

Successful People: The 8 Self-Limiting Behaviors They Avoid

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In my work, I've been fortunate to learn from amazingly successful, impactful professionals and entrepreneurs. I'm defining "success" here as achieving what matters most to you, individually and authentically – not as some objective measure of outer wealth, accomplishment or achievement. Observing people in action who are living fully *on their terms* and absolutely loving it, I've seen how they think, react, interrelate, problem solve, and lead. I've applied these lessons to my own life, and to those I coach.

I've noted that people who love what they do for a living and have created tremendous success and reward, not only engage continuously in life-supporting behaviors, but also avoid certain negative actions and mindsets that other, less successful people habitually get lost in.

The 8 self-limiting, negative behaviors successful people avoid are:

1. Engaging in "below the line" thinking

"Below the line" thinking refers to a particular mindset that shapes how you view the world in a limiting way. It leads to your believing that what's happening to you is outside your control and everyone else's fault – the economy, your industry, your boss, your spouse, etc. Below the line thinking says, "It's not fair what's happening, and I don't have what it takes to overcome these challenges. I didn't expect this and I can't handle it." Above the line thinking, on the other hand, says, "I clearly see the obstacles ahead, and I'm addressing them with open eyes. I'm accountable for my life and my career, and I have what it takes to navigate through this successfully. If I fail, I'll still wake up tomorrow exactly who I am, and will have learned something critical."

2. Mistaking fantastical wishful thinking for action

Successful professionals pursue outcomes that flow organically from their current actions. Unsuccessful individuals attach to fantasies that may relieve them momentarily of their situational pain but have no basis in reality. For instance, I've heard from corporate professionals who share, "Kathy, I really hate my job and desperately want to leave. I've been wanting to write a book and become a motivational speaker for several years now. What's your advice?" I'll respond, "OK, great. Are you writing and speaking?" and more often than not, the answer will be, "Uh...no." You can't write a book if you're not writing anything, and you can't speak in public if you haven't developed any material to speak about. It's critical **to take bold action toward your visions**, in order to create success. Successful people develop

huge goals too, but they crush them down into smaller, digestible (but courageous) action steps that they then build on, which leads naturally to the end goal they're pursuing.

3. Remaining powerless and speechless

Successful people are in touch with their power, and are not afraid to use it and express it. They advocate and negotiate strongly for themselves and for others, and for what they care about, and don't shy away from articulating just how they stand apart from the competition. They know how they contribute uniquely and the value they bring to the table. In addition, they don't wait to bring up concerns – they tackle challenges head on, [speaking about them openly](#), with calm, poise and grace. They don't hide from their problems. And they don't perceive themselves as hapless victims.

4. Putting off investing in themselves

I see this behavior over and over in those who feel thwarted and unsuccessful – they are incredibly reluctant to invest time, money and energy in themselves and their own growth. They are comfortable only when putting other people's needs ahead of their own. They'll make any excuse for why now is NOT the time to invest in themselves or commit to change. They feel guilt, shame and anxiety over claiming "I'm worth this." Successful people don't wait – they spend money, time and effort on their own growth because they know without doubt it will pay off – for themselves and everyone around them.

5. Resisting change

Successful people don't break themselves against what is or drown in the changing tides. They go with the flow. They follow the trends, and embrace them. They are flexible, fluid and nimble. They react to what's in front of them, and improvise deftly. Those who are unsuccessful bemoan what is appearing before them, and stay stuck in the past or in what they "expected," complaining about how life is not what it should be and why what *is* feels so wrong.

6. Honoring other people's priorities over their own

Successful people know what matters most to them – their priorities, values, concerns, and their mission and purpose. They don't float aimlessly on a sea of possibility – they are masters of their own ship and know where they want to head, and make bold moves in the direction of their dreams. To do this, they are very clear about their top priorities in life and work, and won't be waylaid by the priorities and values of others. In short, they have very well-defined boundaries, and know where they end and others begin. They say "no" to endeavors and behaviors (and thinking) that will push them off track. They know what they want to create and the legacy they want to leave behind in this lifetime, and honor that each day. (To get clearer on your priorities, values, and desires for the next chapter of your life and work, take my free [Career Path Self-Assessment](#).)

7. Doubting themselves and their instincts

Those who doubt themselves, lack trust in their own gut or instincts, or second-guess themselves continually find themselves far from where they want to be. Successful professionals believe in themselves without fail. Sure, they acknowledge they have “power gaps” or blind spots, and areas that need deep development. But they forgive themselves for what they don’t know and the mistakes they’ve made, and accept themselves. They keep going with hope and optimism, knowing that the lessons from these missteps will serve them well in the future.

8. Searching for handouts and easy answers

I can often tell from the first contact I have with someone if they’ll be likely to succeed in their new entrepreneurial venture and career, or not. How? ***By the nature of their expectations, and how they set out to fulfill them.*** Here’s an example – if a complete stranger reaches out to me expecting free help without considering what she may offer in return, it’s a bad sign. Let’s say she asks something like this: “I’m launching my new business and wondered if you can give me some advice. I can’t pay you because I’m a startup, but I hope you can help me anyway.”

From this one email, I know she’s not ready to make it happen in her own business. Why? Because successful professionals (and those destined to be) wouldn’t consider asking for help in this way. Instead, they: 1) understand that they have something important and valuable to offer in any situation, 2) are willing and happy to share or barter that in return for what they want, and 3) they treat others exactly as they would like to be treated.

Successful professionals are respectful, resourceful, curious, competent, tenacious, and they figure out how to get the help they need without asking for handouts. That doesn’t mean they don’t seek assistance when and where they need it, or make use of the many free resources available to them (like [Score.org](https://www.score.org), etc.). It means that they don’t expect something for nothing. They treat others equitably and fairly and know they deserve the same. Successful professionals realize that if they’re not willing to pay for products and services they want, then others won’t be willing to pay them (yes, it works like karma).

They also know that their success is directly proportionate to the [effort they put in](#). Most of all, they understand there are no short cuts or easy answers on the road to success.