

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

How Extraordinary
People Become That Way

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HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #3

RAISE NECESSITY

“Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason mastery demands all of a person.”

—Albert Einstein

KNOW WHO NEEDS YOUR A GAME

AFFIRM THE WHY

LEVEL UP YOUR SQUAD

“What else could I do?”

The three Marines sitting around Isaac nod as a waitress refills their coffees.

I ask, “You didn’t have a choice?”

He laughs. “Well, there’s always choice. Right about then I had three choices: Sh*t my pants. Run away. Or be a Marine.”

I laugh harder than anyone at the table. The other guys are used to this kind of thing.

I ask him, “What did you say to yourself as you ran toward the explosion?”

Isaac was on foot patrol when one of his platoon’s vehicles hit an improvised explosive device. The explosion knocked him down and out. When he came to, he saw the vehicle smoldering, engulfed in a spiral of smoke, and taking enemy fire. That’s when he started running toward it.

“You just think you don’t want any of your guys to die. That’s all you really think: about the guys.”

Isaac stares out the café window, and no one speaks. For a moment, everyone seems lost in his own stories.

“Sometimes,” Isaac continues, “everything you are comes into play in a moment. It was just a few minutes. I can remember it like it was a two-hour movie. It’s like your whole life and all that you stand for meets the needs of a moment.”

He looks down to his wheelchair. “It just didn’t end like I thought it would. I’m useless now. It’s over.”

Isaac may never walk again. He’s a hero for providing the cover and action that helped evacuate one of the survivors of the blast. He was shot just as they got the injured survivor, one of his close friends, to safety.

One of the other Marines at the table scoffs. “It’s not over, man. You’ll recover. You’re going to be just fine.”

Isaac huffs back. “Do you even see me? I can’t help myself. I can’t serve my country. What’s the point?”

His friends look to me.

“You’re right,” I say. “There is no point—unless you choose to make one. Either the point of your pain is to say to the world, ‘This is how I’ve chosen to deal with this: by giving up.’ Or the point is to show yourself, your fellow Marines, and the world that nothing will stop you or the spirit of service in you.”

My words land flat. Isaac just crosses his arms. “I still don’t see the point.”

One of his friends leans in. “And you never will. If you don’t have a reason to be, man, you’re done. But the deal is, you choose the reason. You don’t have to get better. Or you choose that you must get better. It’s up to you. One choice sucks and makes your life miserable forever. The other gets you out of bed.”

Isaac murmurs, “Why try?” then remains quiet. It’s that silence no one wants to be a part of, watching someone on the edge, unsure whether to give up or live.

After a while, it becomes clear he doesn’t feel he needs to make a choice at this moment. I can tell it’s frustrating his friends. Indecision

is not something Marines do well. Finally, one puts his face just inches from Isaac's and looks at him with an intensity only a military man can get away with.

"Because, damn it, Isaac, you don't have any other choice. Because you're going to obsess about your recovery the same way you trained infantry: like a Marine. Because your family is counting on you! Because we're here for you but we won't accept excuses. Because a warrior's destiny is greater than his wounds."

#

I share this story to illustrate a rather uninspiring truth: You don't have to do anything. You don't have to show up for life, for work, for your family. You don't have to climb out of bed on a tough day. You don't have to care about being the best you can be. You don't have to strive to live an extraordinary life. And yet, some people do feel they have to. Why?

The answer is a phrase that explains one of the most powerful drivers of human motivation and excellence: *performance necessity*.

Will Isaac get better physically? In many ways, it's up to him alone. The doctors have said he may walk again—if he works hard for it. There are no promises, they tell him, but there is a possibility. Will he get better emotionally? Again, it's up to him. He has plenty of support around him. But lots of people who need it are offered support and don't take it. The only difference lies in whether someone decides it is *necessary* to get better. No necessity, no consistent action.

Necessity is the emotional drive that makes great performance a *must* instead of a preference. Unlike weaker desires that make you *want* to do something, necessity *demand*s that you take action. When you feel necessity, you don't sit around wishing or hoping. You get things done. Because you have to. There's not much choice; your heart and soul and the needs of the moment are telling you to act. It just feels right to do something. And if you didn't do it,

you'd feel bad about yourself. You'd feel as though you weren't living up to your standards, meeting your obligations, or fulfilling your duties or your destiny. Necessity inspires a higher sense of motivation than usual because personal identity is engaged, creating a sense of urgency to act.

This “heart and soul” and “destiny” stuff might sound woo-woo, but it's often how high performers describe the motivation behind many of their actions. For example, in my interviews I often ask high performers *why* they work so hard and how they stay so focused, so committed. Their responses often sound something like this:

- It's just who I am.
- I can't imagine doing anything else.
- This is what I was made to do.

There's also a sense of obligation and urgency:

- People need me now; they're counting on me.
- I can't miss this opportunity.
- If I don't do this now, I'll regret it forever.

They say things like what Isaac said: “It's like your whole life and all that you stand for meets the needs of a moment.”

When you have high necessity, you strongly agree with this statement:

“I feel a deep emotional drive and commitment to succeeding, and it consistently forces me to work hard, stay disciplined, and push myself.”

People who report strong agreement with statements like this score higher on the HPI in almost every category. They also report greater confidence, happiness, and success over longer periods than their peers. When this emotional drive of necessity doesn't exist, no tactic, tool, or strategy can help them.

