

Inspiration

Consistency and social awareness are key to excellence and a purposeful life

By Prof Kobus Maree

Top achievers have a sense of meaning and strong purpose. They know what they want to achieve in life, and they have the ability to see their plans through to fruition. They search for what will help them live meaningful and purposeful lives.

The biggest single aspect that enhances their success is acceptance and execution of the time-honoured principle: Either you work hard in a dedicated manner and you achieve, or you don't apply yourself appropriately and you do not achieve. They understand that success is the result of working consistently, planning ahead, and using smart study methods. That success does not come from only starting to work a few weeks before examinations. In fact, it is quite the opposite: the foundations for success are laid very early and one must work harder and harder every year. Moreover, they know from first-hand experience that acting in an emotionally-socially intelligent manner strongly promotes their chances of achieving good marks. They develop the ability to say 'no' to friends who are not serious about their studies and who want you to have fun with them instead of working hard.

Furthermore, high achievers have the ability to prevent sorrow, sadness, pain, and heartache from interfering with their thought processes for prolonged periods. If something is troubling them, they see someone about it. If it is not immediately possible, they note this on their bulletin board where they can see this and tell their brain: 'See, I will do something about this—just give me (provisionally) the peace of mind to continue with my work.' (That really is a skill that all students should acquire and practice.)

To help top achievers attain success, their friends, lecturers, and parents should offer them emotional support. Potential achievers avoid talking negatively all the time. They accept their responsibility to break the prevailing devastating destructive discourse by making a conscious effort to be positive and inspiring instead of bombarding others with negative messages all the time. Yes, of course we live in challenging times. Yes, of course it sometimes feels as if challenges are overwhelming. However, research has shown them that humankind has always experienced major changes but has also managed to find a way to not only survive but indeed to thrive and flourish, to turn challenges into opportunities, defeat into victory, pain into hope and to making a social contribution.

Top achievers realise that converting anxiety into useful behaviour by studying hard is a key life skill. While some students become overwhelmed when they are stressed or anxious, top achievers in general display consistently the ability to focus on something positive and constructive (like working hard) and, in doing so, convert their anxiety into something constructive.

Lastly: Top achievers have a sense of destiny. They know why they are studying, what their guiding star is. Instead of only studying to qualify for a field of study that will help them make a decent living, they identify (or ask a professional person to help them uncover) their key or central life theme(s) and consistently focus on those themes. Here are some real-life examples to show you what I mean:

- Peter* (pseudonyms are used) has often been bullied in his life. He therefore studies hard because he wants to become a lawyer so that he can help people who, like himself, have been bullied.
- Sharon's mother suffered severe burns when someone set their house on fire. She is studying to become a nurse, specializing in working with burn victims.
- Lebo's younger sister is unable to walk because of a physical disability.



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He is studying very hard to become an engineer so that he can earn enough money to help his struggling family. Most importantly, though, he is motivated by the dream to develop inexpensive wheelchairs that can be afforded by people with mobility challenges in outlying, resource-scarce environments like the one he comes from. In addition, he has set his sights on becoming the CEO of a large company so that he can one day be in a position to find a way to sponsor these wheelchairs. Lebo says, 'Every time I get tired of studying, I think of my sister's face and I become re-energised and re-motivated.'

What all these stories (shared with me by top achievers) have in common, is the theme of turning suffering into victory and a social contribution; converting passive suffering of 'pain' (of whatever kind) into active mastering thereof by taking action by applying oneself meticulously and consistently. And do you know what? When top achievers help others overcome their challenges, they help themselves, too, to overcome the pain they have suffered in their lives. Ultimately, they succeed in honouring the legacy of their loved ones in the best conceivable way.

To paraphrase Dillon, another top achiever,

'Your beliefs don't make you a better person; your consistent actions do.'