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Foundations of

Achievers

*The greatest gift of a life is to spend it for something that
will outlast it.*

William James

Our Foundation

High Achievers are:

- **Driven**
- **Responsible**
- **Confident**
- **Saddled with Shaky Self-Esteem**

Twelve years ago, Vance found himself repeatedly asking the same question. Why is it that some people from similar backgrounds achieve a lot while others do not? After much research and observation, four characteristics of high achievers emerged. From this research, Vance developed his foundation about high achievers.

This foundation is that high achievers are driven, responsible, confident, AND saddled with shaky self-esteem. Yes, that sounds different than what you probably expect! Let's define our terms.

“Drivenness” is often noticeable as early as age two. We define it as an ability to multi-process while being actively engaged in life because of excitement or fear. Because of this, high achievers are driven to achieve more and more. Drive (or conation) is one of the four domains of human development. The other three are psychomotor/physical, cognitive, and emotional.

Being responsible is holding oneself accountable for what happens in one's life. Not being responsible is seeing yourself in a life others create for you. It is orienting on “them”, the system, the boss, headquarters, and in general, others. This belief results in reducing yourself to a victim who has little power.

Confidence is a belief that you can do something or learn to do something at least as well as the next person. In short, if anyone else can do it, you believe you also have the energy, drive, and focus to get it done too. It is a belief in your ability to use your skills and talents to get what you want and to do what you want to do.

We define self-esteem as one's perceived acceptability of self versus one's belief of how acceptable you think or feel you should be.

More About Responsibility

RESPONSIBLE

I Create

I/Me/We *

Leader

I.L.O.C.***

NOT RESPONSIBLE

Others Create

You, They, Them **

Victim

E.L.O.C.****

* *Responsibility-centered conversations use these pronouns*

** *Pronouns frequently used to blame others.*

*** *Internal Locus of Control*

**** *External Locus of Control*

High Achievers take responsibility for their lives.

Taking responsibility for doing, winning, and losing is part of who high achievers are. High achievers speak in terms of “I”, “me”, and “we”.

Are you 100% responsible for what happens to you in life? Probably not.

Are you 100% responsible for how you respond to what happens to you in life? We believe so. Otherwise, you would see yourself in a life others create for you. Not taking responsibility for yourself is “empowering” yourself into a victim who has no direct power. Usually when a person is abdicating personal responsibility for their life, he uses pronouns of “you”, “they”, and “them”.

Taking personal responsibility for what happens in one’s life is having an internal locus of control. Believing that forces outside of oneself are pretty much responsible for what happens in one’s life is an external locus of control.

When Vance was in fourth grade he had a lesson in self-responsibility. Fortunately for him, his teacher, Mrs. White, believed in his ability to learn. She exercised her beliefs about responsibility which made a difference in his life. The following is their story.

[PRODUCTION: Box the following story]

Mrs. White Story: How Vance Flunked Fourth Grade— Almost

Vance’s first three years in elementary school in Miami Springs, Florida, were some of his happiest. He had friends, excelled at physical education, and felt loved.

Vance’s reading and spelling weren’t particularly strong. He did everything he could to avoid reading aloud in class because of the snickers he’d hear from his classmates.

His second and third grade teachers had passed him, probably mostly out of compassion and a belief that holding him back would negatively impact his self-esteem. He was learning that he did not have to be responsible for learning to read and spell.

When he arrived in Mrs. White’s fourth grade class, he very quickly was given an opportunity to learn something about his responsibility to learn. The fifth week of school, Mrs. White sent a note home suggesting a speedily held parent conference.

During the conference, Vance's mother was told by Mrs. White and the principal that Vance should be put back into third grade because he wasn't even close to reading or spelling at grade level. Since he was the youngest in the class, being put back wouldn't be such a bad thing.

Vance's mother cried. Vance was embarrassed and afraid. He started crying, too. Between sobs he asked for one more chance to show he belonged in Mrs. White's class. She agreed to work with him after school four days a week for six weeks. If after that he wasn't progressing satisfactorily, he'd be put back into a third grade class.

Mrs. White also expected Vance to work at home on assignments that she would give him. It would require that he put his best efforts and attention to the tasks.

Vance remembers growing up a lot during those six weeks. He even took upon him the responsibility of seeking out extra help from his grandmother. He practiced reading and learning spelling words with her.

Mrs. White also kept her promise to be responsible for the extra time and attention Vance needed to begin to catch up.

Vance learned:

- to be responsible for his own learning.
- to take school more seriously.
- to be grateful for the opportunity to be responsible for his own results by working harder and smarter.
- that there were people who really loved him enough to be interested in his growth.

