



## Being Nice Makes Good Business Sense

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago I was getting ready to interview with a [law firm in New York](#). It was my first interview ever as a [law student](#) and I was pretty nervous. I was trying to get on an elevator as the door was closing and I saw a woman rushing toward it. I reached quickly for the button to open the elevator and was able to get the door to reopen at the last second. The woman got on and told me which floor to push, and I did this for her as well. The woman was very heavy and was not particularly well dressed. We were going to a very high floor and there were several stops along the way.

At one of the stops, I started looking over my hair because I could see my reflection in the glass in the elevator. I looked up and saw the woman looking directly at me, and she smirked as if to say I looked ridiculous primping in the elevator.

At that point in my life I lifted weights frequently and spent a lot of time at the gym. I taught myself it was important to stick up for myself at all costs. Normally, what I would have done was turn around and tell the woman to mind her own business. On that occasion, however, my nervousness must have gotten the best of me. I turned around and looked directly at the woman.

"Do I look okay? I am going to an interview and I am a little nervous. I want to do a good job."

The woman looked absolutely stunned. The way she looked at me had invited me to strike out and attack. Instead, I had done the opposite.

"Yes, you do. Just pull your tie up a little. I am sure you'll do fine."

This woman ended up being in charge of the hiring committee at the law firm. She was reputed to be extremely difficult as an interviewer and did not like anyone. In my interview, she was very nice to me. I ended up [getting the job](#) at the firm and working in this same law firm over the summer. The woman was nice to me during the summer as well and stood up for me. In fact, she was one of the nicest people in the law firm I can remember.

There is really something to being nice. When you are nice to people, you invite them to be nice in return. However, most often we are less interested in being nice than we are in being thought of as important, powerful, or right.

Given the incredible number of experiences I have had over and over again in my life, I am confident there are various forms of energy we simply do not understand. I firmly believe when you send out negative energy, it comes right back to you. I also believe when you send out positive energy, it comes back to you as well.

One of my favorite books of all time is *The Richest Man in Babylon*. One of the rules in this book is that when you make money you are supposed to give away 10 percent of it to charity or some other good cause. The idea is when you give away 10 percent of your income, you will realize how much abundance there is and you will become less attached to money.

While the book makes this point, and I believe there is truth to it, there is another important point about giving away money as well. When you help and give to others you create positive energy that is directed back at you. There is nothing more important than having positive energy directed back at you. The more positive energy you have directed at you, the better your life and everything in it is going to be.

The word "appreciation" is, to me, one of the more interesting words in the English language. What appreciation means essentially is positive energy directed toward something. For example, when a stock appreciates it means people are excited about it and its value rises. When you are appreciated it means people like you and the value you bring them. Anything that appreciates takes on more value than it originally had. Things typically take on more value when others are excited about them for one reason or another.

You want to be appreciated. You need to be appreciated. Being appreciated means others are seeing and recognizing your value. When people see your value, you get more opportunities and your career and your life can only improve.

Think about things you appreciate in your life and the people who appreciate you. You appreciate these people and things because of how they make you feel. When we are babies, the only things we think about are our needs and taking care of those needs, specifically our need for food and comfort. We do not yet have the capacity to appreciate the needs of others. As we grow older we learn how our actions affect others positively or negatively. We learn we can make others happy or sad. We begin to learn how our ability to make others happy has an effect on our own happiness.

The world exists as exchanges of energy. If negative energy goes out then negative energy comes back. If someone robs a liquor store, the police come after the person and incarcerate him or her. If someone makes a large financial donation to a good cause, the newspapers write about this person's generosity for all to know. There is a constant interplay between positive and negative energy in the world, and you want to be on the receiving end of positive energy. This is really the only decent place to be. When positive energy comes to us, we feel better and the world is a better place to us. This simple rule is so easy to follow.

We exist in a consumer-driven society where so many of our desires are shaped by things outside of us. For example, many people evaluate their happiness based on their material possessions. People strive to earn the money to purchase the best house and car they can. They want nice furniture and watches. They want to travel to the best places. Many people evaluate their own self-worth based on their ability to accumulate these possessions. This is the way of the Western world. What this sort of consumer culture does, however, is focus almost exclusively on the act of accumulating various things. It does not emphasize the act of putting out positive energy and instead bases everything on taking in energy. This constant taking in often violates laws of the universe, which demand equal exchanges between opposite forms of energy. Instead of being focused on taking things in, we need to be focused on putting out positive energy.

This brings me back to the act of being nice. Several years ago, I was listening to Deepak Chopra speak and he was making

a similar point. He said whenever he visits someone's home, he always brings them a flower. In bringing people a flower, he is trying to set up a dynamic of being nice and sending out positive energy. Sending out positive energy is something that comes back to you every single time.

There is a best-selling career book called *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office*. The message of this book is if you worry about offending others, are forthright when explaining information, and make sure your decisions are popular, you will never get ahead. The idea behind the book is that in being nice to others you will not be successful. I believe the opposite is true. When you are nice to others you send out the sort of energy that gets you ahead.

Some years ago I was at a seminar and met a woman who had been a partner at a large and important law firm, but had quit after a year. She was now a [real estate agent](#) and I got the sense she was struggling a little. She told me about how she had been working with the law firm and did not become partner until she demanded it and turned mean. She told me people had walked all over her in her job until she became mean. When I asked her to give me some examples, she did not have any. She simply said they did not make her partner.

I think the woman ended up getting fired from her job within a year of making partner. She had worked for the firm for almost 10 years, and within a year of deciding the best thing for her to do was to become "a bitch," she had lost her job. Being mean simply does not work.

I have seen this happen in my own life and with people who have worked for me as well. Recently, I had someone working for me who was extremely competent in all respects. The person was working very close with me and I was extremely impressed. For some reason, however, this person could not get along with others outside my office. One day, she called and screamed at a coworker for no apparent reason. She also refused to follow instructions. Somehow, she'd come to believe it was good to be mean to others, to attack others savagely, and to not follow orders. The person was quickly let go despite her competence in other areas.

Who knows how this person rationalized losing her job to herself. If she had just been nice to others she would still be happily employed. Instead, this person ended up losing her job and poisoning the people around her. When someone sends out negative energy, it does a lot of damage.

You need to be nice to others. This is the most important thing you can do in your job. Let the negative energy of others flow right through you and be nice in response. The way to get ahead is to be liked, not feared and hated.

We want to work with people who are nice. Companies need people who are nice. It is important to be nice. I want to be very clear that by being nice I am not talking about being a doormat. When you are nice and place the needs of others on the same level as your own, you are simply being smart. Being nice is the smartest thing you can possibly do in your career.

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