

What I Learned from “High Performance Habits”



[Ameet Ranadive](#)

Follow

[May 10](#) · 8 min read

I recently read *High Performance Habits* by [Brendon Burchard](#), and came away very inspired to follow his advice on building habits to become a better performer. Brendon has synthesized academic and original research in psychology and high performance to develop his HP6 model. In this post, I will summarize my key learnings from *High Performance Habits* and hopefully encourage you to read the book.

Brendon’s HP6 model is composed of six key habits, organized into two categories. The first category is “personal” habits, the second category is “social” habits.



HIGH PERF

Personal

SEEK CLARITY

GENERATE ENERGY

RAISE NECESSITY

The six key habits are:

1. **Seek clarity:** know who you are, how you want to interact with others, what you want to achieve. Be intentional about your thoughts and actions.
2. **Generate energy:** build up significant reserves of energy so that you can maintain effort and focus for sustained periods of time. Care for your mental and physical well-being, and bring positive emotions to your work.
3. **Raise necessity:** tap into the reasons why you absolutely must perform well, both internal (identity, values, standards of excellence) and external (obligations, dependents, public commitments, deadlines).
4. **Increase productivity:** focus on the highest leverage actions within what Brendon calls your “prolific quality output” (PQO), the area where you can drive the greatest impact. Forget about all other distractions.
5. **Develop influence:** connect with others to influence them to support your efforts and projects. Build trust with others to enable strong collaboration towards joint goals.
6. **Demonstrate courage:** advocate for your ideas, take bold actions, stand up for yourself and for others.

It is difficult to summarize everything that Brendon has captured in an entire book, but I will highlight my most important take-aways for three habits: Seek clarity, Raise necessity, and Demonstrate courage.

Seek clarity

The first habit is about seeking clarity for who you are and what you want. As Brendon writes:

“High performers are clear on their intentions for themselves, their social world, their skills, and their service to others.”

Brendon calls these the Future Four: **Self**, **Social**, **Skills**, and **Service**.

Self

The first aspect of clarity is knowing yourself. Brendon advises us to:

“Be more intentional about who you want to become. Have vision beyond your current circumstances. Imagine your best future self, and start acting like that person today.”

Ask yourself questions about aspirational words that describe your future self. What do you want to become in the future? One example Brendon mentioned is a woman who described herself as “alive, playful, and grateful.” These words reflect your values and aspirations. By asking yourself how you would describe your future self, you’re gaining clarity on who you want to become.

Social

Brendon writes:

“High performers... have clear intentions about how they want to treat other people... In every situation that matters, they know who they want to be and how they want to interact with others.”

Ask yourself, “How can I be a good person or leader in this upcoming situation?” or “What does the other person need?” or “What kind of tone or mood do I want to set?”

Asking yourself these questions helps you become more intentional about how you want to interact with others, and helps you avoid being entirely reactive or defensive in high-stakes or stressful situations.

Skills

Know what skills and experiences you need to develop in order to be more successful in the future. By identifying your primary field of interest and the skills required to excel, you can then be intentional about learning, practicing, and reflecting on those skills. Over time, you will develop the expertise necessary to be an excellent performer.

Service

Finally, high performers care deeply about the positive impact they will make for others, and for their broader community. They seek to clarify whom they are serving and what those people need, in order to deliver their contributions “with heart and elegance.”

“What will provide the most value to those you serve? This is a question high performers obsess about.”

Brendon advises us to think about high performance in service as a search for relevance, differentiation, and excellence.

*“**Relevance** has to do with eliminating things that don’t matter... They ask, ‘What matters now, and how can I deliver it?’*

*“**Differentiation** allows high performers to look at their industry, their career, and even their relationships for what makes them unique. They want to stand out for why they are, and to add more value than others do.*

*“**Excellence** comes from an internal standard that asks, ‘How can I deliver beyond what’s expected?’”*

He notes that under-performers tend to focus more on self over service. They are more concerned with their own needs and desires, rather than on what those whom they serve want.

Raise necessity

You won’t be motivated to push yourself to perform well if you don’t believe it is absolutely necessary. Brendon therefore advises us to consider four factors in creating performance necessity: identity, obsession, duty, and urgency. The first two factors are internal forces, and the second two are external forces.



