

The Secret of Highly Successful People

Description

Quick, make a list of the most successful and accomplished people you know. Seriously, take a moment to think of 3-5 people you have had personal contact with who are well-established in their careers.

Now, make a list of the most intelligent and talented folks you know.

Are the two lists identical? I bet anything that they're not.

Weird, huh? Thing is, many of the most successful individuals in the world are not necessarily the smartest or most talented. This is good news because after all, we don't have much control over the smarts or talent we were born with. So what *do* we have control over?

[I've mentioned before](#) that one of the most consistent findings in the sport psychology literature is the connection between self-confidence and success. Still, self-confidence all by itself isn't going to win you an audition or automatically get you the career of your dreams. Inevitably, success requires *doing* something. To quote [Guy Kawasaki](#), "You have to sit by the side of a river a very long time before a roast duck will fly into your mouth."

So if it's not smarts, it's not talent, and it's more than just self-confidence, what is the secret ingredient to realizing our big juicy goals?

I have to warn you, it's nothing sexy or mind-bendingly complex.

Your response will probably be more "oh...well, yeah" than "ooh" or "ahhh".

Enough with the suspense, you say?

Alright. The secret ingredient is...persistence.

The Apparent Inability to Process the Word "No"

There are legions of successful individuals who failed not just once or twice, but repeatedly before eventually making it big.

Charles Schultz (Peanuts) had every cartoon he submitted rejected by his high school yearbook staff.

J.K. Rowling's first Harry Potter manuscript was rejected by 12 publishing houses.

Gone With the Wind was rejected by 38 publishers.

Legend has it that Walt Disney was turned down 302 times before finally getting financing for his dream of creating Walt Disney World.

It's also been said that KFC founder Colonel Sanders was rejected 1009 times before finding a taker for his chicken recipe.

What Do the Numbers Say?

The world of sales is a great place to study the value of persistence. It's been said that 20% of salespeople make 80% of the money. Why so skewed? The exact figures vary, but research suggests that you have to make at least 5 attempts to sell something before most customers will go ahead with the purchase. Despite this, 44% of salespeople give up after the first "no", 22% after the second "no," and 14% after the third. In other words, 80% of salespeople fail because they take "no" for an answer too readily.

You'd think that IQ would be related to professional success, right? Believe it or not, studies suggest that the average correlation between IQ and one's job performance is between .2 and .3 (where .1 means there is virtually no relationship, and .9 indicates an extremely strong relationship).

How to Become More Persistent

So how does one become more persistent? Here are a few ideas.

1. Increase your tolerance for frustration

Next time you are ready to give up on something, take a deep breath and give it one more shot. Whether you succeed or not is unimportant. What you are trying to do is to gradually stretch out your tolerance for frustration, and you do that by pushing yourself to give it one more try each time you feel like you couldn't possibly try any more times. It's the same concept as going to the gym and building muscle by progressively increasing the weight or number of repetitions.

2. Read *The War of Art* by [Steven Pressfield](#)

[The War of Art](#) is one of my most favorite books, as the message really resonated with my experience of being a musician. Pressfield talks about what it means to be a pro, and how to press on despite inevitable bumps in the road. Highly recommended.

3. Movie night!

Need a break? Watch [Meet the Robinsons](#), an animated Disney film about a little boy who learns how important it is to "keep moving forward" despite constant failures and setbacks.

The One-Sentence Summary

“Fall down 7 times, get up 8” ~Japanese proverb

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