

Smash Through Whatever Ceiling You Are Seeing by Concentrating on Your Largest Reward

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was about 12 years old I went to look at BMWs with a relative of mine. We spent several hours in the dealership. My relative was trying to figure out if there was a way to get a lower lease payment on the car. Negotiating with the people in the dealership took him a very long time. We were in a not-so-great area of [Detroit](#), and I could see my relative was trying to get a good deal, and was feeling like a big shot in the process. For most of us, buying a car is among the most significant events in our lives, and for this relative it was no different. He was someone who had gone to all the right schools, played by the rules, and continually held [jobs](#) for a long time.

About two hours into the negotiation, a couple of men pulled up in a giant, brand new BMW. The stereo was blasting and the car had aftermarket rims that looked expensive. The salesman who had been speaking with my relative said "just a moment" and rushed over to the men in the car. Before the salesman ran over he indicated that the men had paid with actual cash for the car and were drug dealers. He told us that drug dealers were his best customers because they always paid cash and rarely negotiated.

One of the guys had apparently brought one of his friends to look at cars. The [salesman](#) completely lost interest in us for several minutes, despite being in the middle of a negotiation.

My relative and I sat together in the salesman's office for about 20 minutes until the two men who had been in the car appeared with the salesman. Despite the fact I was quite young, I immediately realized the two men were very uneducated and appeared somewhat rough. They wore leather coats and lots of gold jewelry.

"I'll be right with you," the salesman said as he popped his head in the door of the office where we were sitting. "I just need to get these guys out of here and deliver their car."

About five minutes later, one of the men said he might be interested in a second car on the lot, in addition to the one he was already buying. He asked the salesman to show him a second car.

My relative was disgusted. After that, we got up and left. As we were leaving, my relative said something I'll never forget. He was in his early 50s at the time, and the men buying the car could not have been more than 25.

"I've worked hard all of my life and I cannot even afford one of those cars. Those guys who just came in probably never went to college, and look at them."

I could see my relative was very saddened by what he had seen. It was as if the rules of society were working against him.

A few years later, I saw the movie *Scarface* and was mesmerized. *Scarface* is about a man (played brilliantly by Al Pacino) who comes to the United States from Cuba and is placed in a detention center. He is told he can get a green card and earn his freedom if he kills someone in the detention center, and he does. He gets a [job in a restaurant](#) as a [dishwasher](#) and [cook](#), but soon decides he does not want this life. He is told if he picks up some drugs for someone he will be given a few thousand dollars. He goes over to pick up the drugs and is almost killed, and his brother is killed in the process. He starts working for the drug dealer for whom he was picking up the drugs. Very soon he has mansions, beautiful women, fast cars, and all the material possessions anyone could want.

As the director shows us all of this, a song is playing with the refrain "take it to the limit" over and over again. The implication from the music and the acting is that Pacino's character has taken his life to the limit and made the most of himself, albeit in a life of crime.

This movie is remarkable because it is so quintessentially American. In the United States, stories like this occur every day. People who come to this country with nothing become huge successes. They can do this without educations, without connections, without any special advantages. The results they accomplish are achieved through the human spirit.

I used to work in a law firm, and I have spent most of my life around people who are well-educated, who are playing by the bureaucratic rules of society – people like my relative at the BMW dealership. When you spend time with these types of people, you notice they have a certain disdain for those who've somehow gotten ahead in life without playing by the rules regarding schools, titles, and so forth – the things most of society views as important. These people look at the people around them who are succeeding and decide that achieving success must have everything to do with luck.

This is not true.

What is true is that there is a glass ceiling in your life, my life, and most people's lives, which we need to push through and shatter. Certain people push through these glass ceilings to achieve what they want in life, and others do not.

The man in *Scarface* smashed through the glass ceiling.

The customers in the BMW dealership smashed through the glass ceiling.

My relative did not. Most people do not.

The glass ceiling represents your potential, but it also represents a lot more. In order to illustrate the true power of the glass ceiling, I would like to tell you a couple of quick stories about my experience regarding people and glass ceilings. A glass ceiling has more to do with what you think you are worth and what you think you can contribute than anything else. When you establish your own worth and believe you are worth *more*, your relationships, your way of seeing the world – everything else changes.

[BCG Attorney Search](#) is one of the companies I manage. At BCG Attorney Search, we typically hire recruiters out of prestigious law firms to work with attorneys from equally [prestigious law firms](#). The recruiters earn salaries based on a commission structure, and the more placements the recruiters make, the more money they earn.

Prior to becoming recruiters, these individuals were all getting paid [law firm salaries](#). Several years ago, I began to notice a pattern that's repeated itself to this day. If a recruiter made \$100,000 the year before they became a recruiter, they would make \$100,000 in commissions in their first year with our company. If they made \$250,000 the year before they became a recruiter, their first year's commissions would amount to \$250,000.

I wondered, for instance, why very capable people were not making more placements, and therefore more pay, once they started working for us. It is extremely hard to become a recruiter at BCG. We probably interview 100 people for every one person who [gets the job](#). I knew we were not simply seeing this phenomenon because of some sort of error in our screening process, or some lack of ability on the part of our hires. There was more to it than that.

The people who became recruiters for BCG were setting their own value in everything they did. The number of people they spoke with, their passion for the subject matter, and how hard they worked all set the tone for the results they achieved. When you are in a [commission-style job](#), you get paid based on the amount of commissions you generate. Sales is a very complex discipline on numerous levels, and salespeople do essentially control their own incomes.

The recruiters, in these cases, were being trapped by what they thought they were worth. They were self-imposing a limit as to what they could earn. Once we realized the recruiters were trapped, we started doing everything within our power to pull them out of the trap, and to make them see they could earn as much money as they wanted and be anyone they chose to be. In reality, these recruiters were not limited in value to the amount of their previous salaries.

You need to establish your own terms for your life. You need to make these terms the greatest you possibly can. If you are currently in a bureaucratic organization and have played by all the rules, you need to ensure the organization can give you what you want from your life. The point of this is simple: life gives you what you ask of it. Your career gives you what you demand of it.

In the BMW dealership that day there were two 'meetings of the minds'. In one of the meetings was a mind that had always done whatever others told it, and paid others whatever they asked. Another mind did what it wanted to and set its own goals. Al Pacino in *Scarface* set his own goals as well.

When you concentrate on your largest perceived reward, you can smash through glass ceilings. Remember the glass ceiling only exists in your mind.

THE LESSON

In this article, Harrison explains the importance of smashing that glass ceiling which you have created in your minds - the ceiling which almost always pulls you down. To feel that others are more successful because they are lucky or because you don't have as much potential is a big myth. You need to push through this myth and set your own worth and terms for your life, and believe that you are capable of a lot more than what you think. On doing this, your relationships, your way of seeing the world, and everything else around you changes. The glass ceiling exists only in your mind and you need to simply mould it to think greater of you. Realize the potential in you, smash the ceiling, and go ahead with a successful life.

<https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/>