If I've learned anything from my research and a decade of interventions developing high performers, it's that you cannot become extraordinary without a sense that it's absolutely necessary to excel. You must get more emotionally committed to what you are doing, and reach that point where success (or whatever outcome you're after) is not just an occasional preference but a soul-deep necessity. This chapter is about *how*.

NECESSITY BASICS

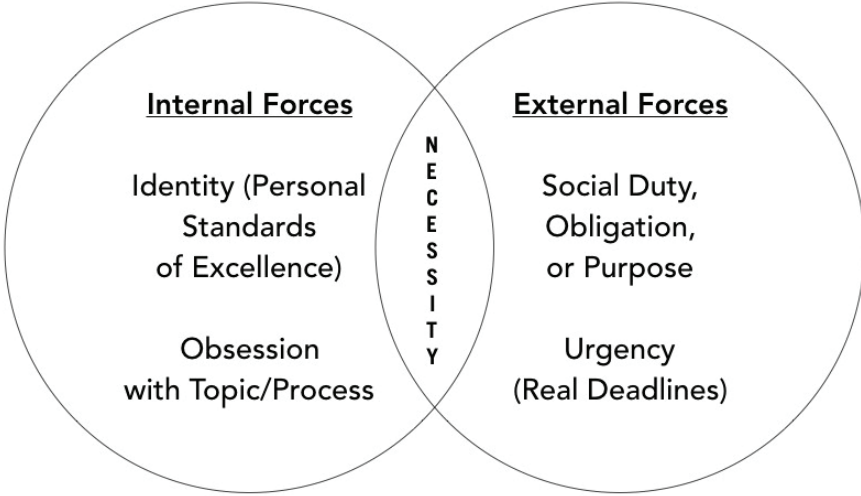
"Necessity is the mistress and guide of nature.
Necessity is the theme and inventress of nature,
her curb and her eternal law."

—Leonardo Da Vinci

These are the factors in performance necessity (which I call the Four Forces of Necessity): identity, obsession, duty, and urgency. The first two are mostly internal. The second two are mostly external. Each is a driving force of motivation, but together they make you predictably perform at higher levels.

The nuances of necessity are not always obvious, so we will spend a few moments on description before we move to prescription. Bear with me, because I'm betting you will identify some significant areas of your life where greater necessity can change the game.

Performance Necessity



INTERNAL FORCES

“Whatever I have tried to do in life,
I have tried with all my heart to do it well;
whatever I have devoted myself to,
I have devoted myself to completely.”

—Charles Dickens

Have you ever noticed that you feel guilty when you’re not living your values or being the best version of yourself? Perhaps you believe you’re an honest person but feel you lie too often. You set goals but don’t follow through. Conversely, have you noticed how good you feel when you’re being a good person and following through on what you say and desire? Those feelings of being frustrated or happy with your performance are what I mean by *internal forces*.

We humans have a lot of internal forces shaping our behavior: your values; expectations; dreams; goals; and need for safety, belonging, congruence, and growth, to name but a few. Think of these internal forces as an internal guidance system that urges you to stay “who you are” and grow into your best self. They are forces that continuously shape and reshape your identity and behaviors throughout your life.

We’ve found that two specific internal forces—personal standards of excellence and obsession with a topic—are particularly powerful in determining your ability to succeed over the long term.

High Personal Standards and Commitment to Excellence

“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.”

—Vince Lombardi

It goes without saying that high performers hold themselves to a high standard. Specifically, they care deeply whether they perform well at any task or activity they see as important to their identity. This is true whether or not they choose the task. It’s also true whether or not they enjoy the task. It’s their identity—not always the choice or enjoyment of the task—that drives them to do well.¹ For example, an athlete may not particularly enjoy a workout their coach has given them, but they do it because they see themselves as an elite athlete willing to try anything to get better. Organizational researchers have also found that people don’t perform well just because they’re doing tasks they’re satisfied with, but rather because they’re setting challenging goals that mean something to them personally.² Satisfaction is not the cause of great performance;

it's the result. When we do what aligns with our future identity, we are more driven and likely to do a great job.

Naturally, we all want to do a good job on things that are important to us.

But high performers care even more about excellence and thus put more effort into their activities than others do.

How can we know that they care more? Because they report self-monitoring their behavior and performance goals more often. High performers don't just know that they have high standards and want to excel; they check in several times throughout their day to see whether they are living up to those standards. It's this self-monitoring that helps them get ahead. In conducting hundreds of performance reviews, I've found that underperformers, on the other hand, are often less self-aware and sometimes oblivious to their behavior and their results.

These findings align with what researchers have found about goals and self-awareness. For example, people who set goals and regularly self-monitor are almost *two and a half times* more likely to attain their goals.³ They also develop more accurate plans and feel more motivated to follow through on them.⁴ In one review of 138 studies spanning more than 19,000 participants, researchers found that monitoring progress is just as important to goal attainment as setting a clear goal in the first place.⁵ If you're not going to monitor your progress, you may as well not set a goal or expect to live up to your own standards. This applies to almost all aspects of our lives, even the mundane ones. Imagine you envision yourself as a healthy person and you want to lose a few pounds. If you don't set a goal and track your progress, you're almost sure to fail. One meta-analysis found that self-monitoring was among the most effective means for improving weight loss results.⁶

So how does this relate to high performance? You need some sort of practice for checking in on whether you are living up to your own personal standards. This can be as easy as journaling every night and considering this line of questioning: “Did I perform with excellence today? Did I live up to my values and expectations for giving my best and doing a good job?”

