, about companies that have managers with specific skills that do not transfer well to other companies. I found the following portion of the article very interesting:

Recruiters also singled out companies that are widely viewed as successful. Consider Coca-Cola. The conclusion among headhunters is that the very attributes that make Coke a great company—an iconic brand and an unmatched global distribution system—also make it too easy for young managers to rise without having to develop the entrepreneurial skills necessary to compete in other arenas. "Coke is a great company with great brands," says Joe D. Goodwin, an executive recruiter based in Atlanta. But Goodwin says he can't recall any Coke alumnus who successfully ran a major company elsewhere. "People tend to get caught up in the Coke bureaucracy and get dead-ended in their careers," he says. "My advice is that unless someone intends to make a career of Coke, don't stay too long." Granted, working at Coke can make you comfortable—the stock has yielded a 24.8% total return over the past five years, vs. a 2.4% return for the Standard & Poor's 500-stock index—but recruiters say it may not make you management material anywhere else. A spokesman says alumni have gone on to successful stints at places like Home Depot (HD) and Clorox (CLX), though the goal is to keep them at Coke.

For all of the vaunted "academy companies" such as General Electric (GE), IBM, (IBM) and Hewlett-Packard (HPQ), revered for honing executive talent that thrives elsewhere, a significant number of companies are seen as weak in that realm. They may do well financially, but they can't seem to cultivate leaders others want to poach. Whether it's their quirkiness, poor leadership development, or political culture, these players have become the corporate equivalents of the Hotel California: You can check in and enjoy your stay, but the risk is that you can't leave. Three of the companies named as problematic by recruiters—General Mills (GIS), AT&T (T), and Intel (INTC)—made this year's ranking of best places to start a career. http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09_37/b4146042031508.htm

In discussing Coke and various companies, the article made it clear that certain companies have people with specific skills that do not work well elsewhere. Some companies may attract and cultivate very good bureaucrats, but not necessarily leaders. This is fine. People inside of bureaucratic organizations can make exceptional livings, and a good proportion of top executives in most companies are more bureaucratic than leadership or entrepreneurial minded. A person from a vicious dog-eat-dog company would be uncomfortable working for a company like Coke and vice versa. Taking people out of a bureaucratic environment where they are comfortable, and putting them in a more [entrepreneurial environment](#), is not smart.

Several years ago, I hired a woman who had formerly been a public school teacher in a heavily unionized school district. In her former job, she had had prescribed break times, a limit on how many hours she could work in a day, and all sorts of other similar rules and procedures to follow. When she began working for our company, we had none of these things, and the woman practically had a nervous breakdown. She ended up quitting, citing the lack of procedures as her main motivation to leave. Incredibly, she filed a complaint with the unemployment office, and in her unemployment claim she cited that a lack of detailed procedures was the reason for her quitting; it had allegedly made her workplace unbearable and intolerable. The woman's unemployment claim was denied, of course, but it really showed me how important procedures and so forth are to some people. As an aside, if I worked in the heavily unionized school system with all of its procedures and policies, I would probably go crazy! Certain environments and types of work come naturally to each of us.

If you are doing a job, or are in an environment that does not come naturally to you, it is always going to be a struggle for you, and you are never going to be happy. Regardless of how much you work at it, you are never going to like what you are doing. Some jobs are so boring and incompatible with certain people that the people may develop medical problems. Other jobs might drive us to visit psychologists for counseling, or psychiatrists to prescribe us antidepressants—to keep our spirits up. If you are in this situation (and many people are), then you should seriously reconsider your current job and career path. You need to be doing what you enjoy, and you need to make sure it is something that comes naturally to you.

Do not be like a duck on dry land.

THE LESSON

Do something that comes naturally to you; if you feel there is something wrong in your life or career, it is probably because you are engaged in work that does not come naturally to you.. No matter what your interests, there is work out there at which you would excel and with which you would be comfortable. You must find work that you enjoy, and make sure that it comes naturally to you.

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