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If you were to play a word association game and “success mindset” came up, what are the first words that would come to mind? For many people, “positive thinking” would probably top the list. While the success mindset does include approaching things with a positive attitude, associating the mindset with being positive is actually a misleading idea that usually leads to people failing to achieve meaningful, long-term results from their self-development programs and efforts.
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↳ In order to get a firm grasp on the success mindset (and to be able to reap its benefits), it’s important to have a clear understanding of what it actually is and how it differs from you simply being positive a couple of times a week.
What’s The Difference Between Being Positive And Having A Success Mindset?
Being positive involves looking at the bright side of things. People who confuse positive thinking with having a success mindset quickly discover that being positive simply isn’t enough to get them the results they’re looking for. This is because you could decide to think positively about certain things, but if you don’t address the automatic thought patterns, attitudes, and beliefs that may be limiting you (aspects of your mindset), your results are likely to be superficial and short-lived. This is why positive affirmations alone don’t really do much for someone in the long term, as these are more like a short dose of motivation and encouragement.
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↳ Achieving permanent results involves a lot more work as well as creating the right kind of mindset that allows for the nurturing of patterns of behavior that are known to contribute to success. A mindset is a set of attitudes, beliefs and values that translate into patterns of behavior, habits and routines. A success mindset, therefore, is a set of beliefs that result in patterns of behavior that lead to success.
What Does The Success Mindset Consist Of?
In order to benefit from the success mindset, you need to automatically be able to think (and subsequently act) like a successful person. This won’t come automatically at first, but start to practice and ask yourself for example, what would Richard Branson or Tony Robbins think about this and how would they react to it? How a successful person might react to a situation can be determined by looking at aspects of their mindset such as their:
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↳ Habits
Sources of motivation and willpower
Attitudes
Beliefs
Inclinations/disposition
As you study the mindsets of successful people, you’ll probably notice that while many of them choose to have positive outlooks on certain things, they can also be realistic (and at times even cynical) about others. So the key to having a success mindset isn’t being positive, but rather taking a deeper look into how you really think in order to change yourself from the inside out, rather than simply focusing on the surface issues! You can’t expect your thoughts to lean towards one direction and your life to lean towards a completely different one. Remember, your external world is a reflection of your internal one - fixing your internal world will automatically change your external world, it just doesn’t work the other way around! Remember that building a success mindset doesn’t happen overnight. It requires constant awareness of your habitual thoughts and the effort and commitment to challenge the limiting ones and replace them with ones that will support your success.
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↳ Be aware of the questions you ask yourself - this is a great place to start.
As Tony Robbins says, don’t really do much for someone in the long term, as these are more like a short dose of motivation and encouragement.
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↳ Consistency is key in changing your mindset and, for me, that is a 24-hour effort. Yes, it isn’t easy, but success isn’t easy - that is why only those people who put in an enormous effort experience success.
Positivity Is Not The Enemy
Just because having a success mindset involves a lot more than positive thinking, it doesn’t mean that being positive about certain things will hinder your success! You should still see opportunities instead of obstacles and not be obsessive about the bad things going on, for example.
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↳ Approaching life with a positive attitude is a great start and will help to give you the momentum needed to kick-start the success mindset as well as the motivation needed to maintain it long-term!
When a team led by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman combed through data on thousands of people to discover what factors matter most for success in life, they found that IQ mattered a minuscule 1 or 2 percent. What mattered a whole lot more? In a word, personality. Which might sound pretty terrifying to those who worry they don’t have the right personality to get ahead in life. But it shouldn’t. If research is pretty clear that character plays an outsized role in life outcomes, it’s also clear that personality can change. Measure what psychologists call the Big 5 personality traits -- extroversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness -- when someone is 14 and then do it again when they’re 75, and the two tests will bear basically no resemblance to each other. What’s more, studies show that with a little bit of effort, it’s possible to consciously change your personality if you so desire. So to sum up, your personality can make or break your chance of success in life, and your personality is, at least to some degree, under your control. And this raises the obvious next question: Which personality traits should you try to influence? While that question will always be somewhat personal -- if your definition of success is building a billion-dollar business then you’ll presumably need a different personality than if you dream of becoming a beloved local librarian -- but psychology can still help answer it.