Asking yourself these kinds of questions daily can bring up tough truths. No one is perfect, and inevitably you’ll have days when you aren’t proud of your performance. But that’s part of the deal. If you don’t self-monitor, you’ll be less consistent and will advance more slowly. And if you do self-monitor, you may still feel frustrated from time to time. That’s just how it goes.

High performers can certainly be hard on themselves if they don’t perceive growth or excellence in what they’re doing. But this does *not* mean they’re unhappy or are turning into neurotic stress cases who always feel that they’re failing. Remember the data: High performers are happier than their peers, perceive that they have *less stress* than their peers, and feel that they’re making a greater difference and are being well rewarded for those efforts. They feel this way because they feel that they’re on the right path. *And they feel that they’re on the right path because they frequently check in with themselves.*

In every discussion I’ve had with high performers, I’ve found them more than willing to face their faults and address their weaknesses. They don’t avoid the conversation. They don’t pretend to be perfect. Indeed, they *want* to talk about how to improve, because at their core, their identity and enjoyment in life are tied to growth.

So how can high performers look themselves in the mirror so often and not get discouraged? Perhaps it’s simply because self-evaluation is something they’re used to. They’re comfortable with it. They don’t fear observing themselves, flaws and all, because they do it so often. The more you do something, the less it stings.

Still, high performers can be tough on themselves when they fail, because excellence is so important to their *identity*. When your identity says, “I’m someone who gets things done and does them with excellence,” or “I’m a successful person who cares about the details and how things turn out,” then you care when things go sideways. To high performers, those statements aren’t just affirmations but an integral part of who they are. This means there is real internal pressure to do well, and that pressure can be hard to tame or turn off.

And, of course, if high performers aren’t careful, these high standards can backfire. We can become *too* critical of ourselves, and soon self-evaluation begins to equate with pain. When that happens, either we stop asking whether we’re doing things with excellence (because the answer is too painful) or we keep asking and psyche ourselves out. Over-concern with making mistakes increases anxiety and decreases performance.⁷ When a star golfer suddenly chokes on the eighteenth hole, it’s not because they lack the necessity to do well. It’s that they allowed necessity to generate a debilitating level of expectation and pressure.

Still, choking is surprisingly rare for high performers because, again, they’re so used to dealing with high necessity.⁸

It’s important to consider our findings on low performers. They report self-monitoring only a third to half as many times per week as their high performing peers. And they rarely agree strongly with statements such as “I have an identity that thrives on seeking excellence, and my daily behaviors show it.” Perhaps an identity of excellence is just too risky. If you regularly feel bad about yourself because you are underperforming, then naturally you might prefer to avoid self-evaluation. But this becomes the ultimate irony for underperformers: If they don’t self-monitor more, their performance won’t improve. And yet, if they do self-monitor more, they’ll have to deal with the inevitable disappointments and self-judgments.

The goal for all underperformers must be to set new standards, self-monitor more frequently, and learn to become comfortable with taking a hard, unflinching look at their own performance.

I don't pretend that it's an easy task. Avoiding potentially negative emotions is a deeply ingrained human impulse. I'm not blind to the fact that feeling intense necessity isn't always rainbows and roses. Striving to play at your best in any area of life can make you truly vulnerable. It's scary to demand a lot of yourself and push to the boundaries of your capabilities. You might not do a good job. You might fail. If you don't rise to the occasion, you can feel frustration, guilt, embarrassment, sadness, shame. Feeling that you *have to* do something isn't always comfortable.

But I suppose that's the ultimate tradeoff high performers make. They sense they *must* do something with excellence, and if they fail and have to endure negative emotions, so be it. They too highly value the performance edge that comes from necessity to let themselves off the hook. The payoff is worth the potential discomfort.

Don't fear this concept of necessity. Lots of people are leery of the idea when I introduce it to them. They fear they're not enough or can't handle the hardship of real demands. But necessity doesn't just mean something "bad" happened and now you "have to" react. It doesn't mean the demand is a negative load to bear.

This is why I often tell low performers:

Sometimes the fastest way to get back in the game is to expect something from yourself again.

Go ahead and tie your identity to doing a good job. And remember to set challenging goals. Decades of research involving over forty thousand participants has shown that people who set difficult and specific goals outperform people who set vague and non-challenging goals.⁹

See yourself as a person who loves challenge and go for the big dreams. You are stronger than you think, and the future holds good things for you. Sure, you might fail. Sure, it might be uncomfortable. But what's the alternative? Holding back? Landing at the tail end of life and feeling that you didn't give it your all? Trudging through life safely inside your little bubble bored or complacent? Don't let that be your fate.

High performers have to succeed over the long term because they have the guts to expect something great from themselves. They repeatedly tell themselves they *must* do something and do it well because that action or achievement would be congruent with their ideal identity.

High performers' dreams of living extraordinary lives aren't mere wishes and hopes. They make their dream a *necessity*. Their future identity is tied to it, and they expect themselves to make it happen. And so they do.

