

“High Performance Habits”

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Book Note by Dave Kraft

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #1 SEEK CLARITY

Clarity is the child of careful thought and mindful experimentation. Successful people know the answers to certain fundamental questions: Who am I? What do I value? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What are my goals? What’s my plan?

You need to know who you are, what you value, what your strengths and weaknesses are, and where you want to go. Clear “stretch” goals energize us and lead to greater enjoyment, productivity, profitability, and satisfaction in our work.

You should also give yourself deadlines for your goals, or you won’t follow through. Studies show that having a specific plan attached to your goals—knowing when and where you will do something—can more than double the likelihood of achieving a challenging goal. Having a clear plan is as important as motivation and willpower. I know who I am. I’m clear about my values, strengths, and weaknesses.

I know what I want. I’m clear about my goals and passions. I know how to get what I want. I have a plan to achieve my dreams. Higher clarity scores are significantly associated with greater confidence, overall happiness, and assertiveness. Which things are you absolutely clear about that help you perform better than your peers? What do you focus on to stay clear about what matters most? What aren’t you clear about, and how does that affect your performance?

What do you do when you are feeling uncertain or undirected? If you had to explain to someone you were mentoring what it is that makes you successful, what would you say? What else do you know about yourself—beyond your values and strengths and plans—that makes you successful?

I call these areas self, social, skills, and service, or the ***Future Four***. There’s a difference between “know thyself” and “imagine thyself.”

Self:

If you could describe your ideal self in the future, the person you are trying to become, how would you describe that self?" High performers spend a lot of time thinking about their best self and the ideal they're trying to grow into. You're actively doing things that exhibit a future characteristic you desire. High performers imagine a positive version of themselves in the future, and then they actively engage in trying to be that.

TO LIVE. TO LOVE. TO MATTER.

Identifying these simple words has given me more clarity than anything else I've done in life. If you could describe yourself in just three aspirational words—words that would sum up who you are at your best in the future—what would those three words be?

Social:

When asked to choose words that describe their best interactions with others, high performers most often responded with words such as thoughtful, appreciative, respectful, open, honest, empathetic, loving, caring, kind, present, and fair. What is apparent across all high performers is that they anticipate positive social interactions and they strive consciously and consistently to create them. When you are constantly juggling and feel depleted, you don't think about the future.

Skills

Executives who score higher on the HPI (high performance Indicators) tend to have more blocks of time already scheduled for learning than do their peers with lower scores. Primary field of interest (PFI). They know their passions and set up time to dial in the skills that will turn those passions into proficiencies. High performers approach their learning not as generalists but as specialists. Look to the future. Identify key skills. Obsessively develop those skills.

If you leave your growth to randomness, you'll always live in the land of mediocrity. No matter your current level of performance, clarifying your PFI and the skills you need to master for your next level of success must be a priority.

Service

The last of the Four Futures, after self, social, and skills, concerns how high performers look to tomorrow and consider their service to the world. How can I serve people with excellence and make an extraordinary contribution to the world? When someone becomes disconnected from the future and their contribution to it, they underperform. It's so vital that leaders continually engage their people in conversations about tomorrow. A search for relevance, differentiation, and excellence. Relevance has to do with eliminating things that don't matter anymore. Differentiation allows high performers what to be unique.

"How can I deliver beyond what's expected?" No goals, no growth. No clarity, no change.

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." —Howard Thurman.

Before entering any performance situation, high performers contemplate how they want to feel regardless of what emotions might come up. My automatic emotions don't have to be in charge. My feelings are my own. High performers are generating the feelings they want more often than taking the emotions that land on them.

"Unhappiness is not knowing what we want and killing ourselves to get it." ~ Don Herold

High performers tend to equate four factors with meaning:

Enthusiasm: What can I get excited or enthusiastic about today?

