



Create a Sense of Urgency

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I first started selling asphalt repair services door-to-door, I heard one response an awful lot:

"Let me think about it!"

In fact, I heard this so often it became tiresome after a while. I could speak with 100 people in an evening and 99 of them would say, "Let me think about it!" The people were pleasant enough and understood the advantages of what I was selling, but they all wanted time to think about it before committing to the purchase. That is how most of us react when we are confronted with the possibility of purchasing something that costs a lot of money: We want to mull it over.

The chances are very good that the purchases that you've taken the time to "think about" in the past are things that you ultimately did not buy. When you decide you are probably not going to purchase something, it usually is because you have no sense of urgency. There are always better things that you can go ahead and do with your money, your time, and so forth.

I live right across the street from a giant hiking area. Since I work about 80 hours a week, I am typically "thinking about" going hiking because it takes so much time. It is the same thing with my interest in riding the racing bicycle I purchased five years ago, or going out into the desert, riding the sand dunes on my ATV. It is the same thing with a million other little things: I am always *thinking about them*. However, if my wife came and told me she would divorce me tomorrow unless I were to go ride my bike with her, I would no longer be just thinking about it. I would get right on that bike.

I owe a great deal of my success to my ability to create a sense of urgency. When I started in the asphalt business I did not have a lot of self-confidence in what I was doing. I just kept getting rejected over and over again when I tried to sell people door-to-door. It was very frustrating and a huge let down. It is not easy speaking with 100 strangers in one night and having just about every single person "think about it" because, as we have established, "thinking about it" means that the person is almost certainly not going to be using the service at all.

One day I got the idea that I would no longer tolerate people *thinking about it*, so when I went to each prospective customer's door I said the following:

"I am going to be working on your street tomorrow. I will do the work for you tomorrow and tomorrow only. I will charge you much less than I normally charge--far less than any competitor would charge, but you have to agree to have me do the work tomorrow. I cannot come back in two days, next week, or next month--I have to do the work tomorrow."

This one change in my business created hundreds of thousands of dollars in wealth for me when I was in college and law school. I was soon driving around in a Porsche. I ate out at fancy sushi restaurants and French restaurants for the rest of my school days. I had a really nice apartment and lived well. I had an accountant and was talking with him about tax strategies, while my classmates were still asking their parents for money. In short, establishing a sense of urgency invigorated my entire business and literally changed my entire life.

I went from selling to hardly anyone--to selling to just about every homeowner I encountered. What had formerly been an incredibly difficult business suddenly became incredibly easy for me. I was so enthralled with the importance of having a sense of urgency that I also installed a yellow police type flasher on top of all of my trucks. When I went through neighborhoods selling the service I would always have the flasher operating on top of the truck. This created even more of a sense of urgency and I started selling even more.

One of the most important things you can do in your job search and in your career is to create a profound sense of urgency. The more urgency you can create in your prospective clients or employers, the better you are likely to do in your job search and the more offers you will receive.

People who are currently employed typically have a much easier time getting jobs than those who are not. Similarly, people who have been unemployed for a very short time have a much easier time getting positions than people who have been unemployed for a longer period of time. The reason for this is that there is generally a *sense of urgency* that is attached to hiring the recently unemployed. In terms of the currently employed, they are generally considered more desirable because they are currently employed, and this helps create a corresponding sense of urgency on the part of any potential new employers.

How can you create a sense of urgency in your [own job search](#) and in your interviews with employers and so forth? I think it is pretty easy.

When I was moving to Los Angeles from Detroit several years ago I sent a bunch of letters out to various law firms. At the time, law firms always requested that you send your transcript with your applications. I had neglected to do this. Since I had not included my transcript, several law firms called me (people did not really use e-mail so much back then) and requested that I send my transcript. Within a few weeks of mailing out these letters I started to also get a few interviews. I flew out to Los Angeles for an interview and the first firm I interviewed with was an extremely good firm but, at the time, not as well respected as some of the other law firms, which had been around 75-plus years in the city.

