

# TEN ATTRIBUTES OF PEAK PERFORMERS

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## **Introduction**

Peak performers or high achievers are people who consistently produce outstanding results in various arenas, including the workplace. They include high-performance managers, top salesmen, successful entrepreneurs, leading professionals and world-class athletes. Peak performers generally behave in similar productive ways and share common personal qualities. They are actually ordinary people who have acquired certain positive attributes which enable them to attain extraordinary results.

Peak performance is not primarily a function of academic achievement, intelligence, heredity or luck. Peak performers are not born; they are made. Peak performers generally share ten basic attributes.

### **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. Peak performers have strong faith in their abilities and view themselves as valuable individuals. Self-esteem is a prerequisite for productive behaviour in general. People perform better in everything they do when they have self-confidence; consider themselves competent to face the basic challenges in life; and view themselves as being worthy of success. In the words of 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."

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. In short, high self-esteem enables peak performers to stretch their personal limits towards performing their personal best.

### **2. A Clear and Personally Compelling Mission**

According to Charles Garfield, "Peak performance begins with a commitment to a mission." Peak performers are proactive and they assume 100% responsibility for their lives and careers. They have a clear and personally compelling mission which spurs them into purposeful action with full commitment. A mission can be defined as the mental image of a desired and possible state of affairs. 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.

Why is mission so critical to peak performance? A clear sense of mission motivates peak performers to do their best; helps to channel their resources and energy in the right direction; facilitates personal decision-making; and, most importantly, provides them a burning desire to excel or a meaningful purpose for living.

### **3. Self-Discipline**

Self-discipline is critical in transforming one's mission and goals into reality. What ultimately differentiates peak performers and mediocre performers is self-discipline. Maxwell Maltz aptly sums up the importance of self-discipline as follows: "Discipline, indeed, can make the difference between your potential and your actuality."

Self-discipline is essentially focusing one's attention on important activities, which contribute towards the attainment of worthwhile goals, without distraction until they are completed. Examples of self-discipline are meeting work deadlines, focusing one's efforts on attainment of goals and consciously replacing negative habits with positive habits.

Peak performers do things which most people are unwilling to do. They are highly disciplined people who are willing to make sacrifices and postpone immediate gratification for reaping future dividends. Peak performers focus their attention on attaining their goals and are not sidetracked by distractions. They break challenging tasks into manageable chunks.

### **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; the 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 behaviour 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". Peak performers see themselves performing their act flawlessly in their mind and it becomes their self-fulfilling prophecy. 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. In short, peak performers become what they think about most of the time.

### **6. A Sense of Inner Calm and Peace**

Peak performers lead well-rounded lives and know how to relax. 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; having a “quiet hour” to complete the most important tasks; and taking positive action against time wasters. They ask themselves constantly, “How do today’s activities relate to my long-term goals?”

## **8. Good Interpersonal Skills**

Peak performers have good interpersonal skills. Research reveals that about 85% of success in business can be attributed to people skills and merely 15% to technical knowledge. As managers, peak performers are skilled at motivating and empowering their subordinates to perform their personal best.

Peak performers seek mutual benefit in all human interactions. They create “win-win” relationships; are good listeners; speak positively of others or not at all; treat everyone with respect and dignity; always try to see the other person’s point of view; are not boastful; and are appreciative.

## **9. Resilience**

Peak performers are resilient: they have the ability to bounce back from temporary setbacks and to adapt quickly to new realities. Peak performers are often ordinary people with extraordinary perseverance. Persevering people often succeed where more intelligent and talented people fail. Peak performers view failures as learning experiences or stepping stones to subsequent success. They persist until defeat is turned into victory. As succinctly stated by Napoleon Bonaparte, “Victory belongs to the most persevering.”

Peak performers are also 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. As stated by Daniel Goleman, “Superior performers intentionally seek out feedback; they want to hear how others perceive them, realizing that this is valuable information.”