Connection: Connection is less about comfort than about challenge. They value being around inspiring people who push them to grow

Satisfaction: Passion + Growth + Contribution = Personal Satisfaction

Coherence: Their lives are creating a legacy and feeding a larger purpose. Enthusiasm + Connection + Satisfaction + Coherence = Meaning

You need to bring more conscious and consistent thought to what you'll find meaningful in life.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #2 GENERATE ENERGY

“The world belongs to the energetic.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Over time, you’ll realize your mind and body didn’t let you down—your choices did. But I’m guessing you already know that. As you might expect, it takes a lot of energy to succeed over the long haul. If you ever want to get more done, you don’t need to buy some new app or organize your papers better.

It’s less about doing e-mail better and more about doing energy better.

Other studies reveal that 42 percent of American adults say they aren’t doing enough to manage their stress. One in three working Americans is chronically stressed on the job, and fewer than half say their organizations support employee well-being. Stress is the ultimate energy and well-being killer.

In a decade of coaching high performers, I’ve found that the easiest, fastest, and most effective way to help them increase their energy is to teach them to master transitions. Do you ever feel depleted but still plow into your next activity without a break, even though you know you should take a breather? Regardless of how you choose to take a break, meditate, or otherwise deal with stress, the idea is to form a habit and stick to it.

“Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” —Abraham Lincoln

You might recall that joy is one of the three defining positive emotions of the high-performance experience. Confidence and full engagement in the moment—often described as presence, flow, or mindfulness—are the other two. Neuroscientists have even found that positive emotions prompt new cell growth (plasticity), whereas negative emotions cause decay.

It turns out that joy, more than anything else, is what gives them capital “E” Energy. If you feel joy, your mind, body, and emotional reality all get a lift.

Positive emotion is a prerequisite for high performance. Anticipation can be just as powerful in releasing hormones such as dopamine, which makes you happy, as the actual positive event.

Of course, gratitude is the granddaddy of all positive emotion. Gratitude is the golden frame through which we see the meaning of life.

If you are always in a state of hurry, anxiety, stress, and busyness, then what energy are you teaching others to adopt? High performers cultivate joy by how they think, what they focus on, and how they engage in and reflect on their days. It's a choice. What we do in daily life—yes, even during those sprint days—tends to gather into habits that are difficult to break.

We have an extraordinary degree of personal control over our general and long-term health. Physical inactivity proves again and again to be one of the leading culprits of all negative health outcomes.

What other stories do you tell yourself to allow your poor health choices to continue? Things appear their worst when you are feeling your worst. And the best when you're at the best. Remember, energy is physical, emotional, and mental—and exercise improves each category. Overeating is just a result of poor decision making—consciously choosing short-term gratification over long-term health.

Still, less than half of working Americans say their organizations support employee well-being, and one in three people say they are chronically stressed on the job. Only 41 percent say their employer helps workers develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle. If you're honest, you probably know exactly what to do. Now it's just a matter of commitment and habit. These states are usually the results of bad decisions, not bad genetics.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #3 RAISE NECESSITY

“Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason, mastery demands all of a person.” —Albert Einstein

One of the keys is a phrase that explains one of the most powerful drivers of human motivation and excellence: Performance necessity.

No necessity, no consistent action. When you feel necessity, you don't sit around wishing or hoping. You get things done. I feel a deep emotional drive and commitment to succeeding, and it consistently forces me to work hard, stay disciplined, and push myself.

You cannot become extraordinary without a sense that it's absolutely necessary to excel. (the Four Forces of Necessity): Identity, obsession, duty, and urgency. “

Whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do it well; whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely.” —Charles Dickens

Those feelings of being frustrated or happy with your performance are what I mean by internal forces. Two specific internal forces—personal standards of excellence and obsession with a topic—are particularly powerful in determining your ability to succeed over the long term. High Personal Standards and Commitment to 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

When we do what aligns with our future identity, we are more driven and likely to do a great job. For example, people who set goals and regularly self-monitor are almost two and a half times more likely to attain their goals. Monitoring progress is just as important to goal attainment as setting a clear goal in the first place.

