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**Several strategies of successful people**  
By DEBRA TAYLOR

***Guess what? You can become the high achiever you want to be, and you may not even need a high IQ to do so. Why not start by taking some sneaky tips from the masters. By Debra Taylor.***

Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Samurai masters and Olympians - these people have not only performed well in their chosen fields, they've over-achieved. Have you ever wondered about the differences between such people and yourself? How they manage to make their mark - and often millions - while you're still shuffling paper?

Andrew Meikle, researcher of elite human performance at The Meikle Files in East Sydney believes we can all learn from high achievers. Over the last 13 years he has conducted the world's most comprehensive study into what makes people successful, researching the psychology and philosophy of over 4000 people including Nelson Mandela, Sir Edmund Hillary, Lieutenant General Peter Cosgrove, the former Wallabies Captain John Eales, world surfing champion Layne Beachley and even the five remaining Samurai Masters. High achievers, he says, share similar traits.

"One common thing you find is potency of desire," says Meikle, 33, who uses his research to educate hundreds of Australia's top influencers in companies such as Telstra and Westpac. "They know what they want and have a deep desire to achieve it. They also all have great determination and passion."

What sets them apart even more, Meikle says, is an ability to work well under pressure. "At some point, all of these people arrive at certainty in an uncertain environment," says Meikle. "They can execute high performance at times when there are risks. High achievers tend to feel relatively stable in unstable situations. Fear or stresses don't become bad feelings because they override them."

Their other defining factor is absolute focus and good old-fashioned risk taking. "They have the courage - or naivety - to take on tasks beyond their skill set," Meikle says. "They are willing to say yes and put themselves in an environment that requires more of them than they appear to have."

In short, high achievers put themselves in situations which, if they don't rise to the occasion, will result in pain. For a sports person it may be physical; for a businessperson, financial; or for those are seeking enlightenment, spiritual pain.

And often high achievers enter these situations with very little except their own personal belief and quick thinking. "They have a capacity to believe without proof," says Meikle. "Most of us need some evidence that something will work, high achievers just believe it will. Take for example, Jana Pittman's knee injury just days before the Athens Olympics. All the evidence pointed to it not healing in time to compete, but she had the ability to believe with absolute certainty that it would."

#### **You can do it**

Jana's determination, of course, paid off, and, while most of us won't be hurdling at the Olympics, the encouraging news is that it's never too late to start achieving.

And even better news - you may not need a high IQ or to have been born into a clever gene pool. "If you have a high IQ it means you can think rationally, understand complex relationships and remember information," says Professor Con Stough, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology at Swinburne University which devised Channel Nine's recent National IQ Test.

"Research indicates a large genetic component to IQ," says Professor Stough. "In our society, which offers a lot of opportunities for education, 50 to 70 per cent of high IQs seem to have a genetic basis." You can be born with good genes but you still have to make the most of them to be successful, and a high IQ, says Professor Stough, is not a guarantee of success.

"You often see people with a high IQ and no interpersonal skills. Where they need to understand other people, motivate them and read them. That takes emotional intelligence." To be a successful entrepreneur, for example, creativity and the ability to generate different ideas to solve problems is just as important, says Professor Stough. "An entrepreneur is someone who can find gaps and see new ways of thinking."

While motivational speakers and life coaches may also not guarantee success, Professor Stough believes they can help you see things differently - which in turn could lead to a change in fortune. "Motivational speakers tend to challenge the way people think," he says. "Cognitive psychology and cognitive behaviour therapies also come up with ways to restructure our thoughts. As we grow up we have certain ways of thinking. When that structure is challenged, it can be replaced by different, more productive thought structures.

### **So how do you know when high achievement has turned into unhealthy over-achieving?**

"In our culture, over-achieving is encouraged," says Sydney psychologist Dr Lissa Johnson. "A lot of the people I see have perfectionism as an underlying issue. There seems to be so much competition in the workplace, and a huge sense of job insecurity places people under more and more pressure."

While a healthy amount of stress and success get us up in the morning, too much can make us unhappy and lead to a dysfunctional lifestyle. "You can easily go into overdrive," says Dr Johnson. "And if you have high, rigid and unrelenting standards, you may end up feeling you can't reach them, which can actually cause you to become preoccupied with detail and procrastinate." It can be the start of a vicious circle. "You may be working hard because your goal is to get a nice home for your family, but you are working so hard you are not seeing your family," says Dr Johnson.

The key to having it all - both success and happiness - is not to measure your achievement in black and white. "Think of it more as a spectrum of performance in lots of different areas," says Dr Johnson. "Also see mistakes and setbacks as learning opportunities, rather than a mark of personal failure".

"A good habit is to ask what you've learned at the end of the week. Often the most valuable lessons are a by-product of difficulties. As Oscar Wilde said, 'Success depends on how you deal with failure,'" she says.

### **You are what you eat**

If you want to get a promotion, excel in that exam or just work to your optimum capacity, what you eat may determine how well you achieve. Research from the University of Denver suggests that a diet high in antioxidants - such as strawberries, blueberries or spinach - improves brain cell function.

Other studies show that the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish are crucial to the outer membrane of brain cells, which need a continual supply of fatty acids to refresh themselves.

Some herbs such as ginkgo biloba and ginseng are also thought to aid concentration and memory.