"Who else are you talking to?" the hiring partner asked me in the interview with this newer firm.

"I've received calls from around 20 law firms," I told him. "I thought the market was in bad shape but the number of law firms that have contacted me is hard to believe. I spoke with my wife last night and two more called just while I was flying out here for an interview!"

I then proceeded to list a few of these [interested law firms](#), some of them highly prestigious, to the partner. My plans for that particular weekend in Los Angeles were to interview with the firm I was currently speaking with and one more.

I went to interview at the other firm, and then the hiring partner at the initial firm called me back to his office.

"We do not want to lose you to another firm," he said. "We have already prepared an offer letter for you and would like to pay you a \$5,000 starting bonus as well."

I was stunned. Five thousand dollars was a lot of money for me back then. I had received an offer from one of the best law firms in Los Angeles within a few hours of landing at LAX. It had all been because of the sense of urgency that I had created, which really came about simply because so many law firms were calling me to request my transcript. I had not meant to create a sense of urgency, but somehow it had come out that way. What should have been a fairly long and drawn-out interview process became *condensed*, and I received an offer very quickly. The law firm felt a tremendous sense of urgency to hire me and take me out of the job market quickly, because they felt I might accept an offer from a competitor.

Creating a sense of urgency is one of the strongest weapons you have in your job search.

When I was in law school I also applied to work for judges following my graduation. The same week I sent out my applications to work for judges I received a call asking me to interview a couple of days later. I got a flight and was in Detroit for an interview a few days later. A couple of days after my interview I received a call from the judge I had spoken with. He told me that he was offering me the job but that if I did not accept immediately he would call his second choice. I accepted the job and I am glad I did. The judge also understood the importance of a sense of urgency.

When I was in law school, I had a strange visit with a friend of my ex-girlfriend's brother, whom I had only met a few times. I had no idea what he was doing in Virginia, all the way from Michigan. He stayed with me and that night took me out to dinner and told me that my ex-girlfriend was getting married shortly, but that there was still time if I wanted to "do something about it." This was something that seemed to have been orchestrated to create a sense of urgency for me for some reason. We can create a sense of urgency in personal relationships as well, and people often do.

Companies use a sense of urgency all the time. They have 48-hour sales and one-day specials, and they say supplies are limited, all to motivate you to purchase them. And it works. Many companies are having sales all the time because they know that this created *sense of urgency* will get you to purchase things, when you otherwise might not purchase anything.

I worked one summer in New York when I was in law school, and next to our building there was a store that had signs all over its windows that said things like "Bankrupt! Going Out of Business! Final Days!" The first time I saw this sign I was very excited because I thought I was going to be walking into some incredible deals. There was confetti all over the floor of the business and tons of red markdown signs.

When I walked into the store and started looking around I realized none of the stuff was really that good of a deal at all. For example, there was a cheap-looking lamp that might have been marked down from \$1,100 to \$300. I doubted the lamp was even worth \$200. There was a ton of stuff like this. Nevertheless, people were all over the store, walking around in a crazy hurry because they thought the store might be closing any second. I was in New York six months later and noticed that the place was still having the same "going out of business" sale. Then, over a year later, there were new signs up on the windows that said "Lost Our Lease! We Must Liquidate Everything Immediately!!" Still later there were different signs.

The perpetually going out of business store was being dishonest, but they were also making use of the same *sense of urgency* phenomenon that you can use to transform your career. Ironically, the store stayed in business by pretending to be constantly *going out of business*. Those business owners understood the importance of creating a sense of urgency better than anyone else.

Several years ago, I spent a lot of time in Turkey and became fascinated at how people sold rugs. The entire process involved creating a sense of urgency and is practically an art form that is far too involved to go into here. For example, the rug sellers would create stories about how they got a certain rug from a family, it had been an heirloom and was worth 10 times what they were selling it for, but the salesman's daughter was sick, and he needed money desperately. These sorts of stories were floated around like crazy, and they worked.

