

Are You More Interested in the Intangible or the Tangible?

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago, I started a business called Law Firm Staff, which is a staffing business for attorneys, paralegals, and so forth. Because it was a relatively new business and I had hired a manager, I felt that it was extremely important that the business had a strong self-concept and was well branded. At the time, our other companies were going gangbusters, and I solicited bids from various "branding agencies" that would help us to come up with various concepts for branding our business in the eyes of customers.

When the bids started coming in, I realized that this entire procedure was a little bit out of my league. In fact, most of the bids for this work were in the \$200,000 range and only one of them was in the low six figures (\$120,000). As is customary with any proposal involving a considerable sum of money, a conference call was arranged to discuss the bids with each of the companies.

"What is involved here?" I typically asked.

"We will come up with a tag line for the business, and several words that describe what you are and what you are not--and then make sure your staff understands this. We will put this all into a report."

If you are thinking what I am thinking, then I am sure you and I are on the same page. The last thing I wanted to do was pay some high-falutin' New Yorkers in \$2,500 suits \$275,000 to give me 10 different words about what the business stood for. You would be surprised at how deeply involved people get in this process. For example, they have focus groups and other sorts of activities to "get to the bottom of things," and they manage to spend loads of money doing the work.

Sitting in the office with the manager I had hired for [Law Firm Staff](#), one day I told him that we should go about doing this work ourselves. As I debated how we would do it, I was also cognizant of the fact that coming up with 10 words to describe the business could be a somewhat complicated process, and was something that I should at least do my best to understand before figuring out these 10 words.

"Let's see if there is a seminar, or someplace where we can learn about this online!" I said.

We were sitting there on a Friday afternoon and had planned on strategizing for the weekend about the business. Within seconds I had discovered a website announcing a big seminar that coming weekend at the LAX Marriott. The headline of the seminar read:

"BRING YOUR PARACHUTE! THIS SEMINAR WILL TEACH YOU IN ONE WEEKEND HOW TO TAKE ON THE 'BIG BOYS' ON MADISON AVENUE AND CREATE A BRAND THAT WILL PUT YOU ON A PILE OF CASH SO HIGH YOU'LL NEED A PARACHUTE TO GET DOWN!"

I was mesmerized and knew right then and there that this was a seminar I had to attend. The woman putting on the seminar apparently had worked on Madison Avenue, and for \$5,000 she would teach us in one weekend how to create a brand that "sizzled." Sitting there in my office, the manager and I called the woman on my speakerphone. A man actually answered and we chatted for a few minutes about the branding seminar.

"Can I bring two people for the price of one?" I asked after a few minutes.

"Wait just a moment, I have to check with my partner. She is working at the other end of the building."

While the man was checking, we were busy poking around the sales letter website and doing other research online, and we very quickly realized that this was not a large company, but just this man and woman, who were putting on the seminar. They were trying to give the impression that it was a giant organization, but in reality it was very small. Within a few minutes they circled back with me and we negotiated some sort of deal for the price of the seminar, which allowed the manager and me to attend.

I was expecting that the seminar would be packed with hundreds of people in a large auditorium. Instead, when I got there, it was among the strangest things I had ever seen. There were about six or seven people in a small room with giant speakers that would have been suitable for a conference of 5,000. The woman giving the seminar was wearing a wireless headset, and a DJ in the back of the room was booming all sorts of music. The woman with the headset was jumping up and down, trying to get the audience charged up. There were posters of her on the wall and banners announcing the seminar all over the room.

"Are you ready for a breakthrough!!!" the woman was screaming to the seven of us as we all sat there. There were also very expensive-looking cameras set up all around the small room. To give you the full perspective of this scene, the entire room was not much larger than an average hotel room.

