

PEOPLE POINTS

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PEAK PERFORMANCE Excelling through Purpose



Peak performance, finding flow in what we do at work and life is about courage, determination, and envisioning success at higher levels.

People with Purpose Perform



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Watching the recent Summer Olympics were you amazed at the achievements of so many wonderful athletes? Have you ever wondered how athletes so young can be so focused? Are you astonished when a sports analyst sticks a microphone near the mouth of the athlete and asks,

"Can you tell us what it is was like to win the gold medal?"

and this person barely old enough to drive a car responds by saying something like,

"This is my dream come true. From the time I was four years old, I knew I wanted to perform in the Olympics!"

WOW, at four years old most of us were lucky if we could ride a three wheeled bike.

How does someone so young have such positive focus and discipline to excel?

On the other hand, how does someone so young cope with missing by a fraction of a second a chance to medal and yet be so positive and upbeat?

It is about

Peak Performance!

Peak Performance is a specialty study that examines and describes the means for people attaining happiness, functioning in optimal fashion and achieving success. While the study draws upon Maslow's motivational theory, it goes beyond to examine how one can excel and perform at high levels on a consistent basis. It expands positive psychology to include capabilities of 'learned

optimism'. It aims to ignite one's sense of hope and it inspires beliefs and behaviors that are life-enhancing.

Martin Seligman [Seligman, M.E.P., 1990, Learned Optimism, Pocket Books] contributed greatly to the study of 'Learned Optimism' with over 500 research studies. He discovered optimistic sales people routinely outsell their pessimistic counterparts by 20 to 40% and as much as 84%! He found optimists have fewer colds, are more resilient at sports, and when faced with a life-threatening illnesses manifest a more robust immune response.

Garfield [Garfield, C. 1989, Peak Performers, Avon Books] interviewed successful business leaders and identified characteristics of these 'peak performers'. He noted

several consistent traits. They seem to be vision and mission driven, and rather than being workaholics they are addicted to activity. While they are results driven, balance in what they do over time is important. Also, they seem to value life long learning and view change as an opportunity to capitalize upon! They believe both the destination and the process for getting there are important.

Peak Performance is about a sense of purpose and a persistent commitment toward a goal. Have you ever felt the positive 'flow' when you did something? Some people say things like, "I seemed to be in such a groove"; "everything just flowed together"; "I felt as though I was part of the mountain, sea, garden, project, etc."

M. Csikszentmihalyi in his books [FLOW, 1990, Harper Perennial] and [Finding Flow, 1997, Basic Books] extensively examines the power of 'flow'. Peak Performers feel this often and the ability to feel this level of achievement is that one sees himself not separate from but truly as part of the process. It's like breathing, you don't have to think about it.

So, how can we become a Peak Performer? How can one find the flow and feel in the groove on a regular basis? Is it possible for one to really achieve a sense of purpose and passion? Does all this require superior intellect?

Ronald Reagan was considered by many to be of average intelligence. After graduating from a lesser known college he neither distinguished himself as an intellectual powerhouse nor a superior actor. His life accomplishments seemed mediocre yet throughout his career he possessed an optimistic viewpoint and a passion for Amer-

ica and a compassion for people. His rise to the Presidency made some incredulous, yet people passionately followed this man. Regardless of one's political philosophy it cannot be denied Ronald Reagan exuded confidence, optimism, and purpose. Genuine leaders have voluntary followers. Ronald Reagan was a Peak Performer.

Here are a few tips that Peak Performers have used to achieve outstanding success in work and life.

To become a Peak Performer:

1. Work to create a sense of purpose.

- Ask yourself, "Why am I here at work, in this life, on this planet, where do I see myself headed in life?"
- Create your own personal job description; write a brief statement of your job/life's purpose.
- Ask, "What gives me joy, inner satisfaction, sense of well-being?"

2. Do some strategic visioning

- Imagine a time in the not too distant future when you are being more like the person you desire to become. What is the image of yourself being the person at work you want to become?
- Imagine yourself, years from now, as the leader, executive, athlete, etc. you wish to become (notice your facial expression, posture, clothing, movements, etc). Just allow yourself to see and feel the possibility of how this feels.

3. Set goals

- Like the Olympians, set outcome goals such as 'to win a gold medal', then

- Set performance goals such as 'to perform to the highest level possible' and
- Recognize the difference. The goal may be the gold medal; however, being able to say "I performed to my highest level and truly gave it my best shot" is a great achievement in its own right.

4. Develop a way to anticipate and manage distractions

- Handle negative thoughts by asking yourself. "What is the worst that could happen? What is my plan for the worst outcome? What is the evidence for this negative thought?"
- Call a trusted friend, utilize an objective professional coach, identify a mentor.
- Schedule 15 minutes of worry time each day, then put your worries away until the next day.
- Listen to relaxation tapes, go jogging, do yoga, etc.
- Schedule time for completing priorities i.e. household chores, returning phone calls, answering emails. Remember your purpose and goals.
- List typical interruptions experienced in a day, week, etc. and then identify ways you can handle them more efficiently.
- Keep a calendar, make a 'to do list' and determine what really must be done vs. what would be nice to accomplish.

5. Celebrate success

- Seek small accomplishments to reinforce your abilities and determination.
- Take pride in what you do and tell others of your accomplishments.
- Recognize that your success is repeatable and past performance is a good predictor of future achievements.