Perform



Internal Forces

Identity (Persona
Standards
of Excellence)

Obsession
with Topic/Processes

Factors that drive performance necessity (source: **High Performance Habits** by Brendon Burchard)

Identity (personal standards of excellence)

“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.” — Vince Lombardi

High performers hold themselves to a high standard, and monitor their own behavior and performance goals often. They ask themselves questions like, “Did I perform with excellence today? Did I live up to my values and expectations for giving my best and doing a good job?” They tie their identity to doing a good job, and they set challenging goals for themselves.

Obsession with understanding and mastering a topic

“To have long-term success as a coach or in any position of leadership, you have to be obsessed in some way.” — Pat Riley

The first internal force to raising necessity is around identity, developing an internal standard for excellence. The second force is around obsession.

“High performers are deeply curious people. In fact, their curiosity for understanding and mastering their primary field of interest is one of the hallmarks of their success... They feel a high internal drive to focus on their field of interest over the long term

and build deep competence... People who become world-class at anything focus longer and harder on their craft.”

Social duty, obligation, and purpose

In addition to the internal forces that raise necessity, there are two external ones as well. The first of these is social duty, obligation, and purpose.

“High performers often feel the necessity to perform well out of a sense of duty to someone or something beyond themselves. Someone is counting on them, or they’re trying to fulfill a promise or responsibility.”

“When you feel the drive to serve others, you sustain solid performance longer.”

High performers often ask themselves, “Who needs me right now?” It could be your family, your teammates, your customers. These high performers double down on their efforts to help others out of a sense of duty, which leads to the excellent performance. As an example, often when soldiers are asked why they performed heroic acts of bravery, they say it was because their comrades were depending on them and they did not want to let them down.

Real deadlines

High performers have a sense of urgency. They use real deadlines as a motivational tool for themselves to increase their performance.

“Nothing motivates action like a hard deadline... What is a ‘real’ deadline? It’s a date that matters because, if it isn’t met, real negative consequences happen.”

Real deadlines can come from a number of things — internal or external events, public commitments, and contractual obligations can all create real deadlines. High performers often use commitments — to their teams, to their managers, to their customers — as a lever to create real deadlines. In high-stakes negotiations, the presence of a deadline for a response from the counter-party creates urgency and motivates action.

Demonstrate courage

The final habit that I will discuss in this post is about demonstrating courage. Why is courage important for high performance? Because it motivates you to take bold action in the face of risk or even fear. And that bold action is often what drives great impact and high performance.

“Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.” — Harry S. Truman

What do we mean by courage?

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear.” — Mark Twain

As Brendon writes:

“Courage is not fearlessness; it is taking action and persisting despite that fear... The more actions you take facing fear,

expressing yourself, and helping others, the easier and less stressful these actions become... I think of courage as taking determined action to serve an authentic, noble, or life-enhancing goal, in the face of risk, fear, adversity, or opposition."

In order to demonstrate courage, Brendon advises us to do a few things.

1. **Honor the struggle.** Don't get frustrated or overwhelmed by opposition, inertia, or challenges that make you struggle. Meet those struggles with poise, dignity, and determination. "No one who achieved greatness avoided struggle. They met it, engaged with it. They knew that it was necessary, because they knew that real challenge and hardship pushed them, extended their capabilities, made them rise... [Tell yourself:] The struggle I'm now facing is necessary, and it's summoning me to show up, be strong, and use it to forge a better future for myself and my loved ones."
 2. **Share your truth and your ambitions.** Each day, reveal to others what you're really thinking and what you really want in life. You will start believing more in yourself by repeating your objective, deepening your own resolve to overcome obstacles in the pursuit of your goal. In the process, you may also find kindred spirits and collaborative supporters who share your dreams and goals.
 3. **Find someone to fight for.** Remember who depends on you, and you will find the will and the courage to fight for them. "We will do more for others than for ourselves. And in doing something for others, we find our reason for courage, and our cause for focus and excellence."
-

In *High Performing Habits*, author Brendon Burchard synthesizes academic and original research in psychology and performance in order to develop the HP6 model. To recap, the HP6 model consists of six habits — three personal and three social:

1. **Seek clarity:** know who you are, what you want, and whom you serve.
2. **Generate energy:** build up your reservoirs of energy to maintain focus and effort.
3. **Raise necessity:** focus on the reasons why high performance is absolutely essential.
4. **Increase productivity:** perform the highest-leverage actions and ignore distractions.
5. **Develop influence:** build trust and influence with others to gain their support.
6. **Demonstrate courage:** advocate for your ideas, take bold actions, and stand up for yourself and others.

