



## Play Each Day Like It Is Your Most Important

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Most people never do their work the best way they can. To be successful you need to make every single day at work, every single interview, and every single job you apply for the most important one ever.

I want to propose to you a relationship with your work that is one of love, improvement, and embracing everything that you do. Embracing your work is the only way to continually move ahead and to stand out among all of the people out there who are also competing for the life that you want.

There is a reason for maintaining this philosophy: the better you perform each task, the more you will improve in each task. The more you improve, the more praise and rewards will come your way. When you are continually improving at each task, you will always look forward to the next task that lies ahead of you. You need to play each day of your life and career like you are playing in the World Series. Every single moment truly matters.

I was reading an article in the *New York Times* yesterday about President Obama being on vacation in Hawaii several years ago, and being recognized in a snack shop by a [reporter](#) (who was also on vacation). Most politicians would probably not have been too excited about being caught off-guard by a reporter while in the middle of a family vacation.

What happened was surprising, even to the reporter. Obama proceeded to be the nicest and most open guy he had ever met. He sat down and spoke with the reporter about his policies and other matters for some time. Back then Obama had not even announced that he would be running for the presidency. Most politicians would have viewed something like this reporter as an annoyance. Obama was smart enough to realize that you always need to be *on*. However, I believe it goes deeper than that. I believe people who are truly great in any discipline, and who rise to great heights, are always on.

The article I read yesterday in the *Times* gushed about this episode. You simply cannot buy this sort of glowing press coverage. Obama realized that if he wanted to be a public figure and a representative of the people, he needed to be accessible. This is what the best people do in every discipline: they live their work and are always on, wherever they are.

Think about all of the people you work with who are frequently stating that "this does not matter" or "that does not matter" right now. People are constantly justifying giving less than a 100 percent performance in their jobs, as if they seek some reason to believe their work is not all that important. This is one of the worst approaches one can take to his work and career.

Several years ago in the United States, people got jobs and typically stayed employed with the same company for their entire careers. They looked forward to annual raises and did whatever they were told to do. It did not matter if they liked their work or not. People did the work they were given within the hours required, and they could look forward to a pension and other benefits years later. They resented their bosses, and they resented their jobs. They did their work simply because it was required of them. They looked forward to the weekends and dreaded Monday mornings.

Today, we are no longer tied to employers like this. Most people move around numerous times in their careers and work for numerous employers. In this modern environment, employees are less loyal to employers and vice versa. We rarely have pensions anymore, and instead we have portable 401ks, which we can move between employers.

Because work is so different today, you cannot afford to dislike your job; whether you like your job or not matters to your employer. There is no excuse for you not to give 100 percent; if you do not give 100 percent, your employer will find someone who will. You have no excuse to not find work you love to do. You can [find a job](#) you like, if you just look hard enough.

There are people who will only work hard for an organization if the organization is prestigious or is experiencing financial success. There are people who will only work hard if they feel they are in their *dream job* with their *dream employer*. There are people who will only put in their best effort if it looks like they are going to receive a bonus at the end of the quarter.

Let me give you some examples of people like this that I have seen or heard of in the past:

-The lawyer who goes to work at a [law firm](#) that is less prestigious than the one he or she used to work for and does not work as hard, because others in the community do not think highly of the firm.

-The person who only puts in a good effort at their job before a performance review is about to occur.

-The decorator who is used to working in the homes of stars and other wealthy people, and gets a job working for a smaller client. The decorator does not promptly return calls or work hard due to the lesser social status of the client.

-The manager who decides to stop working hard the day he realizes he cannot qualify for a bonus.

-The contractor who used to make thousands of dollars a week when the economy was strong, but who suddenly can only find work on small, unimportant projects. Instead of doing a [good job](#), the contractor wastes time and does not apply him or herself to the work that is offered.

-The person who works hard only when his or her supervisor is around.

-The job seeker interested in working for a particular company, who is extremely rude to someone he or she meets at lunch, believing this person cannot help him or her get a job.

-The athlete who gives a horrible performance and does not put out the required effort because he or she does not think the game matters much.

Several years ago, I was at a playoff game for the Detroit Pistons, and I was sitting next to someone who was very knowledgeable about how Dennis Rodman played the game. The person said to me:

"He's playing his best tonight because this is the playoffs. He never tries this hard in the regular season."

It is amazing to me that we reserve our best efforts only for certain times. The people who are always on and are always being watched are the people I believe succeed the most and perform the most consistently. I want to tell you a quick story about someone I never knew all that well, but whom I realized many years ago would do well.

I remember walking into my public high school in Detroit when classes were not in session, and seeing a girl going down the hall, picking up various pieces of paper and so forth that were on the floor. The school authorities did not know anyone was on campus; it was the middle of summer and there was no reason for anyone to be there. This girl was the class president, and this sort of work was something I knew that she probably did not ever tell anyone that she was doing. She just did the work to support the school. In the few years I had known this girl, I had seen numerous examples of her doing things like this, which no one else ever saw.

A few years ago it occurred to me that someone like this was probably famous by now. I had known this girl when I was between 13 and 16, and although I never really spoke with her much about her work ethic back then, her need to always contribute--in the true sense, had a profound effect on me. I knew that this girl was out to better the world.

When I searched for her on the Internet, what immediately came up were tons of pictures of her in Asia, in places like Vietnam, Laos, and other countries--in villages, helping people who were stricken by poverty and disease. There were news stories about her, and a great deal of other information about her online. Twenty-five years ago I probably would have predicted that this girl's selflessness would have made an impact somewhere. Her attitude towards work is the same now as it was back then.

To be really outstanding in life and in a job does not require that much strain. An extra 10 percent effort is often all it takes to become an extraordinary performer in your chosen field, or an average performer in any other field.

Your efforts need to be focused on the work you are doing, not on how people are responding to it. When we are focused on who is responding to our work, how many people are responding to our work, or whether or not we can get ahead through peoples' responses to our work, we are missing the big picture. The big picture reminds us that the best performers out there are continually focused on doing the best they can, no matter what. Making each day's performance the most important ever is something that enables them to constantly improve.

Making the most of each day's performance also strengthens your relationship with your work, rather than with the rewards of your work. When you are looking at the rewards of your work, you are not giving your work the attention it deserves.

Your work is far more involved and far more complex than any reward you could possibly receive for it. Your work can teach you how to become a better person. When I watch people work, I can see their character coming through. I can see how the way that they treat their work relates to how they treat the people around them. I can see how people think of themselves and also how they think of others.

You need to realize that your relationship with your job is an absolute reflection of your character and the sort of person you are. Those around you see everything you do and every single part of your performance--regardless of whether or not they appear to be watching.

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