

## *Why Everyone Needs Someone to Believe in Them: Why I Put My Credibility and Future on the Line Believing in Attorneys*

*By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office*

When I was fourteen, I was not asked back to a relatively prestigious private school in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. There was every reason the school should not have asked me again. My grades were weak, and I could not seem to get good ones. I even got poor grades in physical education. The school also did not like my behavior and considered me a troublemaker because I often joked around in class and could not pay attention to it. The school did not like me and recommended that my parents send me to a school for kids who were not doing well and needed special academic attention.

I was also in a school for pretty wealthy kids - and I was not from a wealthy background. My parents were able to send me there, primarily through the generosity of my grandparents. Because I was not from a wealthy background, I felt left out in the school on many levels. [I felt isolated because of my academic performance and economic status.](#)

I felt isolated due to other things as well. Much of my inability to concentrate and fit in is also driven by my living with my mother then, and she had many substance abuse problems. While she would get drunk most nights of the week, she would also have parties at our small house, often making it difficult for me to sleep. This created all sorts of issues, as well. It was not something I could talk about with kids at school or even my father. This made me feel very isolated and also was a cause of my frustration at school.

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Being a lousy student, kicked out of school, and feeling economically isolated meant that the world around

me came down with a lot of disapproval. I could not do anything right. As a young child, I realized that being in my position would likely lead nowhere good - no college, no good job, and a largely wasted life. Moreover, I was surrounded by people who did not believe in me and only seemed to disapprove of who I was and where I was going. This included parents, teachers, parents of my friends, and, in general, the world.

It isn't easy when you do not have anyone in your corner. When no one believes in you, and the only feedback you are getting from the world is negative, you feel very isolated and alone. Everything you do only reinforces the negativity the world sees in you.

For example, I noticed in school that no matter how hard I studied, I would still receive bad grades. By the Spring Semester of my Eighth-grade year, I started to study very hard in school - but my classes were the same. One week one of my teachers was out, and we had a substitute who knew nothing about me. When she graded a test I handed in, I got the highest grade in the class. It made no sense, and when the regular teacher returned, she accused me of cheating.

On one occasion, my class went on a field trip, and, unfortunately, someone stole something from a girl's purse. The school went straight to me and accused me of taking it. I denied it, and they called my parents into the school and accused me of stealing it in front of me and suspended me because someone had seen me in the area where the girl's purse had been sitting; however, there were several other people in the same space at the time, and I was accused simply due to that my economic circumstances--not because anyone saw me do anything. I was almost not allowed to graduate because I was accused of doing something I did not do. Later, in the Summer, I found out that another kid in my class had told someone else he had stolen it; however, by then, it was too late.

If you do not have people defending you and seeing your best qualities, it can profoundly influence how you see yourself and your capabilities. If everything you do is met with negativity and a lack of approval, this is self-reinforcing and not helpful either. Having the world only give you negative feedback is something that is not in the least bit helpful. [You need positive feedback to become the person you want to be.](#)

Fundamentally, our success and being the people we want to become should be from something inside us--our drive and willingness to achieve and be the people we are capable of being. We need to have a spirit inside of us that wants more and pushes us to become something more than we are right now. However, in addition to having this spirit, we need to have people around us who see what we are capable of, give us positive feedback, believe in us, and want us to become more than we are right now. We need mentors and believers who realize and see the people we can become. We need something that pushes us to become something better.

I would say that what happened to me in eighth grade was similar to a "breakdown"--or getting fired or losing a job. Flunking out of school and being in the position I was in made me feel incredibly isolated. It made me depressed as if I needed to rebuild myself and become something more. I needed to reach deep inside myself and find something. I needed the help of something and someone higher than me. I needed to believe in myself. I had failed, and the best thing for me was a venue change and to become someone different than I was.