In this post, I have gone deeper into three of the habits: seek clarity, raise necessity, and demonstrate courage. Seeking clarity involves exploring the 4 S's (self, social, skills, service) to become intentional about what you want, how you want to act towards others, and how to be the most valuable to those whom you serve. Raising necessity requires you to focus on identity (what are your values and standards of excellence), obsession, duty, and deadlines. And finally, demonstrating courage involves honoring the struggle, sharing your truth and ambitions, and finding someone to fight for.

One common thread that I noticed throughout the book is the idea of serving others, feeling a sense of duty towards others, and

fighting for others. The highest performers are much more others-focused than self-focused. Brendon observed that most people are willing to do more for others than they are willing to do even for themselves. By focusing on others, high performers find the motivation to dream, the strength to persevere, and the courage to act.

Why do some people succeed more quickly than others, and maintain that success over the course of decades? And out of that extremely small subset of people, why do some of them seem miserable, while others live happy lives?

Success and happiness: *That's* the combination we all hope to achieve. But the problem is, how do we become more successful and feel more fulfilled?

Brendon Burchard has spent 20 years answering that question, and in *High Performance Habits: How Extraordinary People Become That Way*, he provides the answers.

Brendon is the author of best-selling books like *The Motivation Manifesto* and *The Millionaire Messenger*, is a pioneer in online education (his videos have been viewed more than 100 million times, and more than one million people have taken his online courses), is a Top 100 most followed public figure on Facebook, and is the CEO of [High Performance Institute](#).

Brendon's findings in *High Performance Habits* are based on extensive research, but, more important, he lays out practical, real-world ways you can adopt the six habits to use in your professional and personal lives.

I read an advance copy, and I promise it's one of the best books you'll read this year. So I spoke with Brendon to get a brief overview, in his words, of the six habits.

Here we go:

1. Seek clarity.

High performers don't necessarily *get* clarity. Instead, they seek it more often than other people -- so they tend to find it and stay on their true path.

For example, successful people don't wait until New Year's to perform a self-evaluation and decide what changes they want to make.

I've worked with Oprah, and she starts every meeting by saying, "What is our intention for this meeting? What's important? What matters?"

High performers constantly seek clarity. That makes them better at sifting out distractions because they constantly refocus on what is important.

A simple approach to seeking clarity is to focus on four things: self, skills, social, and service. How do you want to describe your ideal self? How do you want to behave socially? What skills do you want to develop and demonstrate? What service do you want to provide?

Asking -- and answering -- those questions more often than other people will definitely give you an edge.

2. Generate energy.

Our research shows, unsurprisingly, that most people lose energy throughout the day. By 2 or 3 p.m. they're starting to flag, and many finish the day feeling wiped out.

But some people -- some extremely busy and productive people -- *aren't* wiped out.

What we found is that most people bleed out energy and intention in the transitions between tasks, between meetings, etc.

High performers have mastered their transitions. They're more likely to take a quick break, to close their eyes, to meditate -- to give themselves a short psychological break that releases their tension and focus from one activity so they are primed to take on the next.

They recharge themselves throughout the day, between activities -- it's as if they *generate* energy throughout the day instead of losing it.

If you want to feel more energized and creative and be more effective at work -- and leave work with plenty of "oomph" to enjoy your personal life -- give your mind and body a break every 45 to 60 minutes. While that can sometimes be tough to do, whenever possible, plan your day in those chunks.

3. Raise necessity.

Before every major activity, high performers raise the psychological necessity regarding why it is important for them to perform well.

I was working with an Olympic gold medal sprinter. One day I said, "When you're lined up against all these other sprinters, and the difference in winning and losing is hundredths of a second, how do you know who is going to win?"

He said, "I would put my money on the person who says, 'I'm going to do this for my mom.'"