A few years ago I had a garage sale at my house. I had purchased some "Persian" rugs on eBay a few years previously that were really just crappy rugs. They were machine made, had not very nice patterns, and so forth. They were big rugs that had cost around \$80 each, and delivery had been over \$75 for each rug because they were so big. When the rugs had arrived, they were so ugly I put them in my garage and they sat there until I decided to have my garage sale a few years later.

At the garage sale I put the rugs out. A young guy came up to me and starting asking about them. I had no price tags on them.

"You have chosen the nicest rugs I have!" I told him enthusiastically when he expressed interest. "These are such nice rugs I am sure they will be the first things I sell today!" I rolled the rugs out proudly like I had seen the men do in the rug stores. I pointed out their good features and various patterns.

"I have a personal connection of these rugs and am not even sure I want to sell them!" I told the man.

I then lectured the man about how these rugs could be heirlooms that he could pass down from generation to generation in his family (which is true). None of what I was saying was untrue--but they were not very special rugs in the grand scheme of things, having only cost me \$80 each.

Finally, the man asked me how much I wanted for them.

"\$2,500 for the lot" I said. "There is no way I can accept less than this." I told him that if he liked them they were "priceless."

He looked very nervous and eventually came up to me:

"I only have \$1,100," he said.

I told him I was not sure I could let them go for this low of a price and I went inside. When I went inside I argued with my wife for a few moments and I was sure he could hear me outside. We were arguing about something stupid like not leaving food uncovered in the refrigerator. I had gone inside to get a Diet Coke and my wife had gotten angry with me when I opened the fridge and she saw an uncovered chicken or something sitting there. After my brief argument, I went outside and I could tell the man thought I had been arguing with my wife about giving up the rugs.

"I can only do \$1,400, but you are going to have to purchase them right now. I should not even be selling these!"

The man reached in his pocket and miraculously found some extra money and paid me \$1,400. Then he and his girlfriend grabbed the rugs and started running out to their car with them. They were terrified that I was going to change my mind. It was all because they felt a sense of urgency. My father-in-law saw this whole exchange and he told me later that the couple had been in such a hurry to get out of there that they had peeled out when they left.

Rugs, like many things, are worth what people are willing to pay for them. The rugs I sold that day I sold for no more than a department store or a rug shop might have sold them for; however, I never would have sold them for that price unless there had been a sense of urgency connected to their sale.

When I was in Turkey, many of the men I met talked about how they had a dream of importing rugs and holding auctions in various American airports. If you read any newspaper around the country you will see various advertisements that say things like: "Special Auction of Rugs at Airport--Near U.S. Customs Building. Liquidation event of merchandise that must be sold under Order #295489." These are not actually goods that have been seized by the United States Customs Service. They are owned by a guy in Turkey. The guy takes \$20,000 worth of rugs or so, spends \$10,000 to put them on an American Airlines flight from Istanbul to whatever city he wants to ship them to in the United States, and then holds a "liquidation auction" at the airport, where he turns his \$30,000 investment into \$200,000 or more, as eager people line up to purchase rugs at an auction.

You would not believe how many "success stories" I have heard about people in Turkey who have delved into this business.

This is the power of creating a sense of urgency. It really works. It is the greatest [sales and job-procuring](#) secret. It is the fastest way to close a deal and to get the commitment you are seeking from somebody.

This tactic will work for you in your job search and it will work for you in your life. You are not a rug, of course, but it is important to understand that your career is a commodity and that you need to sell yourself. The better you are at selling yourself and the more effective your sales presentation is, the better off you will do in your career and in your life. *Creating a sense of urgency will always help you make the sale.*

THE LESSON

Creating a sense of urgency is one of the most important things you can do in your job search. Understand that your career is itself a commodity and you need to sell yourself, and your salesmanship will determine your career success. Creating a sense of urgency will always help you close your sale.

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