If you’re not going to monitor your progress, you may as well not set a goal or expect to live up to your own standards. If you don’t self-monitor, you’ll be less consistent and will advance more slowly. There’s real internal pressure to do well, and that pressure can be hard to tame or turn off. Over-concern with making mistakes increases anxiety and decreases performance.

I have an identity that thrives on seeking excellence, and my daily behaviors show it. It’s scary to demand a lot of yourself and push to the boundaries of your capabilities. People who set difficult and specific goals outperform people who set vague and non-challenging goals.

See yourself as a person who loves challenge and go for the big dreams. Are you trudging through life safely inside your little bubble bored or complacent? Don’t let that be your fate. You must do something and do it well because that action or achievement would be congruent with your perceived ideal identity.

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

High performers (HP) feel a high internal drive to focus on their field of interest over the long term and build deep competence. They don’t need a reward or prod from others to do something, because they find it inherently rewarding. This deep and long-term passion for a particular topic or discipline has been noted in almost all modern success research.

People who become world-class at anything focus longer and harder on their craft. A leap beyond grit into the territory of what many might call an irresponsible obsession. It borders on recklessness. But a certain degree of insanity and recklessness is necessary to advance or innovate anything—to make any new or remarkable or meaningful contributions.

What great thing was ever accomplished without a little recklessness? It is reckless to try something that has never been done, to move against convention, to begin before all conditions are good and preparations are perfected. HP also deeply understand that a degree of risk is inevitable and necessary should there be any real reward. When you are passionate about what you do, people understand. When you are obsessed, they think you're mad. That's the difference.

Their obsessions land on their calendars in real work efforts. HP do indeed spend an enormous amount of time thinking about and doing their obsession(s). Is this “abnormal”? Absolutely.

I encourage people to keep experimenting in life until they find something that sparks unusual interest. Then, if it aligns with your personal values and identity, jump in. Get curious. Let yourself geek out on something and go deep. Let that part of you that wants to obsess about and master something come alive again.

HP want to do well to serve a purpose they find meaningful. Fulfilling a high purpose serves as a positive sort of pressure. When we are evaluated more and held accountable for team performance, we work harder and better.

The external demands we feel to meet our obligations in life can feel bad in the short term but lead to strong performance outcomes later. Most HP mention “purpose” as motivating their best performance. This sense of duty to a higher calling is almost ubiquitous when you talk to the top 15 percent of high performers.

“Without a sense of urgency, desire loses its value.” —Jim Rohn

Nothing motivates action like a hard deadline. High performance happens only when there are real deadlines. HP seem to be regularly marching toward real deadlines. I know how quickly I can fall out of high performance by meeting other people's demands that aren't real demands.

Habits such as clarifying real deadlines are what make me, and every HP I know, so effective. HP are more focused on doing what really matters when it matters. HP are driven to get things done because they recognize that their timeliness affects other people. We change and improve over time only when we must.

Here are three practices that can fire up a greater sense of necessity.

PRACTICE ONE—KNOW WHO NEEDS YOUR A GAME

When you have someone external to take action for, you tend to perform better. Your “A game” means that you are giving your best effort with full focus on the singular task at hand. Flow happens when several of these elements are in play: You have goals that are clear and challenging yet attainable. Strong concentration and focused attention are required. The thing you’re doing is intrinsically rewarding.

You lose self-consciousness a bit and feel serene. Time stops—you feel so focused on the present that you lose track of time. You’re getting immediate feedback on your performance. There’s a balance between your skill level and the challenge presented. You know that what you’re doing is doable even if difficult. You have a sense of personal control over the situation and the outcome. You stop thinking about your physical needs. You have the ability to focus completely on the activity at hand.