Obsession with Understanding and Mastering a Topic

"To have long-term success as a coach or in any position of leadership, you have to be obsessed in some way."

—Pat Riley

If an internal standard for excellence makes solid performance necessary, then the internal force of *curiosity* makes it enjoyable.

As you would expect, high performers are deeply curious people. In fact, their curiosity for understanding and mastering their primary field of interest is one of the hallmarks of their success. It's truly a universal observation across all high performers. They feel a high internal drive to focus on their field of interest over the long term and build deep competence. Psychologists would say they have high intrinsic motivation—they do things because those things are

interesting, enjoyable, and personally satisfying.¹⁰ High performers don't need a reward or prod from others to do something, because they find it inherently rewarding.

This deep and long-term passion for a particular topic or discipline has been noted in almost all modern success research. When people speak of “grit,” they're talking about combined *passion and perseverance*. If you've heard of “deliberate practice”—often misinterpreted as the ten-thousand-hour rule—you know that it matters how long you focus on and train for something. The findings are straightforward. People who become world-class at anything focus longer and harder on their craft.¹¹

But I've found that high performers must have something more than just passion. Passion is something everyone can understand. It's acceptable. We're told to be passionate, live with passion, love with passion. Passion is the expectation, the first door to success. But if you can stay highly emotionally engaged and laser focused over the long term, even when motivation and passion inevitably rise and ebb in waves of interest, even when others are criticizing you (and you know they might be right), even when you *fail* again and again, even when you are forced to stretch well beyond your comfort zone so that you can keep climbing, even when the rewards and recognition come too far apart, even when everyone else would have given up or moved on, even when all signs say you should quit—that's a leap beyond grit into the territory of what many might call an irresponsible obsession. It borders on recklessness. I took up this point in *The Motivation Manifesto*:

Our challenge is that we have been conditioned to believe the opposite of these things—that bold action or swift progress is somehow dangerous or reckless. But a certain degree of insanity and recklessness is *necessary* to advance or innovate anything, to make any new or

remarkable or meaningful contributions. What great thing was ever accomplished without a little recklessness? So-called recklessness was required for the extraordinary to happen: crossing the oceans, ending slavery, rocketing man into space, building skyscrapers, decoding the genome, starting new businesses, and innovating entire industries. It *is* reckless to try something that has never been done, to move against convention, to begin before all conditions are good and preparations are perfected. But the bold know that to win, one must first *begin*. They also deeply understand that a degree of risk is inevitable and *necessary* should there be any real reward. Yes, any plunge into the unknown is reckless—but that's where the treasure lies.

Am I mincing words here? No—this is what high performers worldwide spoke with me about.

**When you are passionate about what you do,
people understand. When you are obsessed,
they think you're mad. That's the difference.**

It is this almost reckless obsession for mastering something that makes us feel the imperative to perform at higher levels.

In any field of endeavor, those lacking obsession are often easy to spot: the half-interested browsers, the half-hearted lovers, the half-engaged leaders. They may lack intense interest, passion, or desire in general. But not necessarily. Sometimes, they have *lots* of interests, passions, and desires. But what they lack is that *one thing*, that abiding and unquenchable obsession. You know within minutes of meeting someone whether they have an obsession. If they have it, they're curious, engaged, excited to learn and talk about something specific and deeply important to them. They say things like "I love doing what I do so much, I'm sort of obsessed." Or "I live, eat, and breathe

this; I can't imagine doing something else—this is who I am.” They speak enthusiastically and articulately about a quest for excellence or mastery in their field, and they log the hours of study, practice, and preparation to achieve those ends. Their obsessions land on their calendars in real work efforts.

The moment you know that something has transcended being a passion and has become an obsession is when that something gets tied to your *identity*.

It changes from a desire to *feel* a particular state of emotion—passion—to a quest to *be* a particular kind of person.

It becomes part of you, something you value more deeply than other things. It becomes *necessary* for you.

Just as some people fear setting high standards for themselves, many fear becoming obsessed. They prefer casual interests and passing flames. It's easier to live with passions that have no stake in who you are.

It's worth the reminder: High performers can handle this sort of internal pressure. They don't mind diving into the deep end of their passions. Obsession is not something to fear. Quite the contrary. It's almost like a badge of honor. When people are obsessed with something, they enjoy doing it so much that they don't feel the need to apologize to others for it. They lose hours working at a task or improving a skill. And they love it.

Are there “unhealthy” obsessions? I suppose that depends on how you define things. If you get so enthralled by something that you become addicted or think about it compulsively, then yes. That's not exactly healthy. If you define an obsession as a “persistent disturbing preoccupation,” as Merriam-Webster does for one sense of the word, then yes, taking it to the degree of “disturbing” is probably unhealthy. But the dictionary also defines *obsession* in these ways:

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

- a state in which someone thinks about someone or something constantly or frequently, especially in a way that is not normal
- someone or something that a person thinks about constantly or frequently
- an activity that someone is very interested in or spends a lot of time doing
- a persistent abnormally strong interest in or concern about someone or something

I don't find any of those senses of the word particularly unhealthy. So again, it depends on the definition you choose. What I know about high performers is that they do indeed spend an enormous amount of time thinking about and doing their obsession(s). Is this "abnormal"? Absolutely.

But normal isn't always healthy, either.