Without going into too much detail, this was the worst conference I had ever been to. My manager and I were seated next to a woman who had a website called [IHateCorporateAmerica.com](#). The rest of the audience was comprised of a couple of widows who were looking to start online businesses. There were a few other random people we also had no interest in meeting. I had no idea how we had fallen for this crap. Throughout the conference, the woman kept putting some sort of orange powder in a water bottle and shaking it up. After each sip she would shake her head as if it just gave her a charge, and then continue telling us about her life.

The first day, before lunch, involved the woman telling us how she had worked with the "big boys" on Madison Avenue and realized that she needed to bring what they did to the world, instead of reserving the skill of picking those 10 descriptive words just for the people with \$200,000+ to spend. She informed us that we were in for "breakthroughs," and then spent some time lecturing us about how she had turned her life around and had just published a motivational calendar. That was about all that happened before lunch on the first day. At most of these sorts of conferences for which you pay thousands of

dollars, they serve lunch. At this conference, however, we were expected to go find a place to get lunch on our own.

The manager and I went to lunch and sat there a little shell-shocked and confused. We wondered whether or not we could get our money back at this point, and discussed the future of the business and the brand on our own--since we had not yet gotten any meaningful insights from the conference.

When we walked back from lunch, the woman had the cameras set out in the hall and someone was in the midst of giving a testimonial:

"My experience at this mega event so far has been incredible. I have learned how to transform my brand from below average to superior. I cannot wait to start putting the concepts I have learned here into action and SUPERCHARGING my brand!"

"That's it!" said the woman leading the seminar, and she started clapping. I had no idea what was going on, since we had not learned anything yet.

The woman grabbed me by the arm.

"You need to do a video testimonial!" she said. It looked like one of her parents might have been standing off to the side. I was not sure.

"No," I said. "I do not want to do a testimonial."

She looked astonished and started to follow me into the seminar room. She had her assistant follow me into the room with her.

"Why not!?" she said. She seemed very upset about my reluctance to give a testimonial. I stood there bantering back and forth over the next few minutes with her about this. I was not trying to be rude, but the seminar really did suck, and I had not learned anything yet. More importantly, I did not want my image plastered all over the Internet as a testimonial for the next 50 years. For the rest of the seminar I was an "outsider" and a *persona non grata* because I had not given a testimonial.

There was such a lack of any useful information whatsoever that I left about halfway through the second day--but not before being treated to one of the most incredible pitches I had ever seen.

"Today we are going to pay for lunch if you will come to lunch with us and learn about our lifetime membership program called MILLIONAIRE MASTERY!" the woman told the audience. Millionaire mastery involved some sort of phone coaching program in how to be a millionaire for life--at the cost of \$25,000. The manager and myself were the only ones in the entire crowd of seven who did not go to the free lunch to be pitched on the MILLIONAIRE MASTERY lifetime membership.

I had spoken with the woman's assistant during lunch and learned that she and the rest of these people all [worked from home](#). In addition, the woman lived in a small apartment in Venice Beach. These were not millionaires, but they were more than happy to take your money to tell you how to become one--if you let them.

What I learned on my trip into the "branding universe," about the pitchmen and people involved, is that there is an art, science, and industry involved in the selling of intangibles. Branding, in essence, is making a brand represent a certain intangible meaning, and there are many people, like myself, who can be sold things that are intangible--after all, I am the sucker who paid over \$5,000 in order for a manager and myself to attend a lousy branding conference.

I am sure you have fallen for intangible promises before as well.

One of my favorite pastimes when I was younger was to read magazines like *Entrepreneur* and other magazines for people interested in [starting various businesses](#). The fun thing about reading magazines like this has never been the content inside of them; instead, what has fascinated me so much are the advertisements. Ever since I can remember, these magazines have been littered with one "income opportunity" after another, in which a guy standing in front of his Ferrari or big-gated house promises to tell you about a business wherein he is making a lot of money, and which you can operate for "30 minutes a day" if you send him \$99.00, or something along these lines.

What is so fascinating to me about these ads is that they are so incredibly common. The advertisements never give you any proof that the concept they are talking about works, and instead, they simply talk about how someone made a lot of money, told their boss to go take a hike, has a better life now, and so forth, after discovering some mysterious "secret."