PRACTICE TWO —AFFIRM THE WHY

Personality isn’t correlated with high performance. An introvert is just as likely as an extrovert to be a high performer. HP are confident about their why but open about how. You affirm your whys, to yourself and to others, more consistently. Affirming the why has always been my secret to being prolific. When we verbalize something, it becomes more real and important to us. So, the next time you want to increase your performance necessity, declare—to yourself and to others—what you want and why you want it.

PRACTICE THREE—LEVEL UP YOUR SQUAD

“Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you, spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life.” —Amy Poehler

If you truly want to increase your performance in any area of your life, get around some new people who expect and value high performance. Over the past decade, researchers have made fascinating discoveries about a phenomenon called “clustering.”

Behaviors, attitudes, and health outcomes tend to form in social clusters. Expertise and world-class performance in music, soccer, art, baseball, tennis, and other fields happen in clusters.

it's so important to carefully curate who is in your social circle. It turns out that high performance is not tied to your culture or social environment. You can take back your life from negative influences and direct your mind habits and social environment toward high performance. People can rise above their cultural programming and influence if they have the right beliefs and strategy.

HP spend more time with positive people than with negative people. Learning to live with people who are different from you and who challenge you is just part of becoming a mature and resilient adult. Cutting people out of your life just because they're not a bright and shiny ray of light all day every day will only result in you, alone on an island, talking to coconuts. No necessity, no drive, no fulfillment of true potential.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #4 INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY

I decide to ask a question that type A's dread when discussing their productivity: "Are you happy?" My work-life balance is a mess. One of the worst feelings in the world is to be incredibly busy but feel that you're not making any progress. What she had yet to learn was that not only was balance possible but so was increased progress.

Being effective isn't enough because achievement can be hollow if it gets out of sync with who you are, what you really want to be doing, what you're actually capable of doing.

She had to learn the difference between just getting things done and reaching high performance productivity. Just because you're a giver doesn't mean you're good at setting priorities or avoiding distractions. Givers might feel a lot of heart, but they don't always finish what they start.

If you feel you are more productive, you are statistically more likely to feel happier, more successful, and more confident. Organizations want high performance leaders because they are focused, manage tasks well, and succeed more often in taking projects through to completion.

"The day is always his who works with serenity and great aims." —Ralph Waldo Emerson

The fundamentals of becoming more productive are setting goals and maintaining energy and focus. Productivity starts with goals. Almost everything you do to take good care of yourself matters in increasing your high performance. If you're going to be productive, you've got to maintain focus. Most people in larger organizations are interrupted several times during any given task, activity, or meeting. These facts should get you seriously disciplined about setting challenging goals and keeping your energy and focus on track.

“One of the most common ways for the modern person to maintain self-deception is to keep busy all the time.” —Daniel Putnam

If you believe a better work-life balance is not possible, you have already lost the fight. The great mistake most people make is to think of balance in terms of evenly distributed hours. Most people have a lot more time off and more time with their families than they think. It's just that they're not intentional about that time and, hence, don't enjoy that time enough.

If you aren't consistently measuring the major arenas of your life, then you couldn't possibly know what the balance you seek is or isn't. If we're honest, our lack of attention to the important areas of our life is no one's fault but our own. You'll always feel out of balance if you're doing work that you don't find engaging and meaningful. There's a fine line between busy and burnout. Burnout in one area of life easily scorches others.

For most people, they didn't need to quit their job because of work-life balance problems; they just needed to change what they did on the job so that they felt more energetically balanced. Happily, that's easier than you may think.

“There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither.”

~Alan Cohen

Give yourself intermittent breaks throughout the day. Working straight through the day with no breaks makes people unhappy and less productive. We've all noticed, too, that simple things such as a chat at the cooler, a bathroom break, or letting our mind wander for a few minutes after lunch often refreshes us.

Most organizational experts recommend brief breaks away from the desk at least every 90 to 120 minutes to increase employee satisfaction and performance. Hours at home versus at work is not the issue.