Let's be honest: A normal amount of time spent on almost anything in today's distracted world is about two minutes. So, if an abnormal amount of focus is "unhealthy," then high performers are guilty as charged. But I don't observe high performers as being unhealthy—and I spend more time observing them than just about anyone does. If you're wondering whether you have an unhealthy obsession, it's pretty easy to figure out: When your obsession starts running you instead of you running it, if it starts tearing up your life and wrecking your relationships and causing unhappiness all around, then you've got a problem.

But that's just not a problem high performers have. Otherwise, by definition, they wouldn't be high performers. The data bears this out.¹² High performers are happy. They are confident. They eat healthy amounts of healthy foods, and they exercise. They handle

stress better than their peers. They love challenge, and sense that they're making a difference. In other words, you could say they're in control.

That's why I encourage people to keep experimenting in life until they find something that sparks unusual interest. Then, if it aligns with your personal values and identity, jump in. Get curious. Let yourself geek out on something and *go deep*. Let that part of you that wants to obsess about and master something come alive again.

When high personal standards meet high obsessions, then high necessity emerges. So, too, does high performance. And that's just the *internal* game of necessity. The external forces are where things really get interesting.

Before we move on to the external forces, spend some time reflecting on the following statements:

- The values that are important for me to live include . . .
- A recent situation where I didn't live my values was . . .
- The reason I didn't feel it necessary in that moment to live my values is . . .
- A recent situation in which I was proud of living my values or being a particular kind of person was . . .
- The reason I felt it necessary to be that kind of person then was . . .
- The topics I find myself obsessed with include . . .
- A topic I haven't been obsessing about enough in a healthy way is . . .

EXTERNAL FORCES

“You never know how strong you are
until being strong is your only choice.”

—Bob Marley

An external force of necessity is any outside factor that drives you to perform well. Some psychologists might simply describe this as “pressure.”¹³ I rarely use the term *pressure*, though, because it carries a lot of negative connotations. For the most part, high performers don’t feel ongoing unwanted pressures causing their drive for excellence. Like all of us, they have obligations and deadlines, but the distinction is that they consciously *choose those duties* and thus don’t see them as negative pressures to perform. They are not pushed to performance; they are pulled.

I used to get this wrong. In one of our pilot studies for the High Performance Indicator, we asked people to score whether they agreed strongly with this statement: “I feel an external demand—from my peers, family, boss, mentor, or culture—to succeed at high levels.” To my initial surprise, this statement didn’t correlate with high performance.¹⁴ In asking high performers about this result, I learned that the reason is because the demands they sense to succeed do not come from other people. If they *do* feel pressure from others in a way that makes them perform better, it likely just reinforces choices or behaviors they may already have committed to. Another way of saying this is that high performers don’t necessarily view external forces as *negative things* or as *causal reasons* for their performance.

This means that high performers are not functioning from what psychologists often call reactance, which are acts motivated by the will to fight back or act out against a perceived insult or threat. High performers’ necessity for action in life does not stem from wanting to fight “the system” or whoever is putting them down. High performers aren’t driven because they are rebelling or feeling threatened.

That type of “negative” motivation certainly exists, but alone it rarely lasts long or accomplishes much.

More often, high performers view “positive” external forces as causal reasons for increased performance. They want to do well to serve a purpose they find meaningful—fulfilling a high purpose serves as a positive sort of pressure. Even obligations and difficult-to-meet deadlines—which many people dislike—are viewed as positive performance enhancers.

With this in mind, there are two primary positive external forces that exert the kind of motivation or pressure that improves performance.

Social Duty, Obligation, and Purpose

“Duty makes us do things well,
but love makes us do them beautifully.”

—Phillips Brooks

High performers often feel the necessity to perform well out of a sense of duty to someone or something beyond themselves. Someone is counting on them, or they’re trying to fulfill a promise or responsibility.

I define *duty* broadly because high performers do, too. Sometimes, when they speak of duty, they mean that they owe something to others or are accountable for their performance (whether or not anyone has asked for the thing they feel obligated to do). Sometimes, high performers view duty as an obligation to meet another’s expectations or needs. Sometimes, they see duty as complying with the norms or values of a group, or following a moral sense of right and wrong.¹⁵

The duties that drive performance can be explained best by the truth that we will often do more for others than for ourselves. We’ll get up in the middle of the night to calm an upset child even though

we know we need sleep. It's just *more necessary* in our mind to do this thing for someone else. This type of necessity is often the strongest pull. So if you ever feel that you are not performing well, start asking, "Who needs me more right now?"

If you add to that accountability—when people know that you are responsible for helping them—necessity becomes stronger yet. A tremendous amount of research shows that people tend to maintain motivation, give more effort, and achieve higher performance when they are held accountable for their outcomes, are evaluated more often, and have the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise or gain respect from those they serve.¹⁶ In other words, if you owe it to someone to do well, and you feel that doing well will exhibit your expertise, then you'll feel greater necessity to perform at higher levels. For example, when we are evaluated more and held accountable to team performance, we work harder and better.¹⁷

This all sounds nice, but we all know that often a sense of duty to others can *feel* like a negative thing in the short term. Few parents are eager to wake up in the middle of the night and change a diaper. Doing so is more an obligation than an expression of warmhearted love. Will parents complain about that obligation? Sure. But over the long term, adherence to meeting that "positive" obligation helps make them feel like good parents, which is at least part of what motivates them to do it. In other words, the external demands we feel to meet our obligations in life can feel bad in the short term but lead to strong performance outcomes later.