In a recent Psychology Today post University of Massachusetts, Amherst professor Susan Krauss Whitbourne explains how psychologists figured out what personality traits hold people back from success. While diagnostic checklists have long existed for various clinical mental health problems, up until recently no test or inventory claimed to be able to tell you whether you had a “maladaptive” personality that was likely to keep you from fulfilling your dreams. So a team led by researcher Michael Boudreaux set out to create one. Whitbourne’s post lays out their approach in detail, but the important takeaway for the layperson is that they claim to have succeeded. Sifting through the data the team homed in on seven clusters of problematic personality traits that were consistently associated with lower life satisfaction, worse social functioning, and other problematic behaviors like drug and alcohol use. Here they are:
Emotion dysregulation (difficulty managing stress and intolerant of frustration)
Internalizing (sadness and self criticism)
Will to achieve (lack of direction and distractibility)
Externalizing (acting out in risky behavior)
Scrupulousness (rigidity and perfectionism)
Fantasy proneness (getting lost in fantasies)
Apathy (lack of enthusiasm or strong emotions)
Reading this list, one or more of these areas might immediately pop out at you as something you struggle with, but if not, Whitbourne offers a simple 26-question assessment to help you decide if any of these personality problems apply to you. Shining a spotlight on your personality flaws might not sound fun, but as the article points out, facing up to your weaknesses can actually be empowering. “Gaining insight into your tendencies to thwart your own chances of success is an important first step in short-circuiting a self-defeating vicious cycle. You may never be able to solve all your intrapersonal problems, but gaining insight into their effect on your life can help you be that much more likely to gain long-term fulfillment.”
Whitbourne concludes, “Be bold enough to take a clear eyed look at how your personality is holding you back and you’ll be much better placed to overcome any shortcomings and actually achieve your dreams. Authority, influence, and solid income — these are labels which seem to define highly successful individuals. Achieving a higher status, fame, and abundant resources requires a certain mindset. We have all seen or heard how certain people managed to accumulate great wealth, or simply how they became renowned individuals — but what was truly on their mind? The truth is that they had an idea on to improve something they loved, and possibly impress everyone else who shared the same interest. This brings up a different question – what is the true criteria for being highly successful? Is it having substantial revenue, or showing the world what you are good at? I believe that it is the latter, and that money and fame simply come with the territory. The mindset must never be excluded from the equation, and as far as highly successful people are concerned, these are the mindsets they share.
1. They had a vision and made constant efforts to realize it – Mark Zuckerberg
We have all heard about or seen the movie The Social Network, so we have an idea about how Facebook came to be. Mark is a genius and he had a vision of an online place where people could easily socialize and stay in touch. Creating such a place was no easy task, but he knew success would bring a great deal of appreciation. He knew that it was a vision worth realizing.
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↳ If you are a creative visionary, and are skilled in a particular area, think hard about what you can do with your talents. Think about how to challenge and utilize them in a way that will bring a sense of achievement. Think about how you can do something which will improve the community as a whole – your efforts will not go unnoticed. Without such drive, you are reduced to only daydreaming about how to impress someone with the idea, rather than thinking about what it takes to make it a reality. It is not enough to have vision – you must also find a way to share it. Never allow your governing passion to rust – hone and nourish the skills you have. Learn from others and come up with something new you can share with the world. This is how you can become highly successful and admired.
2. They allowed their suffering to drive their motivation – Elizabeth Holmes
Moments of great suffering and sadness make up our core memories. How we cope in these situations can reveal who we really are. For Elizabeth Holmes, it was the death of her uncle that drove her ambition to help humanity. She has come up with a device that is capable of monitoring one’s health and detecting disease before it fully develops. Now, she is one of the youngest billionaires in the world in the world, and her product can save lives. This kind of mindset is important not only for success, but for life in general. The truth is that life is filled with hardships, and if we can’t endure, we lose. We become deeply insecure, apathetic, and depressed. However, if we work towards regaining control, then we come out scarred but stronger. If you ever find yourself in a situation that makes you feel helpless, don’t dwell on it — focus on what you can do to make things better.