It's more about a person's feelings and overall sense of energy. Putting in longer hours is almost always the wrong answer if you want to reach balance, happiness, or sustained high performance.

By slowing down or taking a break once in a while you work faster, leaving more time for other areas of life. If all you did was stand up every hour, close your eyes, and bounce in place while taking ten deep, long breaths, you'd feel a total renewal of focus and productivity in your life. Those short few-minute breaks buy me hours of added focus and effectiveness each day.

PRACTICE ONE: INCREASE THE OUTPUTS THAT MATTER

"Nothing is less productive than to make more efficient what should not be done at all."

~ Peter Drucker

The concept of Prolific Quality Output (PQO). HP aim their attention and consistent efforts toward PQO and minimize any distractions (including opportunities) that would steal them away from their craft. We live in a world where people spend over 28 percent of their workweek managing e-mail, and another 20 percent just looking for information. Real work is producing quality output that matters.

Figuring out what you are supposed to produce and learning the priorities in the creation, quality, and frequency of that output, is one of the greatest breakthroughs you can have in your career. The goal is to be spending 60 percent or more of your workweek oriented to PQO.

The most common excuses (Is delusions a better word?) are procrastination and perfectionism. Researchers have found that procrastination is really a motivational problem. It stems from working on things that don't excite you. The reason people don't finish more things isn't perfectionism; it's that they rarely even begin, or they get tangled up in doubt or distraction. Let's remember what's most important, let's focus, let's produce real things that we're proud of. Let's be prolific and change the world

PRACTICE TWO: KNOW YOUR IMPORTANT ACTION STEPS

"I believe half the unhappiness in life comes from people being afraid to go straight at things." — William Locke

To become a HP requires thinking more before acting. Know the major action steps that will take you to your goal, break those steps down into tasks and deadlines, then put them in a calendar.

What are (for example) the five major projects you are working on, in sequential order, to achieve what you want?" it's good to remember that without discipline, our dreams will forever remain delusions. Don't spend years on what could be done in months with better planning and more focused execution.

PRACTICE THREE: GET INSANELY GOOD AT KEY SKILLS

I believe the true road to preeminent success in any line is to make yourself master in that line." ~ Andrew Carnegie

Skilled workers are sometimes undermined by bad strategy, leadership, job design, or human resource practices. Perhaps the three best findings of contemporary research tell us that you can get better at practically anything if you keep a growth mindset (the belief that you can improve with effort), focus on your goals with passion and perseverance, and practice with excellence. When people say, "I can't," it's usually code for "I am unwilling to do the long-term training and conditioning necessary to achieve that."

Only put off until tomorrow what you are willing to die having left undone." —Pablo Picasso

Avoid trying to be effective or efficient doing things that you're not proud of and make no impact.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #5 DEVELOP INFLUENCE

TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO THINK. CHALLENGE PEOPLE TO GROW

'You handle things. You collaborate with people.'" ~ John Wooden

No one wants to work with a bosses who can't see beyond themselves. In the heat of battle, we often forget the promises we broke that drew the other side's guns. You can't influence a person in any useful way by diminishing them or putting out the fire in their belly. You'll want to grow in the ability to understand others and get them to act toward objectives.

You can't possibly know whether you have influence with your coworkers unless you ask them to do something. Lots of people dream of having influence, but they never wield the most fundamental tool in creating it: Asking.

Influencers understand the power of repetition, so they try multiple times to get their ideas in front of those they hope to influence. Learn to ask them a tremendous number of questions that elicit what they think, feel, want, need, and aspire to.

In organizational settings, often the greatest thing you can give to others is trust, autonomy, and decision-making authority.

Burnout is more an issue of poor energy management and low clarity than of working too much. According to the American Psychological Association's 2016 Work and Well-Being Survey, only about half of employed adults in the United States feel valued by their employer and sufficiently rewarded and recognized for their efforts.