In ninth grade, I moved in with my father on the other side of town to a public school there. Nothing changed there. I still was a lousy student, could not concentrate, and had adopted the bad kid persona. I also was having issues studying, focusing, and applying myself. I made friends when I was at a new school that did not turn out well. One of these kids ended up in prison, and the other ended up a drug addict. I did not have the tools to improve myself or bring myself up. By the time I was done with ninth grade, I had a 1.7-grade point average for the year, no real friends, did not believe in myself, and had all sorts of other issues that made me appear destined not to do well.

In tenth grade, my father moved overseas to Thailand, of all places. The same thing happened when I got to my new school - I was still not doing well and having difficulty. I started to get very down on myself. I felt utterly alone and did not know what to do or how to improve. It seemed that no matter what I did, I did not get good results from school, friendships, sports, or otherwise. It was very depressing. I was also living with my stepmother and stepsister (because my father was gone often), and they did not seem to believe in me either. All I seemed to get from them was negative feedback and a belief that something was wrong with me in school and otherwise.

Out of desperation, I started reading the Bible each night, praying, and figuring out what I needed to do to be a better person. While the Bible probably has a lot of lessons, I started reading Proverbs and other sections that seemed to teach outstanding lessons simplistically and quickly. I decided to run for student council in the school, although I hardly knew anyone in the school I was in. I started studying for several hours per night to do my best to get good grades. When I ran for the student council, a person from the United States traveled and gave a one-week class to everyone running about leadership and being a good citizen. This was a blessing. The course was excellent, and I learned an awful lot. Things changed by raising my hand, trying to be better, and putting myself out there.

I had been an outstanding soccer player when much younger, and I tried out for the Varsity soccer team - which was challenging to make because so many Europeans in the school took soccer exceptionally seriously. I was the last person to make the team, but making this was a real achievement. Somehow, I won the student council election and received the third most votes in my entire class. My grades started to improve very rapidly. I threw myself into being the best person I could be.

When I committed to being a better person, teachers and others started appearing in my life, recognizing my desire to improve and rewarding it. Math was very difficult for me at one time, but a good algebra teacher started encouraging me, recognized my better grades, and helped me. The same thing happened with history, English, and science teacher. My science teacher told me I was good enough in science to be a doctor maybe and was the one who made me the last student to make the varsity soccer team that year. I made the varsity soccer team not because I was the best player but because I put the most effort into practice - I ran harder and tried harder than most anyone. He recognized my drive and desire and rewarded me for it.

I even started dating a girl in the school who was a professional model and never showed interest in anyone in the school before me. I think she gravitated towards me because she saw I had a desire to get better and a spirit within me pushing me this way. I would never have been with her if I had not realized this and brought this out in myself. You need to have this spirit and something within you driving you to become and be a better person. You have no choice, and the more you have this, the better off you will be.

In law firms, [the people that make partner and succeed as partners are often not the smartest but, instead, the ones who bill the most hours and show the most commitment](#). People recognize their heart and drive and desire and reward them for it.

While much of this may not seem like much, to me, at a young age, it was. I was alone in my efforts to improve myself. I did not have a lot of support from parents or others. I needed to find inspiration outside of myself and pick myself up to do something meaningful with my life.

This is one reason I naturally gravitate towards legal placement and trying to teach others lessons about their career. I have wanted to show people that they are not alone in their discomfort, that they can be someone better and different, and that all is not hopeless.

When I finished my tenth-grade year, I returned to Michigan and was accepted to the best private school in

the state. Because my grades were so bad during my freshman year of high school, this school said that this year should just be a "wash" and would only show my tenth-grade transcript from Bangkok to colleges. I started at the school surrounded by very competitive and smart kids.

I soon took a class with and found a mentor who had gone to Yale for college and had a Ph.D. He very quickly took me under his wing and told me that I could go to a high college like Harvard and would be successful. He inspired me and believed in me even though I had not been that amazing of a student in my first year at the new school. Despite all this, he kept filling my head with what was possible and believed in me. He gave me positive and negative feedback but stuck with me and filled my head with what was possible. Having someone behind you can make a huge difference. If people believe in you and support you, you are profoundly better off than if you do not have this.

