

The Quality of Your Life and Career Is the Result of Your Habits

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Every year on my birthday I receive phone calls and e-mails from various people. Many of the people I do not know very well, but they have been sending me birthday wishes each year for as long as I can remember. Some of them are distant relatives and others are people I may have been close to a decade or more ago. Like clockwork, every year I can count on receiving some sort of notice from these people congratulating me on spending another year on this earth.

These people who are so good at remembering my birthday are also some of the happiest people I have ever known. I think a lot of this happiness comes from the fact that they have made things like birthday wishes for other people a *habit* of sorts. What this says to me is that they are able to prioritize others. What if you prioritized others more? How would your life be different? In the grand scheme of things, wishing someone a happy birthday might not be all that significant; however, for most people who do this sort of thing, it is simply one of numerous things that they do in order to make others feel acknowledged.

Your particular good and bad habits have a lot to do with the quality of your life and your future. The birthday well-wishers are a good example: Instead of remembering others' birthdays, most people are habitually more rude, standoffish, and judgmental of others. Many people are only concerned with what others can do for them. Many people are angry with others constantly. This sort of behavior ends up isolating people from one another. Over the long run, those with bad habits toward others are likely to find themselves lonely and separate from others. Not acknowledging others, being rude, and so forth are all habits for many people. Living a life filled with stress and unhealthy choices is another example: This can kill you and do so quickly.

To progress toward your goals, it is important that you assess the habits that you have and the habits that you lack. If you develop good habits, then the quality of your life is likely to be far better, and if you maintain bad habits, you are more likely to suffer.

In your career, the quality of your habits is a potent weapon in your success arsenal because most other people are simply waiting to be told what to do, or they copy others, instead of developing and maintaining their own habits. The more positive habits you develop, the better you will do in your career.

It is incredibly important to break bad habits. When one tries to break a bad habit, it is often incredibly painful. Someone who is used to smoking every day, for example, will feel a tremendous pull to smoke for some time after beginning the process of quitting. The person's body might even revolt against it. But eventually, with some discipline and help from others, people can break their habits--whatever they may be.

A few years ago, I [hired an attorney](#) in our company's building for some assistance with evicting a tenant. The attorney was 42 years old. He was a real success story, having gone to law school and having started a small, thriving law firm. This man was very ritualistic. He came into work early each morning, then he would go to court later in the morning. After court he would come back to the office and work the rest of the day. He earned a good living and was well liked by everyone. His work entailed going to court every day regarding matters like fighting evictions, defending drunk drivers, and small claims.

This attorney had both good and bad habits. He was probably around twenty pounds overweight. He smoked Marlboro Reds all the time, and even smoked inside the building, despite the fact that doing so is illegal in California. I allowed him to do this because I liked him a lot, and frankly, I did not think he could work without his cigarettes. I could always tell when he was back from court each day because the smell of cigarettes would drift out into the hallway.

"You need to stop smoking those things," I told him on numerous occasions. "They will kill you."

He was always stressed out and was trying to manage his law practice all on his own. He had never been married and I could tell that, on some level, he felt trapped in his life and did not know what to do other than to "push through" and make the most of his stressful existence.

Instead of exercising, meditating, or finding some hobbies, he liked to let out stress by going to Las Vegas and letting loose, whenever he could get away from the office. He used to tell me a story about how he was once standing in a corner of a casino, drunk, at 1:00 a.m. one night, and a tipsy woman walked up to a friend of his, thinking the friend was a gigolo. The friend had been trying to meet women unsuccessfully all evening and apparently was very awkward with women. Needless to say, the attorney's friend was astonished when he was propositioned and ended up going home with the woman who gave him \$300 for his efforts.

"I love Vegas!" the attorney used to laugh after he told me that story. I cannot even remember how many times he must have told me this story, but it was definitely at least three times.

One day he stopped returning my calls and I did not understand why. We had been on good terms. A few days later he was found dead in his apartment, where he had apparently been dead for several days. He had had a heart attack and died at 42. In my opinion, he would still be alive today had he not smoked, and had he had a better diet and not stressed himself out so much. In addition to his good habits, which allowed him to build a successful law practice, this attorney had negative habits, and it was these negative habits that ultimately killed him.