While most employees (68 percent) are satisfied with their work, half don't feel sufficiently involved in decision making, problem solving, and goal setting, and only 46 percent participate regularly in those activities. Work on demonstrating sincere appreciation for those you seek to influence.

Find out what your people are passionate about, and cheer on their good ideas. Good bosses first, shape how we think. Second, they challenge us in some way. Third, they serve as role models. To gain influence with others:

(1) Teach them how to think about themselves, others, and the world.

(2) Challenge them to develop their character, connections, and contributions

(3) Model the values you wish to see them embody.

PRACTICE ONE: TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO THINK

PRACTICE TWO: CHALLENGE PEOPLE TO GROW

HP love challenge. It's one of the most universal observations we've made in our research. First, they challenge their character. You can challenge others' concerns their connections with others—The third area where you can challenge others is in their contributions.

“Never let school get in the way of an education.” ~ Mark Twain

PRACTICE THREE MODEL THE WAY

“Example is leadership.” —Albert Schweitzer

What if our real ability to be truly influential is our ability to be influenced?

“You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want.”

~ Zig Ziglar

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #6 DEMONSTRATE COURAGE

“There are two ways of meeting difficulties: You alter the difficulties, or you alter yourself to meet them.” ~ Phyllis Bottome

It’s a matter of doing something for a cause or person beyond yourself, without any assurance of safety, reward, or success. Our coaching interventions suggest that demonstrating courage is the cornerstone habit of high performance. HP report taking action despite fear much more than others do. The “Six Habits” work together to create long-term success.

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

The more actions you take facing fear, expressing yourself, and helping others, the easier and less stressful these actions become. For someone to demonstrate courage, these things are likely present: Risk, fear, and a good reason to act.

The important thing is that you define what being more courageous means to you and start living that way. 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. HP have a bias toward action even when that action’s outcome is scary, risky, or uncertain. You are capable of remarkable things that you could never foretell and will never discover without taking action.

PRACTICE ONE HONOR THE STRUGGLE

“Success is giving 100 percent of your effort, body, mind, and soul to the struggle.” ~ John Wooden

One act of courage is better than a hundred vision boards! If you quit at the first sign of difficulty in your everyday life, what are the odds you'll persist in the face of real fear or threat? If we keep telling people to do what's easy, why would they ever think of doing what's hard?

To achieve excellence requires hard work, discipline, routines that can become boring, the continual frustrations that accompany learning, adversities that test every measure of our heart and soul, and, above all, courage. No one who achieved greatness avoided struggle.

PRACTICE TWO SHARE YOUR TRUTH AND AMBITIONS

"As far as I can judge, not much good can be done without disturbing something or somebody." —Edward Blake

So, the only path left is to express your own truth and pursue your own dreams. Don't let people's criticisms sway you from your convictions.

"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one will go." ~ T. S. Eliot

Which is nobler: Falling dutifully in line with what everyone wants, or speaking up for what's right for you?

PRACTICE THREE-FIND SOMEONE TO FIGHT FOR

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know. The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." —Albert Schweitzer

"Did I live? Did I love? Did I matter?"

My motivation hadn't risen to the level of my dreams. Nor had my habits. Sometimes, courage appears to be a spontaneous act. But what I have found is that it's usually an expression or action built up from years of caring deeply about something or someone. The CEO didn't know that his attitude and the phrase "Lonely At The Top" are reliable omens for every great downfall I've ever seen.

There are problems that will come from the never-be-satisfied, hustle-and-grind approach that sucks passion and leads to overcommitment.

So, what were the things that caused HP to fall out of prolonged success? Let's start with what didn't cause them to fail:

Fear was not the issue. Competence was not an issue. Other people were not the issue. HP, especially those who have fallen down and gotten back up, take personal responsibility for their journey. Creativity was not the issue. Motivation was not the issue. Resources were not the issue.