It's hard for underperformers to see that obligations are not always a negative thing, which is why we found that underperformers complain more about their responsibilities at work than their high performing peers. Some obligations can naturally feel like something to complain about. A sense of obligation to family, for instance, might lead you to live near your parents or to send them money. This kind of familial

duty might feel like a ball and chain to many, but meeting such duties also happens to correlate with positive well-being.¹⁸

At work, a sense of “doing the right thing” drives positive emotions and performance as well. Organizational researchers have found that employees who are the most committed, especially in times of change, feel that it would be “wrong” to leave a company if their absence would hurt the company’s future.¹⁹ They often double down on their efforts to help their managers even though it requires longer work hours. Duty to the mission replaces their short-term comforts.

Because high performers understand the need to meet their obligations, they rarely complain about the tasks and duties they must perform to succeed. They recognize that fulfilling their role and serving the needs of others is part of the process. It’s a positive thing tomorrow even if it’s a pain now. It’s these findings that have inspired me to view my obligations in life differently. I’ve learned to adjust my attitude to things I have to do, to complain less and realize that most of what I “have” to do is in truth a blessing.

**I learned that when you have the opportunity to serve,
you don’t complain about the effort involved.**

When you feel the drive to serve others, you sustain solid performance longer. This is one reason, for example, why members of the military are often so extraordinary. They have a sense of duty to something beyond themselves—their country and their comrades in arms.

It’s also why most high performers mention “purpose” as motivating their best performance. Their sense of duty or obligation to a higher vision, mission, or calling propels them through the hardships of achievement.

In fact, when I talk with high performers, they regularly say they “don’t have a choice” but to be good at what they do. They don’t mean this as a lack of freedom, as if some autocratic leader were forcing them to do something. What they mean is, they feel that it’s necessary to

do something because they've been *called* to do it. They feel they have been given a unique gift or opportunity. Often, they sense that their performance now will affect their future and, perhaps, the futures of a lot of people, in profound ways.

This sense of duty to a higher calling is almost ubiquitous when you talk to the top 15 percent of high performers. It is not rare to hear them talk about legacy, destiny, divine timing, God, or a moral responsibility to future generations as primary motivators for their performance. They need to perform well, they say, because they know they are needed.

Real Deadlines

“Without a sense of urgency, desire loses its value.”

—Jim Rohn

Why do athletes work out harder in the weeks immediately before walking into the ring or onto the field? Why do salespeople perform better at quarter's end? Why do stay-at-home parents report being better organized right before school starts? Because nothing motivates action like a hard deadline.

Real deadlines are an underappreciated tool in performance management. We'd rather talk about goals and timelines, setting “nice to have” dates to achieve those goals. But high performance happens only when there are real deadlines.

What is a “real” deadline? It's a date that matters because, if it isn't met, real negative consequences happen, and if it is real, benefits come to fruition.

We all have deadlines in life. The distinction that matters here is that high performers seem to be regularly marching toward real deadlines that they feel are important to meet. They know the dates when things are due, and the real consequences and payoffs associated

with those dates. But just as important, high performers are *not* seeking to meet *false* deadlines.

A *false deadline* is usually a poorly conceived activity with a due date that is someone's *preference*, not a true need with real consequences if it's not met. It's what one of my clients, a Green Beret, calls a "circle jerk fire drill."

Here is how this distinction between real and fake deadlines plays out in my life. Whenever someone e-mails me a request, with or without a due date, I reply in this way:

Thanks for your request. Can you give me the "real deadline" date for this? That means the date when the world will explode, your career will be destroyed, or a domino effect leading to both your and my ultimate demise will truly begin. Any date before that is your preference, and with respect, by the time you've sent me this request I have 100 preference requests in front of you. So, to serve you best, I have to put you in ranking order with the real deadlines. Can you please let me know that drop-dead date and why, specifically, it occurs then? From there, I'll decide the priority and coordinate appropriately with you and, as always, serve with excellence. Thanks!

—Brendon

I send this e-mail because I know how quickly I can fall out of high performance by meeting other people's demands that aren't real demands. I'm a people pleaser. I'm a sucker for distraction. Habits such as clarifying real deadlines are what make me, and every high performer I know, so effective.

A recent survey of 1,100 high performers revealed that their underperforming counterparts get pulled into fake urgencies or deadlines *three and a half times* more often than they do.²⁰ High performers are more focused on doing what really matters *when* it matters.

But that's not simply because high performers are superhuman and always focused on their own deadlines. In fact, for the most part, the real deadlines that high performers are marching to have been placed on them *by others*, by outside forces. Olympians don't choose when the games will be held, and CEOs don't set the quarterly demands thrust on them by the marketplace.

Left to my own devices, I probably would never have finished this book. But I knew that at some point, if I didn't turn it in, my family would mutiny, my friends would abduct me, and my publisher would dump me. Sure, I missed a few false deadlines, which I had set. But once there was a real deadline, when my publisher promised the book to retailers, and my wife expected a vacation, *bam*, the words per hour increased exponentially.

