

## Managers, Idea People, and Workers

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I love watching Westerns. What fascinates me about them is that what typically occurs in these movies occurs in any organization--and the success of this process is what determines the success or failure of the organization.

In most Westerns, the plot line revolves around a powerful force that tests the will of a group, such as an evil banker taking away people's land, or a group of outlaws terrorizing a town, and so forth. The beginning of the story typically entails people being devastated by this evil force, and then an individual steps forward and says something like: "We need to rise up against this person and take back this town!" This person (usually the *hero*) does everything he can to motivate the people to take action and to take a stand against the evil force. This character tells people that they stand for something. The person recruits people to join in the fight and the Western is under way. The people who are recruited to fight are generally sufficiently motivated; they will continue the fight even when their leader is killed. Out of the group of people fighting, there will also generally arise a "manager" of sorts, who helps coordinate everyone's actions.

Your strength lies in being one of three sorts of people: (1) a dreamer who is able to see and formulate goals, (2) a manager who is able to take these goals and put them into a workable strategy, taking into account things like obstacles, people, machinery, computers, and so forth--whatever is needed to make the goal a reality, or (3) a worker, one who carries out the goals and does it efficiently. Because you are one of these, your ability to succeed and be happy is going to largely be determined by whether or not you are doing the correct sort of work, that which is most suitable to you.

For example, someone may come up with the idea of creating a hospital to serve the poor. The person with this idea may be very impassioned and may go around gaining support, contributions, and so forth until finally there is enough money, and a giant hospital is built. Once the hospital is built, doctors, nurses, and various specialists will all need to be hired to do the work of providing medical care to people--these are the people who do the work. A group of managers will be employed, to make sure the hospital's goal of serving the poor with quality health care is a reality. The managers will also be responsible for making sure various people are working up to certain standards, that budget goals are met, and so forth. Everyone will work together, guided by the overall goal of the institution.

Because everyone has specific roles, it is generally inappropriate and does not work when people try to take on a role for which they are not suited. The dreamer, who goes around and sells everyone on the idea of a hospital for the poor, is rarely going to be satisfied or happy *managing* and doing all the work necessary to ensure their dream is carried out on a day-to-day basis--hiring, firing, planning, setting agendas, running formal meetings week after week. Nor is the dreamer going to be happy being a doctor who sees patients every day, over and over again for an entire career. Similarly, the manager would not be comfortable conceiving the vision for the hospital, and inspiring the world with this vision. In addition, the doctor is not going to be happy policing the other doctors, nurses, and so forth.

One of my favorite television shows is *House*. *House* involves a doctor, Gregory House, who is very aggressive in the way he treats patients and is quite brilliant, but is always breaking the professional rules. He is supervised by a manager named Lisa Cuddy whose job is to make sure that the doctor is following procedures at all times. This is a classic conflict that you find in any organization. Managers set policies and rules in place to make sure that the work is carried out in a proper manner. Cuddy is also always concerned about donors and others who give money to the hospital based on the hospital's various goals. Cuddy is very careful to make sure that the intent of donors of the hospital is carried out and people are not offended in any way by the hospital and its standards of treatment. In a sense, donors could be categorized as part of a larger group of people who help set the vision for the hospital.

The same sort of conflict exists in all educational institutions. You have the person who starts the institution with a vision. You have the teachers and professors, and you have the administrators. Administrators watch the professors and make sure they are constantly carrying out the goals and vision of the institution.

All organizations are generally started by someone with an idea:

- It could be a vision of making affordable cars.
- It could be a nonprofit hospital.
- It could be someone who wants to make a more effective vacuum cleaner.
- It could be someone who believes that whales should not be killed.
- It could be an educational institution.
- It could be someone who has certain religious beliefs.

Organizations that start, thrive, and grow are generally started by someone with a vision or goal of some sort. In a Western, the person who arouses everyone to fight is generally the person with a goal. In every case if you look at an organization that starts, is successful, and moves forward through time, it is started by someone with a vision or a goal. Goals are something that coalesce people around a common purpose and drive them forward. If the goal is powerful enough, the person with the goal does not even need to be around for the organization to survive. Many religions, companies, and other organizations endure long, long after their creators are gone.

Vision is an important thing and the ability to have a vision is only part of the battle. The person with the vision must also be able to *sell* people on the vision so the vision can continue. If the person with the vision cannot sell, the vision will never be picked up and will not coalesce into an organization that grows, thrives, and endures. For example, politicians always have visions. They may have a vision of a more liberal country, greater military strength, and so forth. However, if the politician cannot sell the people around him or her on this vision, the vision will never become a reality. It is one thing to have a vision

and it is another to *get it going*.

When you look at extremely successful companies that have been started recently such as Facebook, Google, and so forth, you see that these companies were generally started by people who had an idea and could see what this idea would look like in the future. Warren Buffett has said, "The way to go is to get one good idea each year and ride it to its full potential." This is very true. Being an idea person can be a good thing. However, people like the founder of Facebook or the founders of Google are rarely the same types of people who have the ability to do the day-to-day work of managing or running these organizations. Their minds work differently and this is okay. It is rare that people who start organizations ever make a successful transition into management, for example. In fact, it hardly ever happens. Someone else needs to be brought in to run the company, and many more people will need to be brought in to do the work.

The original goal of Google, for example, was "to organize the world's information." This will likely always be the driving idea behind this product. Managers have been brought in to assist with hiring people, doing budgets, setting work quotas, and so forth. Other groups of people--the workers--are brought in to help make this vision into a reality. The ability of Google to maintain this vision of "organizing the world's information" will in large part determine its future success.

In your job you are likely suited to being an idea person, a manager, or a person doing the work. Your success or failure in your career will largely be determined by what role you are in. In the show *House*, House is a worker. He is also the hero of the show and the reason people watch it. In athletics, the athletes are the heroes more often than the coaches, who manage. There is nothing wrong with being a worker--the person who does the work. There is nothing wrong with being a manager--the person who manages the workers. There is nothing wrong with being an idea person--the person who comes up with ideas. What is wrong, however, is when someone who is one of these things believes he or she should be something else.

It is very common for managers to want to be idea people. It is equally common for idea people to want to be managers. It is common for workers to want to be managers. If you put someone with a great propensity to be a worker in a managerial role, that person will likely fail. If you put an idea person in a management role that person too will fail. People fail at jobs when they work on tasks that are not suited to the sort of people they are. You may not be reaching your full potential if you are in the wrong role or if you are trying to be something you are not.

One of the biggest mistakes many organizations make is promoting a salesperson to the role of [sales manager](#). The idea these organizations have is that the best salesperson would naturally make a good sales manager. Not true. Salespeople have one set of skills, and managers have another, completely different set of skills. Just because someone is a good *worker* does not mean he or she will make a good manager.

You need to know if you are an idea person, a manager, or a worker. There is nothing right or wrong with being one or the other, and there is opportunity for each type of person to advance and to achieve success. Whichever type of person you are, you need to understand that your inclination to being this sort of person is natural, and that you gravitate toward this in the same way most dogs like to chase cats. You have a nature, and you should honor your nature. *Your success in your career and life will often come down to your ability to honor your nature.*

## THE LESSON

You, like everyone else, are naturally disposed to be either a dreamer, a manager, or a worker. Consequently, your happiness and success depends on whether you are doing the work that is suitable to your disposition; you may not be reaching your full potential in you are in the wrong role. Your success in both career and life depends largely on your ability to honor your nature.

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