

HOW TO BECOME A PEAK PERFORMER

By Dr. Ranjit Singh Malhi

Introduction

What does Nelson Mandela have in common with Usain Bolt? Or Datuk Nicol David with Albert Einstein? Or Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed with Amitabh Bachchan? All of them are peak performers—people who consistently produce outstanding results in various arenas. There are ten basic traits of peak performers.

1. High Self-Esteem

The most critical trait of peak performers is high self-esteem which is essentially one's overall sense of self-competence and self-worth. Self-esteem is a prerequisite for productive behaviour in general. High self-esteem makes the most of one's personality and abilities. It also triggers enthusiasm and enhances creativity. Most importantly, high self-esteem empowers individuals to attain desired goals and to establish good interpersonal relationships. Peak performers have strong faith in their abilities and view themselves as valuable individuals. As aptly stated by Charles Garfield, "The one element that stands out most clearly among our peak performers is their virtually unassailable belief in the likelihood of their success."

2. Self-Responsibility

Peak performers assume one hundred per cent responsibility for their lives and actions. Peak performers are proactive (take initiative to make things happen) and have an internal locus of control i.e. they believe that they largely determine their outcomes. Peak performers dare to take calculated risks in pursuit of their goals and they make their own breaks.

3. A Clear and Personally Compelling Mission

Peak performers have a clear and personally compelling mission that provides them a burning desire to excel or a meaningful purpose for living. The personal mission statement of peak performers outlines their overall purpose in life and major values. It is

made more specific through the formulation of verifiable, realistic and time-bounded goals.

4. Strategic Plan

Peak performers have a strategic plan that outlines the action steps necessary for attaining their mission and goals. It generally encompasses the pursuit of the required knowledge and skills; establishment of the necessary personal contacts (people) who can assist them in attaining their goals; and deadlines for the various action steps. Many peak performers even model the behavior of their role model.

5. Mental Rehearsal

Peak performers prepare themselves mentally for any challenge they encounter. They imprint vivid and detailed mental images of their successful actions or extraordinary performance in the “mind’s eye”. For example, Jack Nicklaus attributes 50% of his success as a golfer to the mental imagery he uses before he takes each stroke. Peak performers often combine their visualization with affirmations or positive self-talk.

6. A Sense of Inner Calm and Peace

Peak performers generally have a sense of inner calm and peace which enables them to concentrate fully on their goals and to excel at whatever they do. It also enables them to maintain their composure under potentially stress-producing circumstances. Their sense of inner calm and peace is primarily due to good mental and physical health which also provides them the extra energy needed to maintain the competitive edge. Peak performers maintain their physical health through proper nutrition, adequate rest, and regular exercise.

7. Effective Self-Management

Peak performers get more of the right things done in less time. They focus their efforts on activities that contribute most towards the attainment of their goals. Peak performers practise good time management skills such as doing first things first; tackling challenging tasks when they are at their best; planning for tomorrow today; delegating routine chores; saying “No” tactfully to avoid overcommitting personal time; and taking positive action

against time wasters. Peak performers also maintain self-discipline which is critical in transforming one's mission and goals into reality. Peak performers focus attention on attaining their goals and are not sidetracked by distractions. Additionally, they are willing to make sacrifices and postpone immediate gratification for reaping future dividends.

8. Good Interpersonal Skills

Peak performers have good interpersonal skills. Peak performers seek mutual benefit in all human interactions. They create “win-win” relationships; are good listeners; treat everyone with respect and dignity; always try to see the other person's point of view; and are appreciative. As managers, peak performers are skilled at motivating and empowering their subordinates to perform their personal best.

9. Resilience

Peak performers have the ability to bounce back from temporary setbacks. Failure is viewed as a learning experience and a step towards success. As succinctly stated by Napoleon Bonaparte, “Victory belongs to the most persevering.” Peak performers also adapt quickly to new realities. They are open to new ideas; are willing to learn from others who know more than them; and are able to correct their course in pursuit of their goals. They continually adapt and change their behaviour until it produces the desired results.

10. Continuous Self-Improvement

Peak performers are lifelong learners who subscribe faithfully to the process of continuous improvement. They continually educate themselves and seek new knowledge in their field to maintain the competitive edge. They view mistakes as learning opportunities and are receptive to constructive criticism.