The other hugely important thing about mentors is that they can see the error in your thinking, behavior, and action and point you in the correct direction when you make mistakes. The mistakes people make are often just due to bad decisions and thinking about things incorrectly. If you can realize the mistakes you are about to make (or are making) while making them, you will often avoid them and wind up in a much better place.

Most successful people have mentors and others who have helped them with their decisions and recognized the good in them. [The desire for a mentor and a mentor's willingness to help us is often also contingent on their ability to understand a desire and drive within us to get better.](#) They see that we are trying and doing everything we can to be a better person and latch on to this.

When my mentor appeared in high school, he did not appear because I told myself I wanted a mentor. He came because he saw that investing in me was worth his time and effort, and he could help. When my mentors in the previous school appeared, it was the same thing. They saw that I was trying to be a better person, and investing in me was worth their time. I had an energy that needed to be directed in the correct ways. My energy was being misdirected and needed direction.

I have written about the importance of mentors and people who believe in you. I feel very strongly about this and its significance in our daily lives and careers because, without this, we are lost. If the people around us view us negatively and see our faults and not the good we are capable of, it can make a huge difference.

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In looking back on my failed relationships in the past, most of these failures have had to do with either myself not believing in someone or that person not believing in me. Some people see us through rose-colored glasses (and vice versa), and those who do not. If someone loses respect for us and starts seeing the negatives in us, it can take us down, deflate us, and make us feel bad about ourselves. If someone sees only the bad in us--or worse than good--this also collapses us and makes us feel bad about ourselves. This negatively affects the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves in the future. We must be around and expose ourselves to people who see the good in us, not the bad. If someone sees the good in us, this motivates us to do better and push the way we are doing. If someone just sees the negative in us, it makes us feel bad about ourselves and demotivates us. [We need positive feedback to do well.](#)

Reading self-help literature, studying religion, talking to therapists, applying yourself in work, searching out mentors, pushing yourself to be better, and disciplining yourself are signs and symptoms of someone trying to get better. When we do what we can to get better and be better people. When we enroll in coaching programs, read articles like this, study what other successful people do, and ask questions of others, we are also trying to get better. We are trying to get better when we expose ourselves to people we know can help us and join groups that expose us to other successful people.

When I work with candidates at BCG Attorney Search, I intentionally do everything I can to push them to be better and realize their full potential. I hire and personally train all of our legal placement professionals so the candidates get better. [I hire legal placement professionals that are placeable and marketable to almost any law firm](#), so these candidates will improve. I only represent candidates with a genuine desire to improve, a history of improvement, and good stories. I message my candidates with messages about looking at more markets, looking at more jobs, and sending them articles pushing them to get better. I provide direct advice about the market to my candidates so they will improve and improve. I urge the people who work for me to distribute information to candidates about jobs weekly, strengthen their resumes, get to know their candidates personally, send them a variety of firms, write good cover letters and continually improve.

In short, I want people to have the sort of mentors and receive the kind of advice I would have if I were in the same situation. Most people seeking legal jobs need a mentor, guidance, and help.

I believe a few constants are important at BCG Attorney Search because of my background.

First, when I was young, I did not have any mentors. I wanted to get better and experienced a lot of rejection and difficulties in the world. I felt pushed away and controlled by people who did not see the best in me. I was failing for many reasons.

[Many attorneys experience a lot of rejection.](#) You may be in a firm which is a bad experience for you because you are around people that do not see the best in you. This may be because the firm is a bad fit for you culturally; it is simply not a good firm. The private school I got kicked out of was not that great of a school. In the private school I went to, probably 70% of the kids there went to the top 25 colleges. In the private school I got kicked out of, that number was probably closer to 15%. There was something about the atmosphere, teachers, and students at the better school that brought out the best in people and was a better fit for me.