This isn't to say that high performers are driven to meet a deadline only by the negative consequences of missing it. In fact, most want to meet their deadlines because they're excited to see their work out there in the world, as well as to move on to the next project or opportunity they have chosen for themselves. I was eager to finish this book not just because I feared the negative repercussions of being late; I was also excited to finish so I could get the book in your hands and turn more of my attention to my family and to reaching more students with this message.

This example illustrates another aspect of real deadlines: that they are inherently *social* deadlines. High performers are driven to get things done because they recognize that their timeliness affects other people.

**The reality is that when you choose to care for others
and make a big difference in the world,
the number of deadlines coming at you will increase.**

Some might assume that time pressure makes people miserable. But that's just not what I've observed or what other research is finding. A recent study found that by having a deadline, not only did people focus more to complete the activity but they found it easier to

“let that activity go” and devote greater attention to the *next* activity.²¹ That is, deadlines help us get closure between activities, so we can give our full focus to what we need to be working on *now*.

KEEPING THE FIRE

Identity. Obsession. Duty. Deadlines. As you can imagine, any *one* of these forces can make us bring up our game. But when internal and external demands mix, you get more necessity, and an even stronger wind at your back.

I’ll repeat the part about this being a sensitive topic. Lots of people really dislike necessity—they hate feeling any sort of pressure. They don’t want internal pressure because it can cause anxiety. And they don’t want external pressure because it can cause anxiety *and* real failure. Still, the data is clear: High performers *like* necessity. In fact, they need it. When it’s gone, their fire is gone.

For an example of how this might play out, imagine you’re working with someone who is in the top 2 percent of high performers. They say to you, “I feel like I’m not as consistent or as disciplined as I used to be.” What would be your next move with them? Would you make them take a personality test or a strengths assessment or go to a retreat in the woods?

I sure wouldn’t. I’d have a real conversation with them about necessity. I’d find out about a time when they did feel consistent, and I’d explore the Four Forces of Necessity with them to see what led them to such impressive performance in the past. Then I’d cycle through the Four Forces again, seeking to get the high performer more deeply connected to their hunger for achievement because of their identity, obsessions, and sense of duty and urgency. If they didn’t have something they felt obsessed with, obligated to, or at risk of losing or missing out on, I’d have them *find* something to care deeply about. I wouldn’t let them off the hook until we were clear about the Four Forces.

This is exactly what I did with Isaac, the soldier struggling with the feeling that he wasn't useful anymore. I got him to imagine his future in a new way, reconnect with some of the obsessions he had before his injuries, and commit to improving his health and mind-set for his family and so he could get back to work. It wasn't easy, but eventually Isaac reconnected with himself and again found his enthusiasm for life.

Bottom line: We change and improve over time only when we *must*. When the internal and external forces on us are strong enough, we make it happen. We climb. And when it gets most difficult, we remember our cause. When we are afraid and battling hardship and darkness, we remember we came in the cause of light and we sustain positive performance over the long term. Here are three practices that can fire up a greater sense of necessity.

PRACTICE ONE

KNOW WHO NEEDS YOUR A GAME

“Not only must we be good,
but we must also be good for something.”

—Henry David Thoreau

To help you tap into both the internal and the external demands of necessity, try this simple practice. Set a “desk trigger” for yourself. From now on, whenever you sit down at your desk—that's the trigger action—ask:

“Who needs me on my A game the most right now?”

Butt hits chair; then you ask and answer the question. That's the practice. I love this practice for several reasons:

- It's simple and something anyone can do.
- The trigger is based on something you do frequently: sit down at your office chair. Whether your office chair is at the kitchen table or in a high-rise corner office, I bet you're there a lot.
- It forces you to do a quick gut check. The mere mention of your A game forces an internal review: What *is* my A game? Have I been bringing it today? What would my A game look like in the next hour or so?
- The question also forces you to think of someone else. Whether by duty, obligation, or purpose, they ended up on your radar, and now you can have an external person or group to work for. When you have someone external to take action for, you tend to perform better.
- Finally, I like the phrase “the most right now.” It is immediacy focused, and yet “the most” makes you examine your priorities and—yep, you guessed it—your real deadlines.

I started teaching this practice to my clients because I've never met a high performer who didn't *consistently* ponder whether they were giving their best—and not just for themselves but for others. They have come to assess their performance at regular intervals. By giving you a desk trigger, I'm helping you bring that skill to your conscious habits. I'm also helping you step into a spirit of service because that's what high performers do. They're grateful for life, so they're generous with others.

People often ask me to clarify what it means to be on your A game, and *how* to get there. Being on your A game means that you are giving your best effort with full focus on the singular task at hand. To get it, you need to stoke the internal and external demands

of necessity. Specifically, you assume the identity of a high performer and you set up situations that require full immersion. In other words, you get to your A game through the gates of identity and immersion.

In the game of life, you get to choose your identity—who you will aspire to be and how you'll show up. That choice of identity will dramatically affect how well you perform. Consider the difference between these identities:

Dabblers have a passing interest in the game of life. They look at many things and try many things. But they never really jump into anything with full engagement or commitment.

Novices have interest, too, but at least they are intent on developing some expertise in an area. They jump in deeper than dabblers, but their issue is, they don't deal well with discouragement. Novices stop at obstacles because they don't have much of their identity in the fight.

