

The Fastest Way for an Attorney to Torpedo Their Legal Career Forward or Move it Backward

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

*Birds of a feather flock together.
If you're an eagle, don't hang around chickens:
Chickens can't fly.*

If there is one thing that can assist you in ruining [your legal career](#) in the most rapid way possible it is to make the mistake of choosing the wrong friends at work. Far too many attorneys realize this crucial mistake and end up torpedoing their careers due to this.

On my spare time I spend several days per year interviewing students interested in attending the college I went to. In these interviews I am continually reminded it seems of something that is profoundly true in many respects: the environment people spend their time in has a tremendous influence on who they will become. In Los Angeles there are a few private schools where an astonishing 30% or more of the class ends up going to ivy league colleges. When I meet kids from these schools there is often a real discernable edge to them that I pick up even before I get around to reviewing where they went to school. The kids are polished, they speak with confidence, they are knowledgeable about the world in a sophisticated sort of way. What these sorts of generalities have shown me is that the environment these kids are coming out of has a tremendous impact on who they eventually become.

There are attorneys inside law firms and other legal organizations who are clearly and unequivocally on the way up. There are also attorneys who are clearly and unequivocally on the way down. If you spend your time at work and outside of work with attorneys who are on the way up you too will be whisked towards achievement. If you spend your time at work with attorneys who are on the way down you too will gravitate towards losing.

I have noticed a few trends which continually seem to repeat themselves over and over again in every organization I have been associated with. This was also something I noticed when I was practicing law. The scenario is this. Try as any organization might whether they are hiring graduates of the best law schools, the best firms, or the people with the best records or not- people are sometimes going to be hired who do not do their jobs all that well. The people may be lazy and not value their jobs. The people may have been fired from their last employer and have anger towards employers in general. The people may be angry at the organization and the world that they are not making a \$1,000,000 a year. The people may be incompetent and unable to complete tasks. The people may have interpersonal problems with other employees. The person may not be able to receive direction from their superiors. The person may have been treated unfairly by the organization. All sorts of scenarios are possible.

What happens when there is an angry person inside an organization that the organization is "down upon" is that some of these people improve, some leave, some do not improve and means get "sour grapes" and become angry with the organization. The sour grapes response is most common because it is always far easier for many people to blame others for their shortcomings than take responsibility themselves. This is the common response. For some "sour grapes" people will begin attempting to infect others with their dislike of the organization and find fault with the organization and its people with about every chance possible. They literally create "cancerous cells". The people who find themselves in the circle of friends with this person in the organization will generally become infected with this "bad attitude" as well and one by one the members of this group will generally either lose their jobs due to declining performance or they will leave the

organization.

The reason that people close to negative people inside organizations also tend to become negative is because everyone all does things to cooperate or compete with people in their environments. On one level this can be your circle of friends and on another level it can be the people within your firm. This is the same reason I have noticed certain trends among the people from the best private high schools around Los Angeles, for example.

A.Drawbacks of Spending Time with Cancerous People in Your Organization

When you are inside a law firm or any other legal employer the most important thing you can possibly do is avoid "cancerous cells" and attempt to spend your time associating with people who are "winners" and likely to do well. Let me briefly review some of the major drawbacks of spending time associating with cancerous people inside a legal organization or those on the way out:

1.By Associating with Cancerous People the Organization Will Assume that You Too Are a Cancerous Person against the Organization

When I was in high school I was best friends with a guy who got kicked out of school at the end of his junior year of high school for upsetting a particular math teacher in the school. In my senior year of high school I asked this particular math teacher to write a recommendation to various colleges for me. I also asked another math teacher to write a recommendation for me. Despite what I thought had been a good relationship with the math teacher, but this math teacher thought differently of me I believe after the incident with my friend. In fact, his recommendation of me was so dire that when I was interviewing with one of the schools I had applied to the school itself told me they could not believe how bad the recommendation was and thought it "must be a joke".

My own school later told me that this had prevented me from getting admitted to numerous colleges and one of my teachers subsequently told me that the reason the teacher had written since an awful recommendation was due to the fact that my friend had upset him so badly. He said that the teacher believed there must be guilt through association. Years later,I can see why he did this to me.

In every organization once the organization sees bad people they instinctively look for those around that person in order to identify other "bad people". In retrospect this makes perfect sense. This reaction is almost "tribal" in nature and probably we are programmed like this on a genetic level so that we can avoid danger. When you associate with negative and cancerous people they are likely to get you pegged in the same way. This is not the wisest of career moves.

2.People Who Are Failing and Angry with Their Employer Are Having Issues with Their Organization Are Likely Doing Something to Cause This and Will Teach You to Do the Same

When people have tons of "sour grapes" they usually have these sour grapes for a reason-and it is generally because they are failing. They may be failing because they are lazy, have tons of turmoil outside of work that makes concentration difficult, abuse substances at work to such an extent that they cannot do their job at work. Because they are in a job they cannot handle,they are upset and having issues; if you spend time with them they will teach you how to be just like them.

Once we get outside into the real world, the people who tend to be the most popular and liked the most by others are the people who have the brightest outlooks and make others feel good about themselves. The people who are most alone are very good at doing the opposite. Have you ever noticed that when you spend time around people who are happy you too feel happy? Have you ever noticed that when you spend time

around people who are gravely depressed you too feel depressed? The same goes for enthusiasm and other sorts of emotions. I have known people who have become wildly famous and when I was around them before they became famous I too felt this enthusiasm. I have known people who ended their lives and when I was around them I too felt their despair. You become like the people you are around with.

In school if you spent your time with people who abused drugs you probably ended up doing this as well. If you spent your time around athletes you too were probably an athlete. The world works like this. If you spend your time around people who are winning you too will end up winning.

B.Benefits of Spending Time with People on the Way Up in Your Organization

1.People Who Succeed Start and Finish Things

People who succeed do certain things and do them consistently. People who succeed are the sorts of people who start things and then also finish them. Anyone can start a project. It is the people who start and finish projects who make the real difference. People who achieve meaningful success know how to both start and finish things. They will show you how to do this too.

In order to start and succeed things you need to exhibit a high level of self-discipline and a lot of people do not necessarily have self discipline. People who discipline themselves know that success requires consistent follow through and always. Follow through is something that will run off on you too if you hang around people with the ability to follow through.

2.People Who Succeed Over the Long Term Have Passion

You simply cannot succeed over the long term if you do not have a certain level of passion for what you are doing. This passion is also contagious. If you spend time with people who have passion then you will also pick up their passion. Passion for your job is the rule among passionate people.

Some people receive inheritances. Other people have powerful parents who get them the best jobs. Other people get lucky. However, over time the people who succeed are the ones who have passion. Surround yourself with people who have passion-that makes all the difference.

3.People Who Succeed Share With You Their Insights

Different people cope with their work environments in different ways. People who succeed and manage to find happiness in the work environments have a certain way. When you spend time with successful people in your work environment the insights you get from them will rub off on you too.

4.When You Spend Time With Successful People You Too Become Associated With Success in the Eyes of Your Superiors

When you spend time with successful people you will also become associated with success in the eyes of your superiors - in most cases. Your superiors will see you as someone interested in learning how to succeed at your work as well. They will see you as someone who is part of the crowd of people on the side of the employer.

Conclusions

Select the people you spend time with both inside and outside of work carefully. Some people and their careers are going up and others are on the way down. This is something you can generally tell very quickly

after spending time with people. Once you learn to recognize those who make winning a way of life you too can succeed. In order to grow you need to surround yourself with those who make growth a way of life.