

## The Importance of Encouragement

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

If you look at most successful people, somewhere in their background there is someone cheering for them and believing in what they can accomplish. It could be a significant other, a friend, or a family member. When people are encouraged by others, it leads to an increase in their confidence and efficiency, and they perform better.

When I was in high school, an English teacher took great interest in me academically and told me that I had all sorts of special gifts, saying I could do this or that. At the time I had no reason for really believing him, but the harder I worked, the more I proved that he was right. His confidence in me enabled me to do well in my classes, and he encouraged me to set my sights on achievements I could only have imagined before I had met him.

When I was in college, I had a girlfriend who believed I could achieve anything. Whether it was concerning grades, my business at the time, or something else, she always supported me and pushed me toward my greatest potential. This incredible confidence she had in me motivated me and gave me the confidence to do great things.

My life has changed and I have greatly benefited from the people who have believed in me along the way. These people helped mold me into who I am today, and for this I am thankful. When people take the time to encourage us and tell us they believe in us, they are giving us one of the greatest gifts we can receive.

There are exceptions, of course, but very few people will ever achieve everything they are capable of achieving, unless some person or some group of people has believed in them throughout their career and life. I am sure that if you think back on your own life and ponder your own achievements, you will realize just how important it is to have people believe in you. It makes an incredible difference.

One of my greatest goals in life is leaving people better off than they were before they met me. This means that when people come into contact with me (or one of my companies) they should exit the experience being better than they were, in some way, before the experience. If they are job seekers, looking to me to help them track down jobs, I want to give them all the advice, encouragement, and resources I can.

Several years ago, I stopped into an open house on a property I could not afford at the time, and I looked around. The house was near CalTech, and right on the property it had an observatory for looking at the sun, which had been built by a famous astrologer in the early 1920s. The real estate agent who was selling the house was one of the best agents in Los Angeles--not an easy accomplishment, considering there were probably tens of thousands of other agents in L.A. County.

It was one of the most interesting open houses I had ever attended. It was quite enjoyable, and there were hundreds of people stopping by throughout the afternoon. The real estate agent had brought in numerous other assistants, and they were all wearing white lab coats. The day after the open house, despite the fact that the real estate market was not that good at the time, the agent told me he had gotten five offers on the home, and all of them were for much more than the asking price.

The agent had asked me numerous questions at the open house and had gotten to know me a bit. I had told him that the observatory would make an excellent office and that I liked it a great deal. He asked me about the schools I had attended and told me that the builder of the observatory had been a professor at the University of Chicago, where I attended college. Although we had chatted for quite a while, I had been pretty up front with the agent: "This is more money than I can afford," I had told him.

After the open house, as the agent started to receive offers the next day, he started to call and e-mail me, making statements like the following:

- *"You have done so much; you are capable of getting this house if you really want to."*
- *"I know that you belong here and I have faith that you can put together an offer that will allow you to afford this."*
- *"You have done so much in your life already and this is a small blip on the radar of what you are capable of."*

Because of his encouragement and belief in me I ended up putting together an offer on the house. While I did not end up ultimately purchasing the house, I thought about the real estate agent later and realized that it was incredibly skillful how he had gotten me to throw my hat into the bidding ring. He was encouraging and hopeful, and he made me believe in what I could do. This, I believe, was also why the agent was considered so extraordinary at his job. He had the ability to believe in and encourage people. Good salespeople and good people in any profession have the ability to push those around them to greater heights and show them what is possible. I personally believe that this is what separates the normal salesperson, parent, doctor, politician, friend, lawyer, coach, manager, and so forth, from those who are truly extraordinary.

In the recruiting realm, nothing is more important than believing in people. When I used to recruit full time, I made a habit of always believing in my candidates and looking for the absolute best in them. I did everything within my power to point out their strengths and what they were capable of. Consequently, even years after having worked with them, I still receive e-mails from time to time wherein they tell me various things they have achieved, things that are in line with what I always told them they could do.

When we believe in people and what they are capable of accomplishing, it can change their lives. We become a voice in the background, whispering words of encouragement into their ears. Consequently, these people rise to a higher level of achievement than they might have experienced without our involvement.

Most people out there are most concerned with how they can improve their own lives. However, instead of being concerned with just your own life, I would encourage you to be more concerned with how you can help others do better. What can you do to encourage others? What can you do to show others what they are capable of?

As embarrassing as it sounds, I spend a lot of my free time watching various true-life detective shows like *Forensic Files* and so forth. In these shows there is typically a murder at the onset. The rest of the show goes into detail about the mystery of the crime and presents the viewer with various viewpoints and clues that are eventually resolved at the end of the show. Each of these episodes generally shows the funeral of the slain person. Some of the funerals end up being very large--even for people who are relatively unknown. One of the constants I have noticed in these shows is that whenever hundreds of people show up for a person's funeral, those in attendance make comments about the person such as:

- *"She made the people around her feel so good."*
- *"Whenever you were around him, he made you feel like you could do anything."*

In seeing this example over and over again on these shows, it has made me realize that the number of people we touch, build up, and encourage in our lives is, in many ways, the measurement of our impact in the world. Our accumulations of material wealth, the number of times we were right, and so forth pale in comparison to the legacy we can leave by encouraging those around us. Are the people you work with better off for having worked with you? Are your friends happier for having met you? Do you encourage the people you meet with, or do you tear them down? Do you focus on others, or do you just focus on yourself?