The most famous income opportunity advertisement of all time was written by Joe Karbo:

The Lazy Man's Way to Riches

Most People Are Too Busy Earning a Living to Make Any Money

I used to work hard. The 18-hour days. The 7-day weeks.

But I didn't start making big money until I did less--a lot less.

For example, this ad took about 2 hours to write. With a little luck, it should earn me 50, maybe a hundred thousand dollars.

What's more, I'm going to ask you to send me 10 dollars for something that'll cost me no more than 50 cents. And I'll try to make it so irresistible that you'd be a darned fool not to do it.

After all, why should you care if I make \$9.50 profit, if I can show you how to make a lot more?

What if I'm so sure that you will make money my Lazy Man's way that I'll make you the world's most unusual guarantee?

And here it is: I won't even cash your check or money order for 31 days after I've sent you my material.

That'll give you plenty of time to get it, look it over, try it out.

If you don't agree that it's worth at least a hundred times what you invested, send it back. Your *uncashed* check or money order will be put in the return mail.

The only reason I won't send it to you and bill you or send it C.O.D. is because both of these methods involve more time and money.

And I'm already going to give you the biggest bargain of your life.

Because I'm going to tell you what it took me 11 years to perfect: How to make money the Lazy Man's Way.

O.K.--now I have to brag a little. I don't mind it. And it's necessary--to prove that sending me 10 dollars . . . which I'll keep "in escrow" until you're satisfied . . . is the smartest thing you ever did.

I live in a home that's worth \$100,000. I know it is, because I turned down an offer for that much. My mortgage is less than half that, and the only reason I haven't paid it off is that my Tax Accountant says I'd be an idiot.

My "office," about a mile and a half from my home, is right on the beach. My view is so breathtaking that most people comment that they don't see how I get any work done. But I do enough. About 6 hours a day, 8 or 9 months a year.

The rest of the time we spend at our mountain "cabin." I paid \$30,000 for it--cash.

I have 2 boats and a Cadillac. All paid for.

We have stocks, bonds, investments, cash in the bank. But the most important thing I have is priceless: time with my family.

And I'll show you just how I did it—the Lazy Man's Way—a secret I've shared with just a few friends till now.

It doesn't require "education."

I'm a high school graduate.

It doesn't require "capital." When I started out, I was so deep in debt that a lawyer friend advised bankruptcy as the only way out. He was wrong. We paid off our debts and, outside of the mortgage, don't owe a cent to any man.

It doesn't require "luck." I've had more than my share, but I'm not promising you that you'll make as much money as I have. And you may do better; I personally know one man who used these principles, worked hard, and made 11 million dollars in 8 years. But money isn't everything.

It doesn't require "talent." Just enough brains to know what to look for. And I'll tell you that.

It doesn't require "youth." One woman I worked with is over 70. She's traveled the world over, making all the money she needs, doing only what I taught her.

It doesn't require "experience." A widow in Chicago has been averaging \$25,000 a year for the past 5 years, using my methods.

What *does* it require? Belief.

Enough to take a chance. Enough to absorb what I'll send you. Enough to put the principles into *action*. If you do just that—nothing more, nothing less—the results *will* be hard to believe. Remember—I guarantee it.

You don't have to give up your job. But you may soon be making so much money that you'll be able to. Once again—I guarantee it.

The wisest man I ever knew told me something I will never forget: "Most people are too busy earning a living to make any money."

Don't take as long as I did to find out he was right.

I'll prove it to you, if you'll send in the coupon now. I'm not asking you to "believe" me. Just try it. If I'm wrong, all you've lost is a couple of minutes and a postage stamp. But what if I'm right?

