

You Must Have the Home Team Advantage

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of the most interesting things to me is witnessing people when they make a complete reversal in their lives and overnight become incredibly successful, happy, and fulfilled people. Perhaps the reason this is so fascinating is that it happens so rarely. When this does happen, more often than not, the major life change is related to a career, location, mate, or some other important aspect of the person's life. This is why, I believe, that making good decisions pertaining to these different areas of your life is among the most important determinants of your happiness on earth.

By the time most people are around 25 years old, it seems the person they are going to be, their level of happiness, and their level of predictable success has been pretty well set. It is as if the person has been *calcified* to some extent and will go on living the life you would expect of them. Even by the age of 18 or so, most people are already calcified. This calcification does not necessarily mean that the person will never change--but, for the most part, it means that the person will be pretty set in his or her ways. The sorts of achievement the person aspires to, the risks the person takes with regard to careers, what the person expects out of relationships, what the person gives to others, how hard the person is willing to work and more, are all pretty much set. If you were to examine someone at the age of 25 and do an in-depth profile, my guess is that you would get a pretty clear picture of what the person's life would look like twenty years or so from now.

My twentieth high school reunion happened recently. Unfortunately, I did not attend because I did not learn about it until a few days before its occurrence; I live in California, and the school is in Michigan. In hearing from an old buddy about what my high school classmates were up to, there were very few surprises at all. In fact, I cannot think of a single surprise in terms of the level of success or chosen life path of any of my old classmates. I had not known many of these people since I was around 18, but they all pretty much ended up like I would have expected back in high school. *The biggest shock to me is that certain people did not amount to as much as I had expected: it was never the case that a person amounted to more than I expected.*

Have you ever questioned why certain people did not amount to more? To me, this question raises numerous other questions. What is it that holds back someone of tremendous potential and achievement from reaching all that they are truly capable of? What is it that kicks in and calcifies a person's potential, or lack thereof?

I am sure there are some people you know who seem to have problems all of the time: Things go wrong for the person wherever they go. They get in auto accidents; they accidentally break things; they have all sorts of health problems; they make stupid mistakes and get fired from jobs; people around them have all sorts of issues as well. I have known many people like this.

- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always getting sick?
- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always having accidents?
- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always getting in trouble?
- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always in crisis?
- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always having financial problems?
- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always losing their jobs?
- Have you ever known someone whose friends and acquaintances are always unhappy?

I have, and I do not think there are a lot of coincidences when it comes to people and the misfortunes that plague their lives. There are, quite simply, people who will generally make those around them unhappy and create problems.

While it seems to be a paranoid sort of assertion, I firmly believe that whether or not the people around us are validating or invalidating us is a large cause of our success or failure in life. This also goes for organizations. If you are in a good or bad organization, this can have a tremendous influence over what happens to you. One of my greatest sources of pride is the number of positive stories I could tell you about my former employees. Good things have happened to many of them in their careers after being with me for some time. The fact that good things happen to people associated with a given organization or person reflects well on that organization or person. Conversely, I know of [law firms](#) in which nothing much ever happens for the people who leave, and, in most cases, they experience one failure after another following their departure. Much of this has to do, I think, with the level of support the people may have received in their previous positions and the messages they have carried forth into their lives by virtue of this association.

- Did they learn to believe in what is possible?
- Did they feel validated?
- Did they develop confidence?
- Were they able to learn and incorporate a message about their own validity in the world?

If you are spending time with a person who is invalidating your efforts and your life, the odds are you will be negatively affected. Similarly, if you are around someone who is constantly validating you and giving you approval, you may benefit tremendously through your association with this person. The same thing goes for the organizations that we are part of. There are people out there who tend to better the mood, health, and general well-being of those around them, and there are those who do not. I am going to list a few examples of this; some of them may be upsetting and may even relate to you personally, but nonetheless they merit review.

I have known of many people throughout the years who were closely connected with someone, whether it be a parent, mate, or someone else. The person they were connected with had a huge fear of the person leaving them, and therefore their

personal interest was in keeping the person down, making sure that the person did not improve, or change, to such an extent that they could ever leave them. A parent who does not want his or her child to go away from home may feign all sorts of illnesses to keep the child around and may also discourage any of the child's efforts at self-improvement. For example, if the child gets into an excellent out-of-state college, the parent may encourage the child to stay home and go to a local community college, for various reasons, instead of finding a way to make the child's upward mobility to a better school a reality. A parent who has the need to feel superior to his or her child may also keep the child down in subtle ways.

In personal relationships, a man or woman may discourage a mate from trying to [get a better job](#), looking better, and so forth, for fear that this might lead to separation and abandonment. This person might relay negative feedback about his or her partner's accomplishments but hold back positive feedback or information that is likely to be helpful.

The objective of such people is to keep other people down. People can hold you back by direct means, and they can also do so through indirect means. For example, a friend or significant other who does not compliment or notice the positive things that you do, or who always finds fault in the positive things that you do, can have a very traumatic effect on you in the long run. Making you self-conscious of your faults and always pointing these out can also be a seriously negative influence. Relating about nothing other than negativity, impossibility, and so forth can also have a very negative effect on you. If any of this sounds familiar to you, it is probably time to evaluate your relationships.