Amateurs have more than interest. They have passion. They've jumped in deep, and they truly engage a subject and want to get better. They get through more obstacles than novices do, but they tend to remain at an unskilled level unless they get fast and positive feedback or recognition. In other words, they need a lot of external validation to continue.

Players have passion but also greater commitment and skill. With great focus, they teach themselves to master one area of the game. They excel and find themselves happy as long as they get their turn and get compensation. If the game changes or the rules change, though, they're quickly embittered. Players desperately need the rules and routines. They don't like disruption or negative feedback. They need a high degree of fairness if they are going to participate—if someone on the team gets paid more than they do, they freak out and quit. They're committed to becoming a success in their position but rarely

achieve a holistic level of success in other areas of the game (or life). To them, it's a game to be won and there's not much beyond that.

High Performers are like players but with greater all-around necessity, skill, and team spirit. They are all-in on the game. They play at a high level no matter what the recognition or rewards, because the game is intrinsically rewarding and also part of how they view their service to the world. Their identity is tied to the game but also to the team and those they serve. They don't want to master just one area of the game; they want to be known for the game itself. And yet, unlike players, they don't mind sharing the spotlight. They have such a high degree of personal excellence and duty to the team, they become the go-to person in every game. They stand out because they not only deliver exceptional individual performance but also make every person better through their influence.

These are more casual descriptions than I've made elsewhere in the book, but I often share them to help people realize they have a choice. If you want to be on your A game, you can't be a dabbler, novice, amateur, or player. You must consciously choose and try to will yourself into being a high performer. If you're going to bring your A game regularly, you have to describe that identity for yourself and step into it—every single day.

In addition to choosing a high performance identity, you'll have to immerse yourself fully in activities that force you to stretch. You can't just prance around thinking you're good. You have to put yourself in situations that *make* you good. Fortunately, research has clearly outlined exactly what will help you find those challenging and immersive experiences. This popular concept in positive psychology is known as *flow*. According to Mihay Csikszentmihalyi, flow happens when several of these elements are in play:

1. You have goals that are clear and challenging yet attainable.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

2. Strong concentration and focused attention are required.
3. The thing you're doing is intrinsically rewarding.
4. You lose self-consciousness a bit and feel serene.
5. Time stops—you feel so focused on the present that you lose track of time.
6. You're getting immediate feedback on your performance.
7. There's a balance between your skill level and the challenge presented. You know that what you're doing is doable even if difficult.
8. You have a sense of personal control over the situation and the outcome.
9. You stop thinking about your physical needs.
10. You have the ability to focus completely on the activity at hand.²²

You can use this list of conditions to increase the odds you'll bring your A game to those you hope to serve. Perhaps this last part, about serving others, is what makes flow even more powerful. That's why I ask that you frame this practice as an opportunity to bring your A game *for someone else*. Look beyond your individual performance or feelings and connect with a reason to be your best for others. Find somebody or something worth fighting for. If you can stoke the necessity to be your best in order to help others, you'll hit high performance faster and stay there longer.

Performance Prompts

1. The people who need me on my A game at this point in my life are . . .
2. The reasons each of those people need me include . . .
3. The reasons I want to become a high performer for each of these people are . . .
4. I know that I'm on my A game when I think, feel, or behave . . .
5. The things that throw me off my A game are . . .
6. I can deal more effectively with those things by . . .
7. A few reminders I could set up for myself to be my best for the people in my life could include . . .

PRACTICE TWO

AFFIRM THE WHY

“The moment one definitely commits oneself,
then providence moves, too.”

—Goethe

High performers don't keep their goals, or the why behind those goals, *secret* or *silent*. They confidently affirm their goals to themselves and others. If there is one necessity practice that seems to divide high performers and underperformers the most, it's this one. Underperformers are often unclear about their why, and they don't use affirmations or speak about the whys they do have.

To affirm is to declare or strongly assert something as valid or confirmed. It is saying *with confidence* that something is true or will happen. This is the way high performers speak about their goals and their whys. They don't sound doubtful. They have confidence in the reasons they are working so hard, and they are proud to tell you about their purpose. In fact, I found that high performers love talking about why they do almost anything. High performing athletes, for example, take great joy in describing their workout and especially *why* they chose a specific exercise that day. They'll spend as much time telling you why they're doing the routine—"I'm doing three sets of squats at 75 percent today because I've felt off balance"—as on what the routine is or how to do it.

When I first started working with high performers, I often wondered whether they were just extroverts who liked to talk a big game. Or did they have some sort of charisma that made their reasons for action sound more appealing than other people's reasons? I was wrong on both assumptions. Personality isn't correlated with

high performance. An introvert is just as likely as an extrovert to be a high performer.²³

I also learned that while high performers are exuberant in sharing their whys with others, they rarely declare that their *approach* is always right. Yes, they are confident in their purpose, but in interviews it is clear that *most* high performers question whether their approach is the best one available. It's often by being open to better processes that they identify new ways of getting ahead. That is, high performers are confident about their why but open about *how*.

It's in affirming their whys with other people that high performers not only feel more confident but create social consequence and obligation. If I tell you I'm going for a goal and why it's so important to me, and if I speak as though it's going to happen, declaring that *I will make it happen*, then my ego is now on the line. There are social stakes. I promised that something was going to happen, and