

Do Not Allow Others to Be in Control of Your Career and Life

By *Harrison Barnes*

Several years ago, I bought a car that formerly belonged to a very heavy smoker. By the looks of the interior, the car had been exposed to smoke for at least eight hours a day for more than a decade by the time I got it.

My first order of business when I purchased the car was to put in a new stereo. As I sat in the waiting room of the stereo store, I heard someone scream, then saw all of the guys installing car stereos run over to my car. A few moments later I discovered what the commotion was all about. The car had been exposed to so much cigarette smoke that even the car stereo wires inside the dashboard were covered in thick tar. Needless to say, this experience was quite embarrassing and I immediately decided I needed to clean this car as well as possible. It was a health hazard.

For days I tried one remedy after another to attack the cigarette smell and stains on the seats, visors, and other portions of the interior. To save money, I did my best to clean the car myself, but it was a futile exercise.

At some point, when nothing seemed to be working, I splashed some industrial-strength, concentrated bathroom air freshener I had bought deep in the heart of Detroit, all over the cloth surfaces of the car. For reasons I have never understood, the carpets, interior door panels, and the seats never fully dried from the air cleaner incident. The interior of the car took on a sheen and had a "light slime" touch.

This was not the real problem though. The biggest problem was that I had failed to dilute the air freshener with water as recommended on the bottle (1 part air freshener to 100 parts water).

What a mistake.

After at least a week trying to clean my car on my own—and spending countless quarters in self-serve car washes and an excess of \$200 on renting a steam cleaner from the grocery store and buying exotic car soaps and air fresheners, I finally decided to take the car to a car wash and pay \$150 to get the car professionally detailed.

I sat on a bench, watching while a young guy did all of the work on the car. He was in his early 20s and had one of those rocker looks. He had long black hair, was medium height, and was extremely thin and pale. He worked on the car for at least six hours and was extremely detail oriented and a very hard worker. At the time, I had an asphalt business and was paying people around \$20 an hour. I could not believe the enthusiasm with which he was working. I thought immediately about hiring him.

"How much are you making here?" I asked him.

"Oh, I make below minimum wage—but I get paid in cash. I have a good boss, though, and he has promised me that if I do a good job over the summer here he will give me a raise by winter."

"How long have you worked here?" I asked.

"Two years," he told me.

At the time the minimum wage was around \$5.00 an hour. I was a little taken back. For as hard as he was working, he clearly deserved more money.

"Wow. I have an asphalt business and I could pay you \$20 an hour," I told him. I then discussed the work.

"No, that's a bad idea," he said. "My boss would be very angry with me—the last thing I would want to do would be to upset him."

One of the most significant differences between people in the world is this: Some people feel that they control the events around them and others feel they are controlled by events. In the case of the guy in the car wash, he clearly did not feel in control over his life—he was giving his life and work to someone who was grossly underpaying him and with little rhyme or reason.

About five years later, I went by the car wash during the day and saw he was still detailing cars there. I'm assuming that he was still afraid of upsetting his boss.

An important and crucial decision you need to make for your life is whether you choose to be controlled by events and others—or the other way around. Nothing is more empowering than deciding you want to be in control. You control your environment and everything that happens to you. There are no mysterious forces at work that can ever compete with your desire for a better life or career.

Employers, social circles, and other groups often thrive on the illusion that they—and not you—are in control of your future. This is something that is necessary for all groups to survive—but it is a complete fallacy. In reality, you are always in control and have always been in control.

I live across the street from at least two drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers in Malibu. These rehabilitation centers are nothing more than ocean-view houses staffed with a cook, a few therapists who come and go, someone who sits in the house watching television overnight for \$12 an hour in case there are any problems, cleaning staff, and some fitness equipment. Yoga instructors and personal trainers also stop by on a daily basis. I found out recently that these centers charge between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a month for people to visit them and receive treatment. Most people are urged to stay more than one month.

I agree that substance abuse is a serious problem and needs to be treated—but I have heard from my own massage therapist (who works there) and at least a few others that these organizations thrive on making many people feel that they lack control over their own lives—the organization steps in and profits from people's belief that they lack control. For

example, at one center, after many people leave, they are encouraged to spend tens of thousands of dollars a month to have someone live with them and watch them twenty-four hours a day.

Many people, when they start looking for a job, feel at the mercy of employers, as if employers are in control. This thought process is based on a self-esteem issue that I feel gives employers more control over job seekers' future than they deserve. I have known people who have sat around for years waiting for a job to appear, rarely applying to jobs. This makes no sense. If you need a job, you need to realize that no one is more in control of finding you a job than you are.

You can apply to jobs in different states or countries. You can strengthen your resume every spare second you get. You can apply to jobs above your skill level—and below your skill level. You can work the phones and call people. You can resubmit your resume for jobs again and again. You can network every chance you get. You can work on your fitness so you look better for interviews.

All that any of these suggestions represent is you taking control. I could fill 1,000 pages with one-line suggestions of how you can take control. You need to take control of events and not let events control you.

Believing that others are in control of our lives may permeate every area of our lives. Take health care for example. There are chiropractors, acupuncturists, herbalists, medical doctors, osteopaths, and many, many more health practitioners. All of these people function and make their living, in part, by fostering the idea that we lack control.

More than a decade ago, I used to chew tobacco. One day during a physical my doctor suggested I quit. He prescribed some nicotine gum and then made me come back every thirty days for a consultation and to get a new prescription. I did this for six months, and then one day I said to myself: "This is stupid. All I need to do is stop—there is no reason to pay this guy \$90 a month and buy this stupid gum. All I need to do is stop. I am in control."

I stopped in one day and it was painless.

If you ever go see a chiropractor, he or she will generally recommend a course of treatment for years—even in cases where you no longer need it. Dentists recommend a cleaning every six months. Many doctors will operate on your heart instead of spending time with you lecturing you about healthy living (where this might be more effective). I know someone who had had at least five open-heart surgeries and whose doctor has never recommended any change in diet.

Many lawyers are the same way. They foster a belief that we lack control over the outcomes and results we get—and they thrive on this.

If you do not take control, your career and life will always fit into someone else's plan for you. Which is better, someone else's plan or your own? You need to realize that the second you take control and decide what you are going to do for yourself, everything will change—and it will change in an instant.

In most offices and workplaces, the impression is given to the staff that their future is at the mercy of supervisors, management, and others. To some extent this is true; however, it is never completely true. Do you even know how marketable you are? If you are not that marketable, do you know what you need to do to take control of your career and to become more marketable?

You need to understand that it is in the best interest of people "in power" to foster the illusion for you that they are in control and not you. You need to assume control over your career and life.

THE LESSON

It is absolutely vital to be in control of your life and career. When you fail to control your life, someone else will step in to do so and fit your life into their plans. Understand that it is in others' interests to establish control over your life and work, and instead exert control yourself over your life and the events around you.

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