

## Your Commitment Needs to Defy Explanation

By *Harrison Barnes*

My mother lives in a retirement community in Rochester, New York, next door to a woman who was once attacked by an axe murderer. This woman, one of my mother's best friends, has been through one of the most horrific and unusual tragedies I can imagine.

One day, the woman's husband woke up for work, took a shower, got dressed and went downstairs to prepare a cup of coffee. As he stood there making his cup of coffee, he collapsed and died. Apparently he had been attacked with an axe while he slept, had bled profusely, was missing part of his head and, miraculously, was in such shock that he woke up to his alarm clock, he got up to take a shower and went about his day in a normal manner, not realizing he had been chopped up with an axe in the middle of the night.

When the police arrived at the house, they found the man's wife in bed unconscious: Half of her face had been chopped off with an axe and her head was split open. A large piece of her skull was missing. When she was revived some time later, she identified her son as the killer and then later lost all memory of the incident. I could not believe this story was true when I first heard it. You can read more about this bizarre case here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher\\_Porco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Porco). It is so notorious that it has its own Wikipedia entry.

Despite the fact that the woman's son has been convicted of murder, the woman now maintains that he is innocent, visits him in jail, and continues to care for him. My mother has been over at the woman's house while she baked cookies for her imprisoned son. One of the woman's eyes was chopped out in the axe attack, she is missing part of her skull and her husband is dead; nevertheless, she is still standing by her son, baking him cookies. Despite her son being amongst the most horrible kind of monsters imaginable, the woman continues to support him.

This is one of the most powerful forces of human nature: the power of a mother's love towards her child, and this is a level of commitment that often defies explanation. This power is so strong that it can transcend even an axe attack. Most parents care for their children to such an extraordinary degree that it defies all rationality. *Do you care about your career or your job as much as the average parent cares for his or her child?*

When I was in the asphalt business, I wanted nothing more than to get ahead and to impress each customer. There were times when I worked 48 hours straight, covered in tar with clothing literally sealed to my skin. I loved the work so much and was so committed to it. When I decided to be an attorney, I did the same thing; one time I worked from a Thursday morning until a Sunday morning--without a break. When I started as a recruiter, I would often wake up at 3:00 a.m. or so; I was so enthusiastic about the work. This sort of commitment can also defy explanation, but I am not an unusual case. In fact, anyone who is committed to a profession and a job the way they should be tends to work in a manner that defies explanation.

Your commitment and love for what you do, needs to defy explanation if you are going to reach your full potential, and obtain lasting success. You have absolutely no choice. We remember the people who put in incredible efforts, and these are the people who make an impact on the world.

When I was in high school, I had an English teacher, Dr. Fred Roth at Cranbrook-Kingswood School, who would spend two hours or more grading each student's paper. He would mark up these papers in different colored ink for different types of grammatical errors, and sometimes he would rewrite half of the sentences in his students' papers. Other teachers typically just wrote a grade at the end of the student's paper, made a few comments and left it at that. Dr. Roth was absolutely amazing. He eventually became the chair of the English department of our school, and people remembered and wrote to him years after he taught them--and graded their papers. Dr. Roth's commitment completely defied explanation, and I am sure he was never paid more just because he did his job better than other teachers.

But he was esteemed more than other teachers.

He was remembered more than other teachers. *Here I am writing about him 20 years after sitting in his classroom.*

And he can watch movies and see that his best students over the years are people like award-winning screenplay writers, directors on Broadway, and more. These people are all indebted to Dr. Roth in some part, because this man helped them improve. In fact, of all the teachers I have ever known, I cannot think of anyone else whose past students have so often enjoyed such success.

We remember people with incredible commitment, and we often forget *average* people.

We appreciate people with incredible commitment more than we appreciate *average* people.

Your life and career will be the most meaningful if you have a sense of commitment that defies explanation.

Typically when most people look at a picture that they are in, they will focus on themselves first. Very few people are interested in others as much as they are interested in themselves. One exception to this, however, is a parent. When parents look at a picture of them and their children, I have noticed that a good proportion of parents often remark first how good their child looks, how happy their child appears, or how it is (or is not) the best picture of their child.

Parents that really care about their children will naturally tend to elevate their children to a role more important than themselves, and will always look at their children first. To me, this is one indicator that demonstrates that parents often care about their children even more than they care about themselves.

It is this level of caring that forever bonds the parent to the child, and keeps a child coming back to his or her parents. Both the parent and the child need each other. A child needs a parent for emotional and/or financial support, as the child grows older. A parent may need a child for emotional and/or financial support, as the parent grows older. Both parent and child in a large sense get their identities from one another. This special bond keeps a parent and child connected throughout their lives.

The love a parent has for a child at this level is selfless and it is about taking to heart the child's interest before the parent's own interest. An artist may feel this kind of intense love and commitment towards their work; a composer may feel this way towards their symphony; a storeowner may feel this way towards their store. Anyone who is incredibly good at something will generally have elevated their work to a level of importance that is often greater than, or equal to their own importance.

