

Sharpen Your Potential

by Sandra Clark and Al Whittall

This article on the workplace is provided by Sandra Clark and Al Whittall, founding partners of Bellwether-Ecliptic Inc. -- The Performance People, a Calgary-based facilitator of organizational change and performance development.

No one sets out in a job to fail or to be mediocre. Even so, some people seem to succeed at everything they touch, while others just get by.

There are some employees who demonstrate a steady and progressive climb to higher levels of development and challenges, while others seem to have stagnated or plateaued. These high performers come out of the gate flying and leave those in the dust wondering what happened.

Is it the "luck of the draw" or is there something that sets the high performer apart?

Looking closely, we can see the common threads that wind through the career histories of those considered to be successful. They are not always rich in monetary ways, but they are wealthy in job satisfaction and respected for the contributions they make in their field. They have what many envy -- a love for what they do and a depth of competence that contributes value to every situation they are in.

These go-getters often operate by subtle but unmistakable principles. They're hungry. They are thrilled by a challenge and immerse themselves in figuring it out. They are focused intently on the job and how to do it to the best of their abilities. They are not always the smartest people in the room, but they display the rare ability to intently focus on the work at hand and refuse to be distracted by the politics and relationships that could so easily consume them.

The high performer does not focus on "being the best" or being better than everyone else. Success isn't driving them nor is their ego.

They compete with themselves and they compare the performance and results they achieved today to what they did yesterday. As a result of their desire to constantly and consistently improve themselves, their performance excels.

Many employees enter new jobs or projects and ask the question "what's in it for me?" Constantly viewing work in terms of how it will benefit them, they want to know what they'll gain before they will commit themselves to participating.

The high performer looks at it from the other side of the coin. Every situation is approached through thinking, "what do I have that I can contribute? How can I participate in this situation?" As a result, high performers are often rich in experience because they are willing to be a part of them before they know where they will lead.

Many people believe if they are involved in everything around them, it will promote an image that they are dedicated and eager employees. Sometimes this has the reverse effect. Spreading yourself too thin can lead to being involved in everything but truly accomplishing nothing.

The high performer has a history of "completing." They exert a discipline in themselves to stick with things long enough to see it through to completion, even if it means they won't come out shining. They don't give up. They learn as much from the things that didn't work as those that did and all of this learning is applied to future situations.

Successful performers are rarely "lone rangers." They are not under any illusions that they can achieve everything on their own. They know how to partner with others without overriding, controlling or competing with the talents of those around them.

They swing themselves behind the leadership of their peers as eagerly as they will take on the leadership of a project themselves.

Going to work for the high performer isn't about punching clocks or putting in time. The high performer goes to work because what they do is in their veins. They rarely feel a distinct separation between what they do and who they are because their work is an extension of themselves.

"In (performance) mastery, there is a sense of effortlessness and joyousness. It stems from your ability and willingness to understand and work with the forces around you," (The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, p. 194, P. Senge, R. Ross, B. Smith, C. Roberts, A. Kleiner)

Luck of the draw? Not likely. Organizations spend millions of dollars every year to train and develop the performance of their people.

The truth is, the potential depth of the contribution lies within the person. It is their choice, and their perception about work, that determines the limits to that performance.

The Performance group appreciates your feedback. E-mail us at Tpg547@aol.com