

# HIGH ACHIEVERS: How They Do It

Lieutenant Colonel Dennis Kremble selects and trains pilots for the prestigious U.S. Air Force “Top Gun” program. What he looks for in a candidate, he says, is a person who wants to do the best he can with the talent that he has. “If he or she puts out one hundred percent effort—that’s what I want,” he asserts. “More than talent, I want the person with desire and willingness to go that extra mile.”

The strongest attribute shared by high achievers is attitude. After interviewing 1,000 top achievers from a variety of fields about the traits that led to their success, I came away with this answer: these people, first and foremost, believe in their ability to succeed. And, they are committed to doing their best at all times. But that’s just the jumping off point.

The second common attribute high achievers share is the effort put into reaching goals. Take former U.S. Senator and presidential candidate, Bill Bradley of New Jersey, for example. As early as high school, the former New York Knicks player and Rhodes Scholar practiced his basketball moves and shooting skills relentlessly. He had five spots on the court from which he’d shoot 25 times. If he didn’t hit 25 baskets

**If he didn’t hit 25 baskets out of 25 shots, he’d start over.**

out of 25 shots, he’d start over. He was determined to stay there until he could do it right.

When the crowds watched “Dollar Bill” play in college and later in the NBA, they saw him sink one basket after another with ease and grace—but had no idea of the discipline, and effort behind his skill.

Successful people are also persistent and tenacious. They know that hard work is part of the bargain. In fact, they’re often suspicious when things come too easily because they know it isn’t luck or magic that makes people winners. Psychologist Irene Kassorla says success comes through tedious, day-to-day effort. “Luck,” she attests, “has nothing to do with it.”

High achievers also learn from failure and disappointment. Some of life’s greatest lessons are taught through hardships, mistakes, and failures. Senator Bradley, for example, takes this attitude toward failure: “The taste of defeat has a richness of experience all its own. If you’re totally thrown by the defeats, it’s unlikely that you’ll have as full a life, or experience as many victories,” he says. “Your ability to gain a victory is directly related to your ability to come back from a defeat.”

Fear of failure and defeat can also work to a person’s advantage. Teddy Atlas, a boxing trainer and fight commentator, teaches young fighters to acknowledge and accept their fears. He tells them that fear is like fire: when it’s controlled, it will cook for you, and heat your home; when it’s not controlled, it will burn everything up around you. Fear is as an ally, not an enemy.

High achievers also know they don’t have to



## DIAMOND MINDS

By Barry Farber

fight obstacles and insecurities *alone*. They surround themselves with positive ideas and role models, study their industry and their craft, and seek out mentors. Mary Kay Ash believed a reason her cosmetics empire became successful is because she had the opportunity to work for—and learn from—successful people for 25 years before she went out on her own. “We don’t need to make the same mistakes as our predecessors,” she said. “We can learn from their wisdom and experience.”

Achievers are also passionate about what they do. The late Dr. Fred Epstein, an internationally renowned pediatric neurosurgeon, told me, “People are blessed in life if they find a career for which they feel passion and excitement. Then you have to have the courage to go for it, because so often what we have a passion for puts us out on a limb—which could break.” Top achievers know, however, that dreams must be pursued one step at a time. So high achievers set goals. Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner says, “If we don’t have goals, we stand still in life—I want to do something—climb hills, take risks, go on journeys!”

Interestingly, the journeys of top achievers all seem to lead to the same place: a joyful obligation to give back. Each person interviewed expressed this belief in common regarding the most treasured aspect of success: it enables those who achieve it to help others do the same. ▲

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