On the next page is a statement for you to consider about personal responsibility and opportunity.

A Quiz

Carefully consider the following statement, and then decide on your response.

I've always done the most important thing for me to do, at that time, given the information I had at that time.

Now decide if you believe this statement to be true or false.

TRUE _____ **FALSE** _____

Answer the quiz on the opposite page with true or false, whichever is “your truth.”

Don’t read further until you have answered this for yourself, based on your reflection of your beliefs and behaviors, not your intended behaviors.

This question is not addressing what you **SHOULD** have done or what was **BEST** for you to have done. It is simply a question asking what your belief is about your choices and your responsibility for them.

Nobody’s problem is ideal. Nobody has things just as they would like them. The thing to do is to make a success with what material I have. It is sheer waste of time and soul-power to imagine what I would do if things were different. They are not different.

Dr. Frank Crane

A Quiz

I’ve always done the most important thing for me to do, at that time, given the information I had at the time.

TRUE X **FALSE** _____

We believe that everyone does what is most important for them to do, at that time, given the information they had at the time of the decision.

Every successful person I have heard of has done the best they could with conditions as they found them, and not waited until the next year for better.

Edgar Watson Howe

This quiz comes from our understanding of Victor Frankl's writings in his well known book, *A Man's Search for Meaning*. As a prisoner in Auschwitz and other camps, he knew that there were some people who were immediately killed by people and events beyond their control. Of the remaining people, himself included, he eventually believed there was a choice made about how they would respond to their reprehensible conditions. He came to believe that each prisoner retained their free choice of how to view the events in their lives and to choose to do what was most important to them at that time.

When high achievers believe this statement is true for them, they give themselves at least three powerful gifts:

1. They conclude their life is reflective of decisions they have made to date, empowering them to consider choices for the future.
2. They are optimizing their learning from the consequences of each of their decisions.
3. They have the key to forgiveness in their hands, creating light and "liteness", shedding blame, and increasing self-esteem.

More About Confidence

- **Situational**
- **“I can learn to do that”**
- **“I can do that”**

Faith in your own powers and confidence in your individual methods are essential to success.

Roderick Stevens

Confidence is a belief that one can learn to do something or one already knows how to do something in a particular situation or activity.

An example of confidence is when a pilot feels certain of being able to fly a particular type of airplane at a particular time. Even a veteran pilot may lack confidence in flying a plane in certain conditions. A non-pilot probably wouldn't feel as confident to fly a plane as the pilot.

Confidence and self-esteem are not the same. Confidence is situation specific and self-esteem is a pervasive way a person feels about their worthiness and acceptability.

The self-esteem of the pilot and the non-pilot are not predictable just because of the level of confidence they have in piloting a plane. The non-pilot might feel confident about some other skill, like teaching twenty first graders.

More About Self-Esteem

Self-esteem and confidence are different.

**PERCEIVED ACCEPTABILITY = SELF-ESTEEM
BELIEF OF HOW I SHOULD BE**

How acceptable I feel I am versus how I am.

The pious and just honoring of ourselves may be thought the fountainhead from whence every laudable and worthy enterprise issues forth.

John Milton

The secret that many high achievers probably like to keep to themselves is that they are saddled with low self-esteem.* Yep. They often say to themselves, “I should be better, richer, liked by more people, and have a better body.” The operative word is ‘should’. It drives you to hurdling over bars you set higher and higher...keeping you striving and striving and striving to achieve more, more, and more.

This phenomenon is referred to as the “Hungry Ghost” in the Buddhist tradition. It has a huge stomach and a very small mouth. Nothing fills up the hungry ghost within, no matter how continuous the stream of “goodies.” The amount put in rarely registers on the fuel gauge. It is like trying to fill a bucket with a hole in the bottom. It fuels a constant need to do more, acquire more, be more.

Yes, there is value in low self-esteem if you care about achieving more, more, and more!

In Fast Company magazine (1999), Tom Morris distinguishes between an unhealthy “dissatisfaction of acquisition” versus a healthy “dissatisfaction of aspiration”. The former, centering on having more “things”. The latter, centering on who you want to become, setting up growth to be more effective and more loving while expanding one’s horizons.

The combination of low self-esteem with high drive, confidence and self-responsibility is jet fuel, powering a highly accomplished life.

*There are many ways to measure self-esteem. We have used the Coopersmith Inventory with high achievers and found that they are in about the 10th percentile. This means that about 90% of people taking this inventory have higher self-esteem scores!