The parent-child relationship is, in a sense, a model of the sort of relationship you should have with your work and your employer. You should care about your job, your employer, and the work that you are doing in a way that elevates it to something that is almost on par, if not more important, than you are. The same way a parent may put a child first, so too should you understand how to put your job first. The same way that a parent is more often looking out for the child's interest than the parent's own interest, so too should you more often look out for your employer's interest than your own.

Very few job and career seekers seem to understand the following: *The people who do the worst are those who are most interested in themselves.* The people who do the best are those who are most interested in others. This also applies to life in general: The people who are the happiest are most often those who are most interested in others, not in themselves.

The argument that you should treat an employer in a manner and with a level of care that is similar to a parent's love for a child may seem to be something that won't fit in to your way of thinking. After all, you could lose your job at any moment and all sorts of negative things could occur between you and your employer. This is true. However, at the same time, the more committed your employer knows you are to them, the more the employer forms a bond with you. The more your employer believes you love them, the better off you will be.

- Employers typically choose to keep around those who like and care for them.
- Employers promote and protect those who are caring and loyal to them.

When I was around ten or eleven years old, my mother took me to get a dog. Since my mother had grown up with a father who hunted with bird dogs, she decided that I should get a Brittany spaniel, and she took me to visit a family who raised the dogs for hunting. When she took me to see the puppies, one immediately ran up to me and started playing with me. This was the dog I chose to take home. I chose the dog because it seemed to like me the most, and I knew she would always run up to me and follow me around. In a matter of moments I could tell that this puppy would be committed, whereas I never could be sure of the other dogs. This is how it is with employers as well: Employers choose to keep around those who seem the most interested in them, and those who are the most committed. That dog, it turned out, was so committed to me that I had to lock her up whenever I left the house, because if she ever got out, she would chase my car. That dog cared about me more than any other dog ever would, and I knew it the second she first ran up to me.

When I was practicing law, I remember once working with an attorney, who had around 12 years of experience, yet he had very little self-confidence. He did not seem all that intelligent either, but he had been protected, promoted, and kept around by the higher ups in my law firm's New York office, since he had started there after law school. This fellow had probably outlasted at least 100 people who had been hired at his level since he first started at the firm. He seemed to genuinely like the people he was working for; he laughed at all of their jokes, carried their bags, and looked out for them.

He also worked incredibly hard and tolerated a lot of abuse all those years. For example, he would do stuff like follow partners to the Jersey shore on the weekends, and run errands for them while staying in a cheap motel near their beach homes. He would be working all weekend-long, sometimes even taking phone calls about matters at 11:30 p.m. on a Saturday night. This was not the sort of thing attorneys in [prestigious law firms](#) typically do in their late 30s, but this guy could always be depended upon to do things like this--and he would do so without batting an eye. He would even run and pick up theater tickets for a boss if need be; this was not even something that secretaries were asked to do.

I was once on a flight from Los Angeles to New York with this attorney and a partner. From a few seats back in coach, I saw the partner seat the other attorney next to him, up in first class. I watched while the partner leaned over with various instructions to him from time to time during the flight, and the guy scribbled away on a notebook, while the partner sipped wine and read the paper. When the plane landed in New York, the guy jumped up and grabbed the partner's suit coat and handed it to him, then grabbed his luggage and helped him through the airport with it. While none of this seems all that out-of-the-ordinary, the thing is that if I had offered to carry the partner's luggage, the partner probably would have been uncomfortable with it. The guy carrying the luggage had ingratiated himself to such a degree with his superiors that they were not afraid to allow him to do things like this.

The higher ups knew this attorney was not that smart, but was committed beyond reason and could be pushed around. However, I think they also genuinely liked him and the fact that he was so committed. From what I understood then, he was probably making around \$350,000 a year in his "counsel" role in the late 1990s. I remember all of the young attorneys used to make fun of the guy for being such a kiss ass, being taken advantage of so often, and being so generally accepting of and nice to his bosses.

He is still working at the law firm and I bet he is still laughing at bad jokes, carrying bags, kissing up, and now probably makes over \$500,000 a year. In the time he has been at that firm, I have seen countless attorneys come and go, but this guy is still there and his job is still protected. All of the young attorneys I know that used to make fun of the guy would now be 10+ years out of [law school](#). None of them are with the law firm, and none of them have done anywhere near as well in their careers.

In almost every instance, when you find someone who has done very well inside of an organization, you will find someone who likes their superiors and who does not mind taking orders from the higher ups. We like the people who like and respect us, and the people who generally do the best in life are the people who genuinely like and support others. We choose to be around those who we believe will stand behind us and support us. We like to promote, remember, and admire those who show a commitment that defies explanation.