I've had similar conversations hundreds of times with the top 15 percent of high performers, and they all tell themselves why it's important for them to succeed at whatever they do that day. They all associate a deep sense of identity with performing with excellence. They don't just find meaning -- performing with excellence is so critical to their identity that it's almost like food and water.

Most people are scared to attach their identity to their performance. High performers are willing to put themselves out there and place their identities on the line. That's why we call it raising necessity: It's *necessary* for them to perform with excellence.

It's not a passion, it's not a preference, it's a *necessity*.

To raise necessity, always know whom you're doing it for. Ask yourself, out loud, "Who needs me to be on my A game right now?" When I sit down at the computer, I literally say, "Who needs me on my A game right now?" and it brings my focus back.

It could be your family, your team, your peers, your customers, your end users -- whomever it is that you *have* to perform well for. Speak your "why" to yourself, out loud.

To be a high performer, your job is to prime your mental ability to perform an activity well. To do that, you have to raise the necessity so you enter with a high level of intention, so you perform with excellence.

4. Increase productivity.

High performers increase the outputs that *matter*. When Jobs came back to Apple, he stripped down the product line. Then he focused on increasing the quality of the products that remained.

That's what we all have to do: The main thing is to *keep* the main thing the main thing.

High performers are also more productive because they see five steps ahead, and align themselves to achieve each of those things.

That finding changed the way I look at almost every project I start. What are the five moves? What are the five major needle-moving moves that will get me there -- and what are *not* the major moves, so I know the

distractions to avoid? What key skills do I have to develop to accomplish those moves?

For example, before I started developing online courses I didn't know anything about video. Technology wasn't a strength, speaking wasn't a strength, but I identified those skills as necessary for my long-term success, and I obsessively worked to develop them.

What's interesting is that many high performers didn't know they were thinking in five moves; they did it unconsciously. They didn't realize they consistently identified the absolute must-have skills for long-term success and became obsessed about gaining those skills. They just did it.

But you know, and now you can.

5. Develop influence.

High performers develop influence by teaching people how to think and challenging them to grow.

Teach people how to think and you change their lives. High performers say things like, "Think of it this way" or "What if we approached it this way?" or "What do you think about this?" Over time, they train the people around them how to think -- because when you impact someone else's thoughts in a positive way, you have influence.

But that's not all they do. Think of an influential person in your life. Maybe a parent, a caregiver, a teacher -- choose someone who impacted you. They taught you how to think about yourself, or about others, or about the world, and they also challenged you to grow.

Why was this person so influential? They inspired you. How? They pushed you. How did they push you? They always told you to be your best.

High performers challenge the people they care about to grow. That's what makes the most difference where influence is concerned.

6. Demonstrate courage.

We did a tremendous amount of research on courage, and we found that in the face of risk, hardship, judgment, the unknown, or even fear, high performers tend to do a couple of things.

First, they speak up for themselves. They share their truth and ambitions more often than other people do. They also speak up for other people more often than others do. In short, high performers are willing to share the truth about themselves.

Just as important, they "honor the struggle." They know struggling is a natural part of the process. That makes them more courageous, because they enter into a pursuit knowing it will be hard. They can handle the struggle because they expect it.

Sometimes they use different language to describe the phenomena. Some say they are "patient through the process." Others say they're "OK with other people doubting or judging them." But each of them has an almost reverence for the hardship: They honor the struggle as necessary to forge the kind of character that will help them deserve the outcome they desire.

Many people complain about the struggle. High performers don't. They're fine being in the weeds, getting muddy. They know that showing up, even when they're tired, will help make them the best.

Knowing that the process will be hard -- not just accepting that it will be hard but appreciating that working through the tough times is necessary for success -- makes them less afraid.

High performers have also identified someone to fight for. Early on, I assumed courage would come from, say, a mission to change the world -- from a broad-stroke purpose or meaning.

That's not the case. Courage comes from wanting to serve one person or one unit: wife, husband, family, a small group of people. The will to work through uncertainty or fear comes from wanting to serve someone who needs help.

If you want the courage to stay the course, to overcome obstacles, to honor the struggle, don't focus on changing the world. Decide who you're doing it for, and then work hard for *them*.

That will give you all the courage you need.