

What are high performers made of?

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As you reflect on your career, do you ask yourself how you and your performance are perceived by others? As you look at colleagues and bosses do you question if high performers are made or born? As you reflect on your future, are you curious to know what competencies will put you at a serious advantage to others?

Competencies are clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities and characteristics that enables one to perform highly successfully in a job or role.

You gain these competencies either through nature (DNA, early childhood background and experiences) as well as nurture (learning, training and post childhood experiences).

As one would imagine, there is no one formula that creates high performance. However, here are some consistent hallmark competencies amongst high performers.

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1) Motivation and commitment

As motivational speaker Les Brown says, "Wanting something is not enough. You must hunger for it. Your motivation must be compelling."

Motivation is basically a fuel for movement. We typically move more and faster for things that we love than things that we don't.

There are various motivations in life such as altruism (helping others), affiliation (being part of a social group), achievement (setting and achieving goals), aesthetics (design), science and technology, hedonism (fun), power (authority), recognition (bring in public eye), commercial (business and finance) etc.

Most high performers would be most motivated by the achievement factor.

Muhammad Ali for example hated training after awhile (the work itself). However, he was still motivated to achieve and win due to his commitment.

Top performer's main motivations in life would be to set and achieve goals, challenge themselves, compete, get things done and be 'successful' regardless of how they really (and currently) feel about the task.

2) Adaptability

As Charles Darwin states, 'It is not the strongest nor the most who will survive, but those who can best manage change.'

Adaptability is one of the most important areas to assess in an interview with any candidate. Some employees are able to perform exceptionally in some companies whilst not in others.

I remember a nephew who had gone to a public school who could never perform, but upon switching to a private school he totally outperformed. The environment suited him to the point where his strengths could be harnessed and showcased.

A true natural high performer, however, is one who typically could step into any environment, adapt, fit in and find opportunities to bring out his or her strengths.

3) Learning and deliberate practise

As Billy Jean King, former No. 1 professional tennis player, says 'Champions keep playing until they get it right.'

In the book *Talent is Overrated* by Geoff Colvin, there is a strong message that states what separates world class leaders from everybody else is not innate IQ or talent - it is deliberate practice.

High performers spend incredible amounts of time engaging in both things that they like and dislike in order to master skill. They have a 'growth mindset' which inherently suggests that they utilise the right attitude and invest in time learning, training and development to get to the level of competence that they desire.

They constantly seek feedback on their performance and ensure a high level of practice to create mastery. Over time, the more one practices, the more one wants to perform, the more one enjoys and the less it tires you.

4) Strategic thinking and prioritising

As Stephen Covey says, 'The key is not to prioritise what's on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.'

High performers tend to have deep awareness about themselves, others, the organisations and/or politics. They tend to have a knack at envisioning high level strategies to navigate during challenges and also human strategies to navigate across people.

They would focus more on big picture strategies to solve than problems to complain on. Following which, they would execute their priorities in achieving their plan accordingly.

They basically work top down rather than bottom up.

According to the book, *Disciplines of Execution*, by Sean Covey and team, the more focused your goals and the more focused you are, the better your chances of achieving them.

5) Personal leadership

As Robin Sharma says, "You don't need a title to be a leader."

I remember a participant during a senior leadership training who once without any instruction took the lead in ensuring everything was perfect during the training.

She instantly took charge during breaks to ensure everyone had a good break and came back on time. She demonstrated the highest level of natural personal leadership that I had encountered even during discussions and presentations.

When I asked her why she took charge without being asked to, she replied, "Because I believe more than anything else in the world in gaining as much control as possible of situations, being part of moving things forward and getting things done ahead of time."

All high performing employees hold on to an imaginary title called personal leadership that supersedes any given title.

They create high internal control of situations that they are in and are tend to be perceived as someone who is determined and "takes charge".

6) Emotional intelligence

As Frederick Dodson says, "Shift your attention and your emotion shifts. Shift your emotions and your attention shifts."

The ability to flexibly manage your emotions in order to adapt to situations and achieve your ultimate intended outcome is critical.

High performers tend to be able to have more effective relationships than destructive ones. They tend to have a good "GPS" that allows them to get their work done through people. They are also able to regulate their negative emotions more quickly into something constructive that will continue to give them the resilience to pursue goals and obstacles.

As you read through the various competencies, reflect and do a quick self assessment too. High performance is merely an act of building your attitude, motivation and skills "it is not nearly as far fetched as we think it is."

Here's wishing you peak performance for 2014 and beyond!

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