Review

The High Achiever’s Profile:

- **High Drive**
- **High Responsibility**
- **High Confidence**

• **Low Self-esteem**

Let's review.

The high achiever's profile includes being driven, responsible, confident, and saddled with shaky self-esteem. Are you one of them?

Based on our research, there is a problem for many high achievers: only about one in ten report being happy.

After Vance finished his doctoral dissertation, he had an instinct that the high achievers in his study were not happy with their lives. Although this was counterintuitive to our cultural belief, he recalled the repeated interviews he had with community and business leaders, celebrities, astronauts, and Olympic champions. He decided to do a follow-up study.

His study of 100 high achievers resulted in 92% rating themselves with some degree of unhappiness. The past decade has confirmed these data as Vance has worked with thousands of high achieving educators, graduate students, corporate executives, pastors, and business owners in one-on-one coaching and group sessions world-wide. His original results are reinforced daily. About one in ten high achievers in myriad walks of life rate themselves with some degree of happiness.

Those 8% began to be our teachers. They can now also be yours by our sharing what we have learned these last ten years.

The Problem

92% of high achievers are not happy!

How sad that so few of these achievers are Happy High Achievers!

It seems to us that a big part of life is creating happiness for oneself. We wondered what was at the root of the happiness experienced by the 8%.

We even began to ask ourselves, “Why strive to be a high achiever unless there is a way to also be happy?” Why would anyone want to be a high achiever if nine out of ten were not happy?

We decided to discover what makes the difference between the high achievers who are not happy and those who are happy.

What Can We Learn From Happy High Achievers?

The road to happiness lies in two simple principles:

*Find what it is that interests you and that you do well, and
When you find it, put your whole soul into it—
Every bit of energy and ambition and natural ability you have.*

John D. Rockefeller

Our focus is:

1. Getting to know the eight per cent of high achievers who are happy.
2. Learning to borrow the wisdom of Happy High Achievers (HHAs) for our own growth and to be better able to serve others in their journey toward happiness and achievement.

Happy High Achievers' Life Model

I. Purpose

II. Vision

III. Meaningful work

IV. Relationships → Energy

V. Beliefs & Behaviors → Peace

VI. 3R's: Review, Renew, and Recommit

VII. Discipline

We have observed that happy high achieving Americans have a powerfully simple life model.

We have seen pieces of this model in myriad ancient writings of many kinds. These pieces keep showing up in psychology books as well as spiritual and self-help publications. Why? Because they make such simple sense and hold true over the centuries.

We have integrated these pieces into a cohesive, comprehensive, comprehensible model. It is one that can easily guide you in your efforts to both achieve and to feel happy with yourself and your life.

Let's begin our exploration of the seven keys that, when utilized together holistically, have transformed so many peoples' lives into Happy High Achievers.

A Real Life Example

Naomi Judd strikes us as a classic example of a high achiever who became a Happy High Achiever. She shared some of her story and her wisdom in the February 8, 2004, issue of American Profile.

Judd was at a low point in her life. It was a time when she didn't feel worthy. She was a young, single mother with two children, no money, no education, and no resources. She felt trapped and overwhelmed. In a flash, she realized that her desperate situation was a result of all the small and large inappropriate choices she had been making which had shaped her life.

Naomi Judd called on her beliefs and behaviors to reverse the course of her life. She realized that she was not bad and that she could work her way out of these dire circumstances.

She had plenty of drive. She worked as a waitress while earning a nursing degree. She also kept alive a dream. She had a vision of being a star, of writing a number one song and winning a Grammy for Songwriter of the Year. She had a belief that "you become whatever you think about all day." She eventually won that Grammy.

She realized that the success and money were not the keys to her happiness. She chose to not participate in materialism. She developed practices to find peace of mind. She chose to begin each day with 20 minutes of solitude which helped her reduce stress and improve her health. She examined what truly made her happy and followed that path.

Naomi Judd also found her true calling. She realized that she

could use her own life story, sharing the choices she made and their consequences, to help others. She has written a book about what she has learned on her life's journey, *"Naomi's Breakthrough Guide: 20 Choices to Transform Your Life."*

Naomi is candid about her belief in her ability to control her choices and reactions to what circumstances occur in her life. She states, "Peace of mind isn't the absence of problems; peace of mind comes from your ability to deal with them. The more we understand ourselves and what's standing in the way of our being as happy and healthy as we can, and the more eager we become to risk following our dreams and offering our gifts to others, the more worthy we feel, the more we choose peace of mind."