

## Seven Reasons People Never Have the Successful Careers They Are Capable of

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A lawyer told me last night that most of the other attorneys she knows are looking to do something other than practice law. Lawyers are one of the most fascinating breeds of people I know. The ones who go to the top law schools and start in [jobs with the top law firms](#) generally have been performing at a very high level for their entire lives; however, when they get out in the real world, a good proportion of these attorneys fail to have fulfilling and successful long-term careers. What this has taught me is that no matter how smart we are, how talented we are, or how much potential we have--there is something else that matters when it comes down to whether or not we will have good careers. It often comes down to being able to do certain simple things.

I have been studying what makes people successful in their careers for as long as I can remember. Some people out there have incredible, truly admirable careers, and they remain successful in every type of economy and under virtually every circumstance. There are others who do not make the most of their careers and are unsuccessful under virtually every circumstance.

There are seven reasons I have identified that determine whether someone will make the most of a career or not:

**1. People Who Do Not Reach Their Full Potential Are Complacent.** I will never forget that night. I was standing around in a bar in Windsor, Ontario, one summer evening with a bunch of kids from our town, and a girl I had been infatuated with for some time came up and started talking to me, and then asked me out on a date. I had known her since I was probably 6 years old, and she was an accomplished athlete, student, and so forth. She had been dating another guy for at least a few months, who was in college at the time. We had just graduated from high school that spring.

"What about your boyfriend?" I asked her at one point.

"It's starting to get boring," she said.

Since I was young at the time, I was still learning about dating and so forth, and this statement came as a real surprise to me. What this girl was saying, in effect, was that she no longer felt challenged, and she wanted to try something new. This girl ended up becoming extremely successful, and I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that she was always challenging herself, and always had been. She was never happy doing anything for long and she always pushed herself to do new things.

In order to be as successful as you can possibly be, nothing is more important than not allowing yourself to be complacent. The most successful people out there are never completely happy with themselves and their level of accomplishment, and they are always pushing themselves to do more and more.

Complacency takes on many forms. If you allow yourself to get too comfortable you will see your growth slowing. Your life will start to feel like a routine--no longer exciting or inspiring. You may be asking yourself "can I do better?" and things like this. If you start to get bored or complacent, then you need to start challenging yourself.

**2. People Who Do Not Reach Their Full Potential Rely Too Much on the Opinions of Others.** One of the hardest decisions I ever made in my career was to quit a \$170,000 year job as an attorney (in 1999) without any idea about what I would then do with my career. As it turned out, this was the best decision I ever made, but it was also incredibly difficult. Everyone around me thought my decision was completely *nuts*. I cannot even begin to tell you the number of people who told me that I was making a mistake and how many made fun of me for making this choice.

You need to do what is right for you. Never let the opinions of others influence you and your beliefs about what you are capable of becoming--and never fear the opinions of others. When I left the practice of law, what I did right was listen to what was inside of my heart, instead of the opinions of others. In order to reach your full potential in everything you do, it is important that you too listen to your heart and not the opinions of others--either real or perceived.

**3. People Who Do Not Reach Their Full Potential Allow Difficulties to Turn into Ruin.** The world is full of people who have experienced various setbacks and difficulties in their careers. The difference between those who end up thriving in their careers and those who do not, often comes down to their ability to get through the various difficulties they have had and come out on top.

I know of some attorneys who have been fired more than five times, yet they are still having incredible [legal careers](#). I know of other attorneys who were fired once and were so upset by this that they got into drugs and started having so many problems in their lives and careers that they never recovered. You need to be resilient and to never let negative experiences hold you back. We all have negative experiences; it is what we do with these negative experiences that matters the most. Turn negatives into positives.

**4. People Who Do Not Reach Their Full Potential Associate Negative Things with Being Successful.** Striving to be successful means being competitive. Every organization has some level of competitiveness to it and every job has some level of competition to it. Many people try to become successful and fail, and when they fail, they feel bad. After some time, people stop trying because they want to avoid the negative feelings associated with trying to become successful, so they try to [find jobs](#) that are "safe" and "secure." Thus they attempt to avoid being exposed to those negative emotions they might feel from trying to become successful.

It is important to understand that these kinds of associations may be controlling your life. I have heard so many people throughout the years say that they would not want a certain position, would not want a certain level of success, and so forth, due to their perceptions that having a certain level of success is negative. Many of the beliefs about what we can accomplish have been instilled in us by others throughout our lives, unbeknownst to us. We may have been given the impression by people who are our competitors that being successful is undesirable. Alternatively, we may just fear the unknown. It is

important that you do not associate negative things with being successful and, instead, associate success with a positive outcome, which usually takes the form of a happier life.

**5. People Who Do Not Reach Their Full Potential Never Make Success a Firm *Must*.** In order to experience success, you simply cannot accept the substitute for success, which is being average or below average. By refusing to accept mediocrity, people who end up achieving the most and being successful find a way to succeed--regardless of the conditions they are in. They "do what they have to do" in order to be successful.

You need to refuse to accept the possibility of *not being as successful as you can be*. People who refuse to accept mediocrity look for ways to ensure they make the most of their lives and every situation. Refuse to be average.

**6. People Who Do Not Reach Their Full Potential Never Develop a Strategy That Works.** To make the most of your career, you need to have goals and to know where you are going at all times. When you set goals, they help guide you toward your destination, and everything else begins to fall into place:

- You start paying attention to things that lead you to your goals.
- You start ignoring things that carry you away from your goals.
- You know the resources that will bring you closer to your goals.

To get ahead in your career and life, it is incredibly important that you have a strategy to get you there. Your strategy is made up of the goals you set and the methods you choose to help you meet those goals. You must have a strategy in order to reach your goals. It doesn't need to be a "perfect" strategy; what is most important is that you simply have a strategy. It starts with having a clear vision for where you want to go.

**7. People Who Do Not Reach Their Goals Do Not Follow Through with Their Plans.** Many people have goals and a strategy; however, more important than goals is the follow-through. Setting up systems to make you accountable on a periodic basis is very helpful. You need to have methods for monitoring your progress on a daily and weekly basis, to ensure that you reach your objectives. It can be very difficult to set up these follow-through plans, but the advantages are great.

Have you ever made a resolution to, for instance, run 5 miles a day, or something similar? What most people do is try it for a day or two, or a week or two--and then they give up. Many people are "dabblers" and because they are dabblers they never reach their potential. They try something, but never give it their all. Commitment and follow-through are the most important components of success.

Avoiding these seven negative career traits will help you become the most successful person you are capable of being.

#### **THE LESSON**

People who fail to reach their career goals are too complacent, rely too much on the opinions of others, allow difficulties to progress into ruin, and associate success with negative things. You have to establish success as a firm "must" in your life, associate your success with positive things, develop a workable strategy for success, and follow through with your plans. Never be a dabbler or give up in the face of adversity.

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