

Megatraits:12 Traits of Successful People

To be an American is to be a success seeker. Indeed, no other creed, cult, belief or, religion in the nation embraces so many of our fellow citizen as the sprint for "success." Yet, as we all know, most people never succeed in becoming the success they dream of being.

That's why I was delighted when Doris Lee McCoy's publisher sent me her new book MEGATRAITS: 12 TRAITS OF SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE. I had two reasons for promptly focusing on her research: my own continuing desire to be ever more successful and my wish to disseminate to the greatest number McCoy's detailed findings.

McCoy, who comes across as a congenial, empathetic personality eagerly seeking the essential modules of success, has over the last many years interviewed a host of people most of us would regard as successful... that is, people who have reached a certain plateau of physical, emotional, and spiritual/psychological comfort. They include politicians, political leaders, entrepreneurs, athletes, authors, and media and entertainment personalities. As a result of her interviews, McCoy has identified twelve essential components of success she called "megatraits." While many of these come as no surprise, I think it is instructive to see them listed in one place where each day one can review them and see whether one's work and life really exemplify these essential traits.

Successful People Enjoy Their Work.

Be honest with yourself. Are you enjoying what you're doing today...or this week? Successful people do. They enjoy the challenge, the game, the sheer excitement of what they're doing. Indeed, as real estate magnate Trammell Crow put it, "Work is so much more fun than fun, it is improperly called work." Oh sure, each of these successful people has moments that are less than thrilling... but they expect them and shuck them off as trivial by comparison with the excitement of their productive lives generally.

What comes out clearly in McCoy's work is that the truly successful feel blessed by their work... and delighted at the opportunity to work on the projects and problems that make up their chosen occupation. Do you feel this way? Or is it pure drudgery getting up and facing yet another day of employment? Says Malcolm Forbes "The essence of success lies in doing what you enjoy." Otherwise you neither do it well, fully, nor successfully.

Successful People Have High Self-Esteem And A Positive Attitude.

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of meeting people who have refined self contempt and self criticism to an art form and spend their time (and too much of my time, too!) telling **all** the reasons why they've been victimized by life.

McCoy's research points out in detail that you can't truly be successful if you don't have a good, healthy quotient of self esteem and a positive attitude that irradiates everything you do.

Truly successful people are confident, upbeat, enthusiastic, and certain that things will work out. Yes, they know that many projects will fail; no, they are not mindless Polyannas. But they figure that having done the necessary homework and taken the lay of the land, it is better to go forth with

an expectation of success, than the certainty of failure. As May Kay Ash, of Mary Kay Cosmetics says, "It never occurred to me I couldn't do it. I always knew that if I worked hard enough, I could." Is this how you feel?

Successful People Use Negative Experiences To Discover Their Strengths.

I know many people who take defeat personally -- who almost gladly tell me that as a result of their bad experiences they now feel fully justified never having to try again, but these people, as McCoy's research demonstrates, have taken the wrong lesson from experiences that didn't go as well as they might like.

Successful people almost come to regard negative experience as a private tutorial -- a tutorial that gives them insight into what works, what doesn't, and why. As McCoy puts it, "In retrospect, many successful people can actually see how the difficulties they experienced offered them opportunity to discover more of their potential. In some cases, they were able to use traumatic experiences as a means of seeing more options than they had before." In other words, they analyzed even the worst of experiences seeking to squeeze the last drop of insight and education from them, so they could go out again and, at last, triumph.

Successful People Have Integrity And Help Others To Success.

We live in the age of the fast buck at a time when crooks seem to prosper marvelously and where even the best of people wonder whether integrity and empathy aren't drawbacks instead of must-have ingredients for success. Because of this pervasive attitude, I was delighted that McCoy found integrity and helpfulness part of the make-up of the truly successful individual.

What this means is running your business so that on all transactions both people really benefit. As Robert Dedman, Board Chairman for Club Corporation of America, says, "Your ability to set up successful, lasting relationships is the biggest determinate you'll ever have of personal and business success." This means you can't "strip mine" your way to success riding rough shod over people, pushing "ahead" without a thought to their benefit. As Karl Keller, Chairman of the Board for Circle K Stores, comments, "With any deal I've ever made, I've been careful that I was fair to the other side - so that both parties were happy." Can you say this?

Successful People Are Persistent.

This seems pretty obvious, doesn't it? Yet, how many times can you name in your own life that you took "**No!**" for an answer...despite the fact that you knew the person who said this to you really would be better off with what you're selling? Successful people learn from the no's they get... learn to see in them the beginning of the yes that they want. In short, they know that the most successful people in the world are the people who get turned down the most and who make sure they know why, taking the time to re-craft the next approach based on what happened to them before. They don't take this rejection personally, but see it as a learning experience. Is this you?

Successful People Take Risks.

As McCoy discovered, "One overriding trait of the successful is that they believe in their idea, their product, themselves so fully that they are willing to take risks." Sadly, most people - whatever they say to the contrary -- don't take risks. They don't take risks in human relationships or in business, but wait for someone else to lead the way. Not surprisingly, they never have much success.

What happens when you risk? Sometimes you fail producing just the result the quivering ones fear. More often, especially as you learn from failure, you succeed. Thus, as Forrest Shumway of the Allied-Signal Companies says, "In 75 percent of the cases over the course of a lifetime, I will be intuitively correct, and that is a fair percentage." Now, ask yourself: in what I do, do I put myself on the line, extending myself, taking the risk to make any given situation better...or do you hold back until someone else takes the lead?

Successful People Have Developed Good Communication And Problem-Solving Skills.