The traps are superiority, dissatisfaction, and neglect.

TRAP #1: SUPERIORITY

'Bad pride' is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance. — John Maxwell

When you are succeeding beyond others, it's easy to get a big head. You can begin to think you're special, separate from, better than, or more important than other people. Superiority has no positive connotation in a healthy mind.

As you get more successful, you can quickly fall prey to the same fatal error. Minimizing someone else so you look better? When it has a firm hold on us, we begin acting out like jerks.

We end up soloing and we destroy the sense of connection and camaraderie that makes high achievement fun and worthwhile.

The concept of **confirmation bias**. Looking for things to confirm what you already believe.

What these thoughts have in common is a sense of separateness. You just feel so much more capable or accomplished than others that, in your mind, there is you at the top and then everyone else. All isolation is ultimately self-imposed.

Yes, you can tell yourself that no one on your team "gets it," but that's just your ego blinding you to the value that others can ultimately add. Discounting others doesn't make you a greater person; you are just choosing to be more separate, ultimately making

yourself more vulnerable to failure. You can't maximize your potential while minimizing others.

In almost all studies on expert performance, the major thing that made the difference was not a person's innate talents, but the hours of exposure and deliberate practice. The myth of the naturally superior human has been deconstructed and obliterated by research across dozens of fields.

Unhealthy people aren't only separate from others and, thus, dismissive of their ability to understand or help; they also become condescending toward others. Superior-minded people are certain they are better, more capable, more deserving.

And it's that certainty that closes their minds to learning, connection with others, and, ultimately, growth. The more you absolutely believe anything, the more likely you are to become blinded to new perspectives and opportunities.

We must beware of separateness and certainty. If you could improve on my idea, how would you go about it? Learning is the anvil on which humility is forged. Receiving feedback is the hallmark of consistent growth. Trust is earned through caring for others, not bragging about yourself. The more grateful you are the more humble you'll feel.

TRAP #2: DISSATISFACTION

"Be satisfied with success in even the smallest matter and think that even such a result is no trifle." —Marcus Aurelius

If I cannot sense satisfaction in the moment, then I am not feeling connection or gratitude for the moment. Perennial dissatisfaction is the first step on the path to misery.

Seeking excellence and experiencing satisfaction are not mutually exclusive. To be a satisfied striver rather than a dissatisfied curmudgeon. People who feel a sense of play, not dissatisfaction, perform better in almost every field of endeavor. No one wants to work with someone who is perennially dissatisfied with themselves or others.

If you become habitually dissatisfied, it's going to destroy your influence with others. If your aim is to maintain high performance, please, allow yourself to feel and celebrate the wins. Don't just hope to arrive somewhere someday and finally feel satisfied. Strive satisfied.

Neglect

“If things are not going well with you, begin your effort at correcting the situation by carefully examining the service you are rendering, and especially the spirit in which you are rendering it.” —Roger Babson

An over-obsession in one area of life can hurt another area. No one intends to neglect important parts of their life over the long term. Their explanations for neglect, I found, can be categorized into two areas: obliviousness and overreaching. Obliviousness is when you are so focused in one area that you are completely unaware of the growing problems in another.

The things that HP believe helped them climb to success—hard work, focus, and persistence—became the very things that caused their demise. Tenacity and grit, held for too long, can actually undermine well-being and good health.

Intense hard work sustained for too long becomes workaholism, creating work-home conflict, which hurts the well-being of the workaholic and the family members. There are always warning signs along the road to disaster. We just need to pay attention. The solution is to keep perspective in life by keeping an eye on the quality or progress of the major life arenas.

Overreaching

One reason high performers become so effective is that they are more disciplined at setting priorities for what to focus on—Prolific Quality Output.

Overreaching was a problem that stemmed from an insatiable desire for more, coupled with an unrealistic sense of what is possible in a short time frame. It’s an issue of going for too much, too fast, in too many domains.

