

Five Gallons of Soup: Are You a Moving-Away-From or a Moving-Toward Sort of Person?

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was a freshman in college, one of my older fraternity brothers once dumped a giant pail of soup over my head while I was eating dinner. This was during my "pledge" period when I was in the process of joining the fraternity.

Each of the kids in my pledge class experienced similar humiliations at one point or another, something that we all endured until we were officially inducted into the fraternity. The older fraternity brothers loved these sorts of pranks and mischief and I am sure it is still going on to this day.

I had suffered this particular indignity because I had not been present at an event the night before where my pledge brothers were blindfolded and individually led out to the front porch of the fraternity house, told to get on their hands and knees, and had a giant plastic trashcan of cold water dumped on them from a porch three stories above. Unfortunately, after being forced to drink almost a fifth of whisky in the hours of hazing leading up to this event, I had passed out on a floor of a bathroom and had been unable to be moved to the front porch to have water dumped on my head.

This soup was among the most humiliating experiences I had ever had. I was with 30 or so other guys who all thought it was hilarious; many were laughing so hard that they fell out of their chairs. I had been sitting at a table, innocently eating my dinner, when the people at the table all got up at the same time, ostensibly to go get some more food. A few seconds later my older fraternity brother came up behind me and dumped five gallons of soup on me. Needless to say, I was extremely shocked and upset.

Instead of remaining incredibly upset and dwelling on it, I decided that I needed to take action and fight back. The kid who had done this to me was older, bigger than me, and had a lot more friends in the fraternity house than I had. Nevertheless, I knew that I would never respect myself if I did not stick up to him and fight back aggressively. I did not want to be known as the sorry kid who had had soup poured over his head.

I had fun for months pulling all sorts of pranks on the guy who did this to me. Eventually, my pranks got so serious and I started pushing the line so much that the president of the fraternity came to speak to me and told me the pranks had to stop. Not only had I returned the favor by dumping soup on the guy--at least three times--I did other menacing things to torment him as well. He started avoiding *me*, not the other way around.

There was another guy in my fraternity who once got into a big fight with a couple of other kids in the fraternity house, also over someone pouring liquid all over him. He lost the fight and ended up being humiliated in front of a bunch of people. A fight with punches, screaming, and so forth had ensued. Apparently, moments before this, someone had walked up behind the guy and peed on him. I am not going to comment on the humor or the animalistic nature of my fraternity brothers, but I will tell you that they probably thought this was funnier than the soup that had been poured on my head. What was so different about this episode, though, was the ferocity of the guy's reaction. He appeared to have been genuinely traumatized and was upset to a high degree by what had happened to him--and understandably so.

After this fight, the young man avoided the fraternity house almost completely. He moved off campus and was rarely seen. He would walk around the block so that he would never have to walk by the house. He did not go to parties there, and he pretty much avoided all of the people from the fraternity house the rest of his time in college.

One time, several of us were standing on the front porch of the fraternity house and we saw the guy crossing the street about a block away. It was clear that the guy was trying not to be seen by any of his fraternity brothers.

"What a loser!" one of my fraternity brothers shouted.

I have heard people use the word "loser" in multiple ways throughout my life. This use of the word really stuck with me, though, because this time the guy was being referred to as someone who had *given up* trying to fit in with the other kids. In this sense, one could say that many people out there are "losers," to the extent that they are avoiding situations and people that are painful to them.

- Avoidance is a form of being a loser.
- Not challenging yourself is a form of being a loser.
- Giving up is a form of being a loser.

The reaction of other kids in the fraternity house to getting in arguments, being humiliated, and so forth was typically to keep pushing forward and doing their thing.

People react in different ways when negative things happen to them. Have you ever known someone who had a really bad experience, wherein something really awful happened to the person at work, in his or her personal life, or elsewhere?

- The person might have gotten fired.
- The person might have been disgraced or humiliated in a relationship.
- The person might have failed at a very important task.

It does not really matter what the situation is--what is most important is how the person reacted. When something bad happens, many people typically react in one of two ways: they either pick themselves up and keep moving forward, or they withdraw and try to avoid similar bad situations in the future. Many people spend their entire lives avoiding certain situations. Other people spend their lives continually pushing through and finding new, better situations. You are probably either one sort of person or the other.

I believe that the world is almost evenly split between *moving toward* people and *moving away from* people. Regardless of

who you are and what sort of job you are doing, you are either a *moving toward* person or a *moving away from* person. Your success in your career and life will ultimately have a lot to do with whether or not you are motivated by moving toward something or are consistently moving away from something.