I think of a friend I have who turns off virtually everyone he ever talks to, despite a good heart and a zealous commitment to success. Why? Because he doesn't know how to communicate with people, almost invariably he offends them. What's wrong? He doesn't have good communication skills -- the kinds of skills that enable him to put what he has to say in the best possible way and so both engage the person he's talking to and persuade that person to take action. Successful people have these skills, and you must have them too.

You must also have the ability to confront established norms of behavior and procedure and say, "Does this make sense anymore?" It's just astounding to me how few people are unwilling to look at a situation with an open mind, remembering that all things outlive their usefulness and must be changed. Successful people know this. Their loyalty is to getting things done in a mutually beneficial way; not how things are done.

Successful People Surround Themselves With Competent, Responsible, Supportive People.

With the best will in the world, successful people cannot do everything themselves. They realize they must rely on others -- so they seek out such people, cultivate them, and reward them taking every opportunity to include their supporters, praise them, and help them develop. Truly successful people don't want "Yes People" around. They want people who are bright, loyal, questioning, and capable of being truly helpful. As Malcolm Forbes says, "No matter how successful your business is, the only real asset is the people you have."

Successful People Are Healthy, Have High Energy, And Schedule Time To Renew.

As McCoy discovered, the successful are generally characterized by a very high energy level...they get up early, work late, and do not complain when it is necessary to work hours other people would regard as onerous. McCoy discovered that many of the people she interviewed get by on less than the normal amount of sleep (this dismayed me, as I seem to need the average quota), and most have a regular exercise program. In addition, most of the successful take time for renewing themselves -- for doing things that are not related to their regular line of work. As McCoy puts it "The changes in rhythm might involve a shift in activity or pace and often a new environment. Revitalizing themselves is crucial enough to them that they actually schedule time for it."

Successful People Believe In God, A Higher Power.

Importantly, the successful people interviewed by McCoy do not feel alone in their ascending development. "They believe they're not inventing their lives alone...nor, in trying moments, do they have to face circumstances by themselves. As Ronald Reagan told McCoy, "I have a deep-seated faith that if you ask for help, it will be given."

Successful People Have A Sense Of Purpose And A Desire To Contribute To Society.

These days, so much of what many people do seems pointless to them. A terrible feeling of ennui and "is that all there is?" is pervasive and casts a blight on far, far too many lives. The successful don't have this feeling. They know not only what they are doing but they know why it matters. In short, they have a sense of purpose about their activity that informs all they do and makes them want to get "up and at em" instead of wasting time in self-destructive doubts and frustrating introspection.

The successful are certain they are contributing to society, making people's lives better. Most have a zealous sense of mission that gives them both focus and zest. As McCoy writes, "The successful show an inner strength, a "knowing", that enables them to move out of the ordinary at times when they believe the situation calls for it. Not so much a rebellious act, it is the will in inspire a higher level of good in society."

Other Characteristics Of The Successful.

As a result of McCoy's hundreds of interviews, she was able to see that the vast majority of successful people shared either all or most of the preceding 12 "megatraits." She also discovered an additional six traits that, if not quite universal, were still widely shared by the successful, and it is worth pointing these out to you, too.

Many Of The Successful Challenge Traditional Concepts.

As McCoy points out, those who cannot succeed within the established system for whatever reason get ahead more often than not by challenging existing patterns of behavior. Their desire to be included, to be successful in conventional terms, drives them to change the game and its prevailing rules. They are constantly coming up with innovative, fresh ideas.

The mark of the successful people, according to McCoy, is their willingness to discard ideas that don't work any more -- and their ability to keep coming up with new, fresh solutions to problems. What matters is what will work, not how things have been done before.

Age is not a barrier to their starting new companies. McCoy presents many individuals -- including Ray Kroc who started McDonald's when he was 52 -- who didn't let their age get them down, but pushed ahead when others their age were thinking about retirement.

They continue, even in their late years, to be productive, many choosing not to retire until long after the traditional age.

Because the successful are not "working" in the traditional sense, they have no incentive to "retire" in the traditional sense either. They realize that the work they have undertaken for so long is what has made their lives so rich and productive, and they see no reason to abandon it, whatever the majority of their age peers are doing.

The Successful Continue To Schedule Time For Their Education.

McCoy reports that the truly successful are under no illusions that they know it all or that what they know today will be sufficient to enable them to compete tomorrow. They have succeeded because of their ability to change, retool, rethink, develop, and discard previously usable ideas, and they know that this is what they must continue to do to remain successful. Thus, whether with formal or informal programs of education, they are committed to staying abreast of the crucial developments that will enable them to remain successful.

Last Words.

Now that you've read this article, re-read and post the list on the following page. As the successful also know, each moment of your life is either an opportunity to be more successful, or the chance to fall back and sabotage yourself. Which is it to be? Too many people reading this article will say, "I know lots of what Doris Lee McCoy took years to discover. I certainly don't need to consider it again." But, be honest with yourself. Are you as successful as you want to be, and are you exhibiting these traits in your daily life? Do you know the "megatraits"...or are you living them?

Megatraits: Traits of Successful People

Successful people:

Enjoy their work

Have high self-esteem and a positive attitude

Use negative experiences to discover their strengths

Have integrity and help others succeed

Are persistent

Take risks

Have developed good communication and
problem solving skills

Surround themselves with competent, responsible,
supportive people

Are healthy, have high energy, and schedule time to renew

Believe in God, higher power

Have a sense of purpose and desire to contribute to society

Challenge traditional concepts

Schedule time for their education