The most popular and overall successful people seem to be focused on building up those around them instead of tearing them down. People who are high achievers are able to help the people around them rise.

When you consider the life you have led, the chances are very good that you will find one or more people who have encouraged you and helped you move forward. Whether it was a boss who promoted you, a teacher who told you that you had talent, a coach who told you that you could win, or a parent who encouraged you, there are people who have believed in you.

If you look at the world and find people who are unhappy, down, unsuccessful, and not reaching their full potential, you will usually find people who simply have not received the sort of encouragement they could benefit from. Many people also can appear far too arrogant, meaning they do not allow others to get close to them, so they may miss opportunities to be encouraged and supported.

You need to have people around you who believe in you. You need to be in a supportive environment and one that is constantly nurturing you. You need to be with people who will constantly push you forward. Having people around you who support you can be a great motivator and key to your success.

One of the greatest mistakes I ever made in my career as a [legal recruiter](#) happened back in early 2001. I was representing a real estate attorney from a town I had never heard of in Arizona, who was interested in relocating to Los Angeles. He was working at a small law firm in Arizona and did not have very good qualifications in terms of his schooling and experience. He had not even taken the California bar exam. In addition, he was making a pretty low salary for an attorney, about \$45,000 a year, when attorneys at his level in larger law firms were typically making around \$150,000 a year. At this particular time, there were not a lot of real estate [attorney job openings](#) in Los Angeles, and I was not at all enthusiastic that this young man would get hired by any of the law firms that I worked with. Nevertheless, he had pestered me very effectively to represent him and I eventually agreed to do so, telling him I would do everything within my power to (hopefully) get him a job. He was getting married to a woman in Los Angeles and his moving here was very important. In addition, he had been looking for an L.A. job on his own for a year and had not been able to get a single interview with any law firm.

I did everything I could to secure this man interviews, and to my absolute astonishment, he received an interview and then a job offer from a decent-sized law firm in Los Angeles. He only received one interview, mind you; every other law firm I attempted to interest in him *passed* on him, and most did not even respond. There was basically no interest in real estate attorneys in L.A. (even ones with stellar records) at the time, yet I was able to get him this one offer. I was very excited about it. I believe the job paid around \$115,000 a year, which was much more than he was making at his current position. Moreover, the job was in Los Angeles, and he would be able to live and work in the same city as his fiancée.

When I called the attorney about the offer, he was disappointed.

"This is outrageous. The going rate for real estate attorneys in large [law firms](#) at my level is \$150,000 a year," he told me. He seemed genuinely disappointed and angry that the offer was not for more money. He had absolutely no gratitude. I got a little angry, and then I said to him something I will always regret:

"Listen. You are working at a small law firm in the middle of nowhere right now. You went to a lousy law school. You have been searching for a job for over a year and this is the only interview you have had in Los Angeles. This firm is paying you more than double what you are making right now. You have not taken the California bar. This firm is a big law firm and it has important work compared to what you are working on right now. This is a blessing and you need to take this offer!"

The guy paused for a second and then said something I will never forget: "You should be encouraging me and telling me my strengths--not putting me down. I do not want to talk to you ever again." He then put down the phone.

I was shocked. I looked him up on the website of the little law firm he was in, and he was still there a couple of years later. Then I lost track of him. I was very disappointed in myself because he was absolutely right: I should have been encouraging him and telling him his strengths, not belittling him. Perhaps if I had approached this differently, he and his new wife would have been able to live in the same town and I would have made a difference in his life by building him up, instead of tearing him down.

In my life I have been incredibly surprised when I show people that I really care about them. I love seeing potential in people because it is something we all need. It is important to find and show people what makes them special, what they are doing right and why they are good people and capable of so much. The world is bristling and full of people who know the things that are wrong with us, who are critical of us and can find fault in everything we do. There are fewer people out there, however, who tell us about the things that we are doing that are correct and take the time to build us up. Most people are more concerned about tearing others down.

In order to have the career you are capable of and to live the most productive life possible, you need to surround yourself with people who will challenge you and build you up, but never tear you down. You need to be around people who notice what you are doing right, not what you are doing wrong all the time. Allow others to be exposed to the constant critic--you can only reach your full potential when you are around those who recognize and encourage your strengths.

The final part of all of this is your immediate impact on the world and the legacy you leave. Do you want to be remembered

as a critic and a cynic, or do you want people to remember you as one who encouraged them to reach their full potential? Make others better off in the world by virtue of having met you and having related to you. Your goal should be to make the world a better place, and it all starts with making sure you build up and encourage others.

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