When his family came to clean out his office, I met his mother. She was in her late 70s and a very calm woman. She moved slowly, but you could tell that she had a Zen-like manner about her that always kept her calm. I am sure that she had a different lifestyle and set of habits from her son, and it was these habits that enabled her to live as long as she did.

I see episodes like this over and over again. So many people's lives end prematurely, or the people do not reach their full potential, due to a series of bad choices and negative habits. Your habits will determine your destiny. Good habits can make

you successful and bad habits can bring you down. The results you get in your life, how long you live, how happy you are, and your career outcome will all be determined by the sorts of habits you have.

Habits are also about your state of mind. For example, many people feel a sense of low self-esteem, anger, revenge, insult, and more. These sorts of negative emotions are automatically and habitually activated in many people whenever certain things occur in their surroundings. I know someone who becomes extremely angry and insulted if someone is late for a meeting. He harbors all sorts of hostility toward the person for hours after he or she shows up. This guy's anger comes out of habit, and not as a logical response to his situation. Other people like to complain and find fault with everything. They are quick to point out what is wrong with something, what does not work, and what is improper. They find fault with their jobs. They find fault with their friends and coworkers. These negative reactions to life and other people are habitual. They are a response that is learned over time.

Other people react to everything around them in a positive way. They are always giving people the benefit of the doubt. They are always seeing the good and not the bad in people and in situations. They learn to cherish and not be angry about their [jobs and careers](#). These responses are also habitual. These people are, for the most part, continually happy. Even when something terrible happens, out of habit, they are able to make the best of a bad situation.

When you develop habits that force you to see the world in positive ways, your life will change and it will be more positive. You need to push yourself to acquire these habits, though. Also, your habits are influenced by how you were raised and whom you choose to spend your time with. For example, if you spend or have spent the majority of your time around people with bad habits, the chances are very good you will develop (or have already developed) bad habits as well.

It is important to take inventory of your habits and to know what they are and where they come from. You need to know which habits are helping you and which habits are hurting you. You need to eliminate the bad habits and develop more positive habits. Developing good habits takes discipline. When you first start trying to develop a good habit, your body and mind will resist it. However, over time you can develop positive habits, which will help you.

Several years ago, I went to an attorney's house for dinner, and I realized by his habits that he probably did not have long to live. I did not know if it would be two years, five years, or ten years, but I did not think he would be around long. The attorney was in his late 40s and had numerous habits that I knew would bring him down sooner rather than later.

He was a good attorney. In fact, he was one of the best attorneys in his area of the country. He never looked very healthy, however. His face was noticeably pale and you could see stress in it. His belly popped way out over his belt. He huffed and sweated when he walked up the stairs. Every night he barbecued all sorts of meats on his grill while he made himself numerous mixed drinks, until he started slurring his words. He drank so much that he would buy four one-gallon liquor bottles at a time, which the liquor store would put side-by-side in a box, in a special way for him.

He never exercised, and each day he went to work, he dealt with an incredible amount of stress. He did not know it, but all of his relatives knew that his wife was having an affair. The man's life consisted of working very hard, coming home and getting drunk and barbecuing, and on weekends, sitting in front of the television, drinking and watching sports.

A year after I realized that this man was headed down the wrong path, he got cancer. I saw him once more and his cancer had gotten so serious that he could no longer sit down for long periods of time.

A short time later he was dead.

This is an unhappy story. However, I have known many attorneys like this and many other men and women like this, whose lives are overtaken by bad habits. The habit could be working too much, eating an unhealthy diet, drinking too much, or a combination of all of the above. The point is, though, that each of these people developed a set of negative habits, which ultimately dragged them down to the grave.

You need to develop a series of habits that will help you to live long, do well, and be happy, and you need to attack and conquer the habits that harm you. The results you obtain in your life are directly related to the habits you develop.

THE LESSON

Assess both the habits you have and the habits you lack to progress towards your goals. You will improve the quality of your life by adopting positive habits, and adopting negative habits will make you more likely to suffer. Adopt habits that will enable you to live long and prosper, and conquer those habits that harm you.

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