Sworn Statement: "I have examined this advertisement. On the basis of personal acquaintance with Mr. Joe Karbo for 18 years and my professional relationship as his accountant, I certify that every statement regarding his personal and business status is true." (Accountant's name available upon request.) Bank Reference: American State Bank 675 South Main Street, Orange, California 92668

Joe Karbo 17105 South Pacific, Dept. 125-A, Sunset Beach, California 90742 Joe, you may be full of beans, but what have I got to lose? Send me the *Lazy Man's Way* to Riches. *But don't deposit my check or money order for 31 days after it's in the mail.* If I return your material—for any reason—within that time, return my *uncashed* check or money order to me. On that basis, here's my ten dollars.

- Please send Air Mail. I'm enclosing an extra dollar.

Name

Address

City State Zip

There are advertisements like Karbo's all over, still to this day. The advertisement above, however, was one of the most successful advertisements of its kind ever, and it sold over 3 million copies of Karbo's book in short order. In fact, Karbo's advertisement resulted in his having the best-selling self-published book of all time before the book ever even made it to bookstores. Even today legions of copywriters, authors, and others are inspired by Karbo and his advertisement.

When you read an advertisement like Karbo's you may be struck by how little information it provides. For example, the advertisement does not tell you what the business is that Karbo is promoting. It gives few facts and figures. The advertisement does not tell you very much at all. Instead, the advertisement appeals to:

- what is possible;
- the future and what lies in store;
- a vision for a better life;
- what is naturally obvious to people;
- an abstract sense that success will occur;
- an acceptance of concepts over proof.

It is important to understand that many people out there can, obviously, be sold on intangible ideas. In fact, a great number of people's expression of the world is based primarily on intangibles and on "what feels right." Are you an intangible sort of person or a more tangible sort of person?

Someone who is more "tangible" would probably not have been suckered into going to a branding conference like the one I attended. This type of person would not purchase a book by Joe Karbo in response to an advertisement like the one above either. People who are more tangible are more interested in:

- seeing proof that things work;
- focusing on the present moment, with less regard for promises about the future;
- acting, but only if they are sure about something.

You are either motivated by tangibles or motivated by intangibles. People are typically motivated by one or the other. Understanding whether you are a tangible or intangible person is incredibly important to understanding the sort of career you should be pursuing, and how you should be spending your time.

Someone who is tangible is typically going to:

- prefer to be told that a certain way of doing things will work because it has been proven by others to work;
- be comfortable with routine, administrative, and predictable sorts of tasks;
- be very good at handling detail-oriented tasks;
- be comfortable undertaking tasks that have very clear guidelines.

In my experience, about half of the people out there are like this. If you are like this, you need to be in a job and profession that makes use of your natural inclination. There are people out there who simply need to understand exactly how things should be done, and to work this way consistently. They do not like abstract thinking and are more focused on the "here and now"--more than they are focused on the abstract future.

Someone who is more focused on intangibles, in contrast, will prefer to be given tasks in a manner in which

- they can come up with new ideas;
- they can see new possibilities;
- they do not solely rely on facts and predictable routines;
- they can see how their work fits into the overall scheme of things.

The person interested in intangibles makes up the other half of the population. If you are someone interested in the "intangible side" of things, then it will be important for you to be in jobs in which you can make use of these sorts of skills. You will also, unfortunately, fall into the sorry half of the population that, like me, will sign up for seminars promising transformation and may even buy books that were written by Joe Karbo.

What is important to understand, though, is that you are either slanted toward being a tangible or an intangible sort of person. I have seen numerous people fail in all sort of jobs, simply because they were in a job that did not make use of their particular skills and interests in this regard. You need to understand what sort of person you are, and to make sure that you are working in a job that takes this into account.

THE LESSON

To determine the sort of career you should be pursuing, you need to determine whether you are a tangible or intangible-oriented person. Many people fail in jobs simply because those jobs did not cater to their specific skills and interests. Tangible-oriented people seek work within clear guidelines, whereas people interested in the intangible are more comfortable around new and unproven concepts. To succeed in your career, you need to understand you inner nature and choose a workplace accordingly.

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