People who are moving toward something are constantly trying to make progress. They have various priorities that are important to them and they try to keep on top of these priorities, no matter what the cost. In addition, they typically go into situations without caring so much about what can go wrong. They are often perceived as *fearless*. When things are not working out very well, these people do not usually pay as much attention to what is not working as to what *is* working. They are the sorts of people who are

- trying to get promotions all the time,
- trying to do something new or innovative,
- trying to make progress in their work,
- competitive with others,
- want to get the biggest bonus,
- want to achieve and surpass goals.

These sorts of people may have been "burned" or had bad experiences, but they have not given up. Instead, they are constantly pushing forward. Moving forward is often a state of mind, a perception, more than anything.

In my career as a [legal recruiter](#), I learned to recognize that there are also generally two [types of attorneys](#): those who are continually moving forward and those who are moving away from things.

When most attorneys get out of law school, they are ready to take on the world, and they typically want to go to work for the largest, most prestigious and "hardest charging" law firms. They want to make the most money and have the most prestige. At this point, the young attorneys are definitely in *moving forward* mode.

After a few years inside of law firms, a good proportion of attorneys get into *moving away from* mode. One of the most persistent things about most attorneys who start in large law firms is that they tend not to like working in large law firms after they have had considerable experience doing so. The reason is that law firms require attorneys to bill time and be accountable for each hour of their day. The larger the law firm is, the more the attorney is typically expected to work. There are all sorts of political pressures inside law firms, and multiple levels of supervision, and many other unpleasant things that attorneys simply do not want to deal with. For this reason, a good portion of attorneys out there are seeking to work, instead, inside corporations or at other jobs with different demands, which the attorneys perceive as less stressful. In fact, most attorneys who start out in large law firms spend the rest of their careers doing their best to move away from large [law firm jobs](#).

I know this because for a good portion of my career I was counseling and speaking with attorneys about these things on a daily basis. Less pressure, fewer hours, more flexibility, and so forth are the sorts of words the attorneys would use to describe what they were looking for. I have heard this so frequently from attorneys, I can hardly believe it. These are the *moving away from* sorts of attorneys.

What is a *moving away from* person? Someone who is constantly moving away from something is typically motivated to avoid certain people and situations. He or she will avoid negative situations and will always do his or her best to steer clear of certain situations. These are the sorts of people who

- tend to speak about people, places, and things they want to exclude,
- tend to speak about people, places, and things they want to avoid, and which they do not like,
- tend to speak more about what they do not want than what they *do* want.

I am sure that you know many people who are *moving away from* sorts of people, because these people are everywhere and they are just as common as the *moving towards* sorts of people. *Moving away from* people tend to be more interested in jobs that are "steady," wherein they can avoid conflict. In contrast, *moving toward* people are more likely to be interested in a job with good pay, wherein they can continually find excitement and grow. The *moving away from* people tend to be more concerned about what sorts of hassles, conflicts, and so forth the job will enable them to avoid.

It is important for your career for you to understand whether you are a *moving toward* sort of person or a *moving away from* sort of person. The key to reaching your full potential is to put yourself in a situation in which you are the most comfortable. For example, you might not be interested in high-level achievement, advancement, and so forth, and are therefore going to be more comfortable in a *moving away from* sort of job than a *moving toward* sort of job. Most people realize they have a strong preference one way or the other, once they think about it.

There is nothing wrong with being one of these types of people or the other. Both are needed in the work world, and you can be happy being either. The danger occurs, though, if you become a *moving away from* sort of person for the wrong reasons. If you had a bad experience at some point in your life (like I did with the soup being poured over my head) you should not allow this to make you a *moving away from* sort of person. You should first overcome whatever fears, insecurities, and ill feelings that were instilled in you, and then decide if you want to be a *moving away from* sort of person.

Do not become a *moving away from* sort of person in response to bad things that happen to you. Push through and address whatever these bad things are, and then, only then, you should decide whether or not you want to become a *moving away from* sort of person in the future.

The reason this is so relevant to your career and life is that many people never address and confront the fears and insecurities that have turned them into *moving away from* sorts of people. They spend their lives hiding in anonymity and in careers wherein they are not reaching their full potential. They exert most of their energy and spend most of their time avoiding all sorts of things out there in the world.

Are you *hiding* in a job right now?

Are you avoiding a certain type of work due to something that happened to you in the past?

Nothing is more harmful than allowing yourself to be in a career in which you are hiding--especially when you are hiding from something deeper within yourself, which you need to confront. You need to confront everything that comes at you and then decide if you want to be a *moving away from* or a *moving toward* sort of person in your job and career. Once you determine

this, you can create a path to the life that you desire.

THE LESSON

Avoiding problems, not challenging yourself, and giving up in the face of challenges are all forms of being a loser. Your reaction to any given situation is far more important than the situation itself. Whether you are the type of person who moves towards or away things will ultimately determine your career success; those who move toward things make consistent progress, confronting their fears by facing and dealing with them.

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