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↳ Whenever someone gives you a dirty look and tells you that you are wasting your time playing video games, tell them about PewDiePie. The gaming industry is vast, not everyone can afford to play every game. Now, you can decide whether or not a game is worth the money before you buy. This is thanks to online streaming, or “Let’s Play” videos. It has become widely popular, but one person who explored this trend and managed to earn money, simply because he liked playing video games, was PewDiePie. Truth be told, a lot of viewers find him immature, childish, and annoying. Still, Felix has a huge fanbase of subscribers, simply because he never failed to deliver what his initial audience wanted — insight about gaming and games in general. This kind of mindset is important for any entertainer and provider — you need to listen to the feedback of your audience in order to perfect your performance or services. Otherwise, someone else will exploit your weakness and steal your consumers, simply because you weren’t guided by the principles of good customer service. In other words, if you are not doing something unique and complex, then you are not irreplaceable. You need work on forming a strong relationship of loyalty with your audience. After all, this is why PewDiePie is still very popular — he stayed loyal to his initial fan base.
4. They nourished their creativity – Jonathan Koon
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↳ Sometimes, being unique and original without the intention to change the world can do the trick. Jonathan Koon was just a teenager when he started nourishing his creativity for car fashion, and managed to accumulate a lot of money from it. Then, he became one of the suppliers of the show Pimp My Ride, which was a way to help out the community and gain publicity at the same time. Afterwards, he became a fashion designer, an industry he still works in today. Jonathan had the commodity of a young age, and was fortunate enough to discover his talent during his youth. If you are good at something, devote at least one day per week to nourishing that creativity. This kind of mindset is important if you intend to become highly successful one day. It is true that we might not always have the time to practice what we are good at, but probably possible to find some free time during the weekend. This allows us to feel truly productive, filling us with positive energy. Without this kind of devotion, there is a risk that you will feel trapped and unfulfilled. After all, our hobbies are part of who we are – our own spark of individuality. “Highly successful” does not always imply wealth – very often it simply means being the best at something, and in this case it is martial arts. Bruce Lee is the undisputed champion when it comes to fighting techniques, and no matter how you look at it, this is sheer success. He showed the world the potential of the human body. One of his most memorable quotes was “Do not pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one.” The truth is, hard work and determination will get you through the most difficult times in your life. Struggles teach us to be resourceful and find a way out of a difficult situation. If you are going through a financial crisis, there is always a way to manage your finances — you can try doing something as a freelancer on numerous online platforms, you can do surveys online and get some money, you can give English lessons via Skype, among many other options. These are not permanent solutions, but they can help you manage.
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↳ The ability to efficiently cope during hard times is essential for highly successful people. It shows them what options are available, it helps when constructing contingency plans and exit strategies. Such a mindset will result in greater confidence and a sense of security. Without it, you’ll be constantly overwhelmed with the fear of losing your assets, which always results in health issues.
6. They challenged the popular beliefs and pushed the limits - Steve Jobs
When we are talking about highly successful people who made crucial decisions at a young age, Steve Jobs is an inevitable mention. He, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elizabeth Holmes exemplify the American Dream — just like the very inventor of the concept, Benjamin Franklin. The problem is that these situations make one into a role model, and idealizing others can have a negative impact on your mind. It is not uncommon to try mimicking the behavior of your paragons, thinking that it will somehow get you closer to their mindset. With that being said, it is quite clear that forsaking school and education is not a part of the mindset, it simply happened because Steve Jobs wanted to pursue his well-established vision. When you decide to challenge established norms and try to go against the curve, make sure you have a well-supported plan. Deciding to become a drop-out and waiting for brilliance and fame to appear miraculously is a flawed belief. Think every major decision through. Weigh the pros and cons before you make major decisions — after all, recklessness is not a virtue. However, it is also important to mention that hesitation can result in regrets, so always strive to find a balance between the two.

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