In most sports, there is something called the *home team advantage*, which means that when a team is playing at home, it tends to perform much better than when they play away. When a team is at home, it is encouraged and cheered on by people, and is supported by the spectators, whereas visiting teams are often booed. Consider this explanation from Wikipedia:

In most team sports where the concept of home and away stadiums is found, the home team is considered to have a significant advantage over the visitors. Due to this, many important games (such as playoff or elimination matches) in many sports have special rules for determining what match is played where. In association football, matches with two legs, one played in each team's "home," are common; it is also common to hold important games at a neutral site. In many team sports in North America (including baseball, basketball, and ice hockey), playoff series are often held, with a nearly equal number of games at each team's site; as it is usually beneficial to have an odd number of matches in a series (to prevent ties), the final home game is often awarded to the team that had the most success over the regular season. In some sports, this tends to be a huge ace in the hole, such as basketball, where historically the home team in deciding games has won 78 of 97 games, up until the second round of the 2007 NBA Playoffs.

Home field advantage is especially pronounced in NCAA Division I American football, where teams like LSU, USC, Ohio State, Penn State, Florida, Texas, Oklahoma, Georgia, and many others win consistently at home. Many college football stadiums also have nicknames that represent the loudness of the stadium. Autzen Stadium, home of the Oregon Ducks, has been nicknamed the "Autzen Zoo" because of how loud it gets, and Kyle Field, the home of the Texas A&M Aggies has been nicknamed the "12th Man" because of the loudness there. That can be attributed to the fact that many of the largest football stadiums in America are college stadiums, such as Michigan Stadium, which seats 107,501, about 35,000 more than most NFL stadiums. However, teams that are nearby may have less of a home field advantage. Such examples may be UCLA-USC or Cal-Stanford, where the visiting team's fans often equal or exceed the home crowd and the only effect the visiting team has is they have to wear their road uniforms and play on a nearby field. Sometimes during bowl season, a team will happen to play a bowl game in their home stadium and sometimes be designated as the visiting team in their own home stadium, and thus, receives the home field advantage despite not being the home team. On the high school level, where schools often share stadiums, when the co-tenants play each other, one school manages to pick up a not so rare, but advantageous road game in their home stadium. On the professional level, several teams either get to play road games in their home stadiums or play a road game nearby. When the Jets and the Giants of the NFL meet, whoever the visiting team is gets an extra game at their home stadium. A similar situation occurs when the Lakers and Clippers of the NBA play each other. Other series where teams get to stay close to home on the road include: (NFL) Raiders-49ers, Ravens-Redskins (MLB) A's-Giants, Dodgers-Angels, Mets-Yankees, Cubs-White Sox, Cubs-Brewers, Orioles-Nationals (NHL) Islanders-Rangers-Devils, Ducks-Kings, Oilers-Flames, Senators-Maple Leafs, Canadians-Senators, and in the NBA, Knicks-Nets, Kings-Warriors and Lakers-Clippers. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_advantage

The home team advantage is one of the most important concepts in sports and it is a proven factor in how well teams do. If this concept applies to teams, how do you think it can apply to everyday life? There are people who support us, validate us, and make us feel good, and this helps us do well more often than not. There are also people around us who fail to support us, and this hurts us. When a team away from home scores a goal, people boo or do not make the team feel validated for its efforts. When the team away from home does something wrong, people may cheer. The psychological message transmitted is that people only approve of the team away from home when they are doing poorly.

Many people associate with people and groups of people who treat them like they *are not* the home team; others associate with people who treat them like they *are* the home team. Your success in your career and in your life will in large part be determined by whether you are living, working, and associating with a "home team" crowd or an "away team" crowd.

When I was in high school geometry class, after the first exam, our teacher drew a giant circle on the blackboard, representing the shape of a horse-racing track. He then put little dots in several places along the track and said something that I will never forget:

"This is where you all started in the race, but everyone's position can change. Some of you will pass one another at some point, and the person who is in first right now may not keep running and may end up in last place. Conversely, the person who is in last may keep running, training, and trying to do better and may end up in first place. You need to realize that the race for the best grade will take all semester, and just because you are one place right now, this does not mean it is where you will end up."

This is a really simple example and the teacher was talking only about our geometry class at the time; however, it is a metaphor that stands true for our lives. People begin the race in a certain place, and then some people end up doing much better than others, and this is just how it works. The race keeps going and just because someone starts the race in first place does not mean he or she is going to finish the race in first place.

When you trace the cause of someone with a lot of potential falling behind in the race, when you see sickness and ill health, when you find people not trying hard enough, when you see failure and despair, generally somewhere along the line you will find someone who has been negatively affected and otherwise discouraged by people somewhere along the way. It is an absolute fact of life that the company you keep will have an effect on what happens to you.

In athletics, it is common for some players to be extremely good at a sport despite not being tall enough (in basketball), big enough (in football), and so forth. What generally separates these players who do not have all the physical attributes of success is the sheer determination and self-belief inside of them. Having heart and drive can make all the difference. Heart and drive are what push people to the top of any profession and any job. If you are going to reach your full potential, you must possess *heart* and *drive*. This is something that wins races, despite any uncontrollable obstacles that may arise.

Heart and drive can be killed, though, if they are not supported. The best thing you can do for yourself is to put yourself in a position where you are supported, where you have the home team advantage. *Having the home team advantage is something that can help you win in the game of life.*

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