At BCG Attorney Search, the idea is that I want people to experience an atmosphere where they can thrive. I was in a bad atmosphere when I had issues and failed. A different atmosphere ended up bringing out the best in me. Having people around me that saw the best in me and did not see me through ugly glasses helped. It also helped that I had access to information (leadership classes, religious material) that showed me there was a better way and brought out the best in me in many ways. I did a lot of this alone without encouragement from my parents, and it required me to be introspective.

Second, I love the idea of giving people a ton of options. I feel that people need the ability to relocate



geographically or have many different types of places they can work in the same city or market. This is important to me--and we spend a ton of money on research--because a geographic relocation or switching to a smaller, more significant, or different type of law firm is often essential for people. I ensure all of the candidates in our database are texted, emailed, and so forth about new and different markets, that they approve the firms they are sent to, and that we are doing whatever they can to find options that are important to them. This is helpful because one market may be a good fit for people, and the other may not.

When I was applying to colleges, I did not give myself many options. I looked at a few schools, which made me feel unwelcome before I ever got there and made me feel bad about myself. Then, I found a school where I felt very comfortable and welcome and knew would bring out the best in me. When I got to this school, my instincts proved to be correct. The same thing that happened with schools when I was younger happened again. Had I gone to the wrong school, I might still have had the same experience.

This is one reason we tend to tell people at BCG Attorney Search about many firms and markets and push them to look at many things. It is not just the largest law firm in the most important markets you should always look at. You need to find your home and a place where people believe in you. This is so important on so many levels. Sometimes this may even mean switching cities and markets completely.

When I got out of law school, I clerked for a far-right, conservative Republican judge in a small town in Michigan. This was not a good fit. I did not understand the logic used to reach decisions, and the things about me that I felt were worthwhile were not appreciated in this environment. I did not like those big corporations; people with money and power always won. I felt like an outsider like I was when I was younger and in an environment where I was surrounded by people with money and power and felt excluded.

Instead of working for the judge for two years as planned, I only worked for him for one. The judge's hostility to my difficulty with his 100% pro-corporate decisions made me like a harmful virus in his midst. This put my entire career in peril because the judge and I decided to part ways in June of that year, and I did not have a job lined up.

I had initially planned on working in New York, but that market was not the best fit for me. It seemed too hectic, impersonal, and competitive. There were undoubtedly places that were good fits for me there, I am sure; however, I was expected to return to the firm I had been a summer associate, and I was not a fan of this place. As luck would have it, this firm went out of business several years later.

I also did not want to work in Detroit. I felt like my past followed me too much there. I was reminded of my failures for whatever reason. The market seemed too small and limiting. I felt like there were not enough people like myself--or, at least, I did not know how to find them.

I applied to law firms in Los Angeles on a whim and interviewed with several terrible firms but a few perfect ones. I spoke with large law firms, small firms, and everything else. The firm I liked most was [Quinn Emanuel](#), and it was minimal at the time, and only 45 attorneys. It felt like such a good fit. It now is over 1000 attorneys. Back then, it only had one other office that housed one attorney in a strip mall in Palm Springs. Today it has offices all over the world. This was a pleasant atmosphere for me then compared to everything else available.

I did not like things about this law firm either--and I realized I needed something different. In reality, though, I probably should never have left--I did not want to be an attorney, or a part of me was afraid of committing to it. I had been fired from a clerkship, "fired" from a school when I was younger, and I did not want to be in a place where I was too vulnerable to others. During my time there, I saw people lose their jobs and not be made a partner for reasons I believed did not justify this, and it made me feel I could one day suffer the same fate. I did not want to.

I should have understood why it was excellent and the things that were the best about this firm instead of those that were not. I did not yet understand myself and what was important to me in my career. I needed something different than a law firm and to be in control of my destiny. Being in a law firm left me with the feeling that I was not in control over my future and left a part of me feeling separated from this.

