

Show Value, Do Not Expect Value

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

If you understand the message I am about to share with you, you will thrive in your career and life, and you will also be very good at identifying organizations and people to avoid. The message is this: people and businesses crash and burn when they start expecting value before giving value.

This may seem like a very trivial thing to say, but this is happening in epidemic proportions around this country. It's spinning out of control and it's hurting our economy, [individual careers](#), and your future to the same [incredible degree](#) it's hurting mine.

A few months ago, a friend of mine and I discussed working together on a small business deal. My friend does a show for ESPN and when he is not filming the show the studio just sits there. He thought it would be fun to start filming a show announcing sports scores and streaming this information over the Internet on his website. He wanted someone to help him with some of the [business aspects](#), and I agreed to do so. In order to do this, we needed to draw up a contract outlining our responsibilities.

I have another old friend who'd recently become a partner at a [big law firm](#) in Los Angeles. I asked him to put together a simple agreement. The agreement was a standard, "form" type of contract and I knew it would not take him more than an hour. Although our firm has an in-house attorney who could have easily drafted this document, I wanted to give my friend some business, since he was a new partner, and also introduce him to my friend from ESPN. I thought this might result in some work down the road for him. I was trying to do a nice thing.

My friend at the law firm called me after I requested he email over a short form agreement. Pretty soon, he was trying to talk me into spending over \$20,000 on this agreement, which included all sorts of unnecessary work. I told him to just email me a form agreement and not to do any work on the project. He said okay. A few weeks later I still had not received anything and called him looking for the agreement. He was out of the office and my call was transferred to a paralegal who said she would get an agreement right over to me. A couple of hours later I received an email from the paralegal with an agreement. I knew all she had to do was a global "search and replace" to change a few words to the name of our company. It was not a lot of work. It probably took her no more than an hour.

A month or so later I received a bill for over \$7,000, charging me \$600 an hour for work that simply was not done. The bill had such notations in it as, "Review business plan, 3.5 hours, \$2,100."

The problem was there was no business plan. My friend was literally making things up and lying about the work he had supposedly done. Then he started calling me, demanding the money and harassing our [accounting department](#). I was incredibly shocked.

What happened here? Why was this guy doing this?

His attitude was that he deserved something for nothing. This attitude can creep into organizations and destroy them. It can also destroy people.

Around the same time I had referred another friend of mine to the same attorney. The friend I had referred had a very large and serious legal issue. My friend went to Santa Monica to interview the attorney about working for him. After the interview, the attorney said he would send him a fee agreement discussing what the fees would be if he wanted to hire him. Once my friend received the "retainer agreement" (a simple statement of how much the firm will charge for doing the work) he decided he did not want to work with the attorney due to the high costs he was proposing; therefore, my friend did not return the agreement.

A few weeks later, after the attorney realized my friend was not going to work with him, my friend received a bill for \$14,000 from the attorney for putting together the retainer agreement. Like me, my friend called this attorney to ask him if he was serious. He told him he was quite serious. My friend refused to pay this bill and is being harassed to this day.

You may find this story as hard to believe as I do but it actually happened. This sort of thing happens in the business world every day. There are tons of people who simply expect something for nothing regardless of whether or not they provide any value. What do you think happened with my friend and this law firm? Exactly what you might expect: the law firm and its owner were indicted for their role in one of the largest scams by a law firm in history. When people start expecting something for nothing it is generally a very good indication something bad is about to go down.

The example of my friend is so serious because he will never get a referral from me again. He will never get business from any of the friends I referred to him. His desire for quick gain has likely cost him millions of dollars in potential referrals throughout his career.

Have you ever focused too much on your rewards? When you focus on getting rewards and not adding value, you stop yourself dead in your tracks. People see right through you.

Your career is not about you at all. Your career is about the fact someone else has a problem that he or she needs you to solve. For any job you have ever had, the company hired you because it had a problem that needed to be solved that it could not solve on its own. Throwing yourself into solving someone else's problem is essential to growing in your career.

The problem could be as simple as serving clients in a restaurant by bringing them food, or as sophisticated as analyzing the tax issues between a large corporation and a foreign country in which it does business. Regardless of the problem, someone needs you to solve it.

Let me tell you a secret very few people understand: your income, praise, and life will get better in proportion to how well you

solve people's problems, and how dedicated you are, and appear to be, to doing so.

The more you throw yourself into solving other people's problems, the more dedicated you appear to be to solving other people's problems. The better you are at delivering results, the better you will do in your life. This is the secret to a great career. It is a simple one but very difficult for most people to do on a day-to-day basis. You are owed nothing by the world or anyone until you go out and create huge sums of value. You need to create value by solving problems to the very best of your ability.

When you look at work simply in terms of the rewards, you are diverting your energy from what creates those rewards in the first place. You need to get into the work you do and make it the best you possibly can. People will hire you and seek you out as long as you create outstanding value for them.

People and companies that expect something without doing work cause enormous damage. Car companies in the United States have experienced this type of damage. One of the fringe benefits of working for car companies, such as General Motors, is their unions often have contracts that prevent people from being laid off. The arrangement is so absurd that if GM wants to close down certain plants, for example, it can, but it needs to keep paying the workers from those plants. For months, and sometimes years, those workers are furloughed in "job banks" where they go and sit all day with no purpose whatsoever in large rooms with nothing to do, all the while getting paid. The absurdity of this is hard to believe. Once a company or group of individuals starts expecting something for nothing, death is often near.

The problems with car companies go even deeper than this. For example, many American car companies do not make cars people want. Refusing to make cars the public wants is an example of not showing value. You cannot get ahead or do anything worthwhile if you do not show value. Once you start expecting something without creating value, the end is often near.

One of the most amazing things about many musicians, movie stars, and other individuals who become really famous is they usually start out creating a lot of value. Their performances contain a lot of passion and they wow audiences with their talents. The same thing goes for businesses that get really popular. They provide tremendous value to people, and people flock to them. However, at some point along the line many businesses and people become famous and something happens - they stop providing value to others, and this leads to their fall.

The indictment of Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois was a perfect example of this. Politicians typically start out their careers talking about how they will provide more value to the people than those they are running against. Politicians get elected based on their pronouncements they will help others. At some point, however, for many politicians the office becomes more about providing value to themselves than to others, and this is when politicians typically fall. One quote from the Wall Street Journal really stuck out for me:

Mr. Blagojevich appeared frustrated that the Obama team didn't appear willing to talk about favors to the governor in exchange for a favorable appointment.

"They're not willing to give me anything except appreciation. [Expletive] them," the governor said, according to the affidavit. It further claimed that Mr. Blagojevich expressed frustration at being "stuck" in his job as governor, which pays \$177,412, according to one conversation alleged in the affidavit.

Here Blagojevich is complaining about his salary and what he believes is due him. When I think about this I am absolutely amazed. I can imagine it must be a tremendous amount of work to win a governor's election. People do not run for the position for the money. In this quote you can see the governor has become more focused on his own rewards than on what he can deliver to others.

Creating value for others sets up a natural path for rewards. Contributors focus on the work they are doing and the rewards comes naturally. Focusing on the rewards diverts your energy from what generates rewards in the first place – the value your customers, clients, or audience gets from what you do. People want to align themselves with people who are focused on giving.

I want you to be the best you can possibly be. I want you to be constantly focused on creating value. I want you to be a wonderful and capable person on whom the light of the world's approval is constantly shining. This will happen to you when you focus all of your energies on creating value for others. Get started today.

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