Zero in on just those few things that really matter and protect your time and well-being. Focus on just a few things and the people and priorities you really care about, and you won’t fall prey to overreaching.

Broaden your ambitions too widely, and your appetite soon outstrips your abilities. I can usually tell whether someone is about to fail, by asking a simple question: “Do you feel seriously overcommitted right now?”

Slow down, be more strategic, and say no more often.

Play the long game, and life feels less like a slog and more like play. Trying to go faster and do more things seems so right when you're good and you're certain, but it can knock you for a serious tumble. I encourage all high performers who want to keep rising to say no to almost every opportunity in their mind first, then force themselves to justify it before ever giving a yes.

If the new thing you want to commit to doesn't strategically move you toward your end goals, it must be delayed. Superiority, dissatisfaction, and neglect are your enemies.

THE #1 THING

Nothing we've found correlates with high performance scores across the board more than confidence. Confidence is the secret ingredient that makes you rise to the challenge. Along with engaged and joyful, confident is one of the three words high performers use most to describe their consistent emotional state. When someone is more confident, they consistently have greater clarity, energy, productivity, influence, necessity, and courage. It's clear from our research that to become extraordinary, you need strong confidence and high performing habits.

HP almost universally reported that their confidence came from purposeful thinking and action. I can bucket my findings in three areas: **Competence, congruence, and connection.**

PRACTICE #1: DEVELOP COMPETENCE

The kind of confidence that is mostly tied to performance improvement comes from belief in one's abilities in a specific task. the more competence you get at any given task, the more confident you'll become in trying it more often. Confidence is not a fixed personality trait.

It's a muscle you build through exertion. HP are learners, and their belief that they can learn what is necessary to win in the future gives them as much confidence as their current skill sets. The internal voice of a HP is saying, "I believe in my ability to figure things out." The competency that matters is the ability to become competent. it's important that you begin a practice of reflecting on your progress and your new learning.

PRACTICE #2: BE CONGRUENT

At some point—often a major moment in their lives—HP took control, defined who they wanted to be, and started living in accordance with that self-image. HP seem to wake up each day and have a clear intention of who they really want to be, and then they go out into the world and give that intention real focus and energy. You can't be congruent with something you've never defined. No clarity, no congruence, no confidence. It's that simple. Stand in your truth and tell the truth, and you'll feel congruent.

PRACTICE #3: ENJOY CONNECTING

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." ~ Dale Carnegie

A recent study of over nine hundred CEOs found that just over half of the HP were introverts. It doesn't matter whether you are natural with others. What matters is this: "Do you want to learn from others? Will you take the time to do it?"

"I know I'll do well with others because I'll be genuinely interested in them because I want to learn." Confidence comes less from projection than from connection.

Curiosity x (Competence + Congruence + Connection) = Confidence

Ease is not the objective in personal development; growth is. Seek clarity on who you want to be, how you want to interact with others, and what will bring meaning into your life. Generate energy so you can sustain focus, effort, and well-being. To stay on your A game, you'll need to care actively for your mental stamina, physical energy, and positive emotions. Raise the necessity of your level of performance.

This means actively tapping into the reasons you must perform well, based on a mix of your internal standards (e.g., your identity, beliefs, values, or expectations for excellence) and external demands (e.g., social obligations, competition, public commitments). Increase productivity in your primary field of interest. Specifically, you'll need to focus on "prolific quality output" (PQO) in the area in which you want to be known and to drive impact. You'll also have to minimize distractions (or opportunities) that steal your attention from creating PQO.

Develop influence with those around you so you can get them to believe in and support your efforts and ambitions.

Without a positive support network, major achievements over the long haul are all but impossible. Demonstrate courage by expressing your ideas, taking bold action, and standing up for yourself and others even in the face of fear, uncertainty, or changing conditions.

I have learned that my questions are to be:

Did I live? Did I love? Did I matter?