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The Difference Between Amateurs and Professionals

4-5 minutes

Why is it that some people seem to be hugely successful and do so much, while the vast majority of us struggle to tread water?

The answer is complicated and likely multifaceted.

One aspect is mindset—specifically, the difference between amateurs and professionals.

Most of us are just amateurs.

What's the difference? Actually, there are many differences:

- Amateurs stop when they achieve something. Professionals understand that the [initial achievement is just the beginning](#).
- Amateurs have a goal. [Professionals have a process](#).
- Amateurs think they are good at everything. Professionals understand their [circles of competence](#).
- Amateurs see feedback and coaching as someone criticizing them as a person. Professionals know they have weak spots and seek out thoughtful criticism.
- Amateurs value isolated performance. Think about the receiver who catches the ball once on a difficult throw. Professionals value consistency. Can I catch the ball in the same situation 9 times out of 10?
- Amateurs give up at the first sign of trouble and assume they're failures. Professionals see failure as part of the [path to growth and mastery](#).
- Amateurs don't have any idea what improves the odds of achieving good outcomes. Professionals do.
- Amateurs show up to practice to have fun. Professionals realize that what happens in practice happens in games.
- Amateurs focus on identifying their weaknesses and improving them. Professionals focus on their strengths and on finding people who are strong where they are weak.
- Amateurs think knowledge is power. Professionals pass on wisdom and advice.
- Amateurs focus on being right. Professionals focus on [getting the best outcome](#).
- Amateurs focus on first-level thinking. Professionals focus on [second-order thinking](#).
- Amateurs think good outcomes are the result of their brilliance. Professionals understand when good outcomes are the result of luck.
- Amateurs focus on the short term. Professionals focus on the long term.
- Amateurs focus on tearing other people down. Professionals focus on making everyone better.
- Amateurs make decisions in committees so there is no one person responsible if things go wrong. Professionals make decisions as individuals and accept responsibility.
- Amateurs blame others. Professionals accept responsibility.
- Amateurs show up inconsistently. Professionals show up every day.
- Amateurs go faster. Professionals go further.
- Amateurs go with the first idea that comes into their head. Professionals realize the first idea is rarely the best idea.
- Amateurs think in ways that can't be invalidated. Professionals don't.
- Amateurs think in absolutes. Professionals think in probabilities.
- Amateurs think the probability of them having the best idea is high. Professionals know the probability of that is low.
- Amateurs think reality is what they want to see. Professionals know [reality is what's true](#).
- Amateurs think disagreements are threats. Professionals see them as an opportunity to learn.

There are a host of other differences, but they can effectively be boiled down to two things: fear and reality.

Amateurs believe that the world should work the way they want it to. Professionals realize that they have to [work with the world as they find it](#). Amateurs are scared — scared to be vulnerable and honest with

themselves. Professionals feel like they are capable of handling almost anything.

Luck aside, which approach do you think is going to yield better results?

Food for Thought:

- In what circumstances do you find yourself behaving like an amateur instead of as a professional?
- What's holding you back? Are you hanging around people who are amateurs when you should be hanging around professionals?

Footnotes

- 1

Ideas in this article from Ryan Holiday, Ramit Sethi, Seth Godin and others.