Throughout my career in the legal placement business, I have emphasized and always believed that [looking for a position was an essential exercise in self-discovery](#). I have concluded that people need information about themselves to succeed. I have always felt that it was important for people to understand why they are having issues in their positions and why they are not. Looking at more markets is essential, and being pushed to look at different types of employers is also vital.

I would never have looked at where I went to college, the University of Chicago, had someone close to me who was mentoring me pushed me to do so instead of other schools where I did not feel like I fit in at the time. You need to be driven by others sometimes to look at different places.

I applied to Quinn Emanuel by accident - I was not applying to smaller firms like this then and only contacted larger law firms. I was lucky to have found them.

When I applied to the judge I ended up working with, I did not have a solid understanding of political parties or politics at the time. Had I such an agreement and understood that I was not a far-right Republican, I likely would have realized this would not have worked out well.

We need to discover ourselves when doing a job search, and we often need help from others. It is not just a job search where this occurs, however. It is also from our mentors, legal career coaches (if we have one), the people we surround ourselves with, our ability to be open to criticism, and more.

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# *Organizations Can Determine if an Attorney Will Do the Job Long Term*

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Something that happens to many attorneys when they wind up in law firms is that they discover they are in very intimidating environments. Most often, these environments do not bring out the best in them but make them feel bad about themselves and as if they do not belong and something is wrong with them. They then often find legal recruiters, and these recruiters show them the same large firms in the same cities, and they end up right back where they started and unhappy. They believe their only option is going in-house, a change in the practice setting, or more. In many cases, the solution is often a different type of firm or even working in a different city. Some attorneys belong in New York who is not there, and there are attorneys in New York who belong in smaller markets who are not there either.

Most people we encounter in our careers when we are seeking help are out for their self-interest. Most recruiters are out for their self-interest and will often push us in directions we should not go. Many career counselors are out for their self-interest. Most law firms and other legal hiring organizations are also out for their self-interest.

This is why you need to fill yourself with the right information, look out for yourself, and do whatever you can to become the best person you can be. This is also [why you need mentors](#) and people who will push you on the voyage of self-discovery and to be a better person. These people will fill you with information, approve of you for trying to get better and advise you on the right way to go. When you have this and take this seriously, your life will never be the same.

This article mostly came about because we had an incident in our company where a recruiter did not want all of their candidates to receive ongoing career advice from the company. After all, they believed it might annoy them--this was information about looking at new markets, looking at more types of firms, approving different kinds of firms, ongoing articles, and more. They opted for the candidate out of all communication. A manager of the company assisted with and supported this decision. This upset me. It isolated the candidates from helpful career advice that could have improved them. It undermined our core values. It puts the interest of an individual recruiter in isolating their candidate above the company's interests in helping the candidate on a journey of self-discovery led by the company. It also put the individual recruiter and the manager in the role of not allowing the company to be a mentor but, instead, trying to isolate the candidate from information that could lead to self-discovery and prevent future unhappiness.

Whether it is a company that cares about you or someone, there are often very few opportunities in our lives to be exposed to guidance that can help us make life-changing and significant decisions. I want interactions with our recruiters and company to result in an opportunity for self-transformation when appropriate.

Different companies have different core values. Our core values are trying to push you to look at more markets and various types of firms. Our core values are also about trying to push you to read and understand the information we have available that can help you improve your career and become a better person. [Our core values are about helping you find happiness in law practice inside law firms](#). Our core values are about telling you the way the legal market is. Our core values are telling you what and who to look out for. Our core



values are about making you ready for the truth.

The world does not always want the truth. I am controversial, but I tell it like it is in the legal profession. It often upsets people and makes good news - but I tell the truth because I care.

I have learned in two decades of legal placement that everyone has good in them and personal success that can be brought out. Most attorneys out there have many options that are the right fit for them and need to be pushed to explore those options. This company has largely been built based on the issues I have faced in my own successes and failures in both life and my career. I want you to make the decisions I have made that worked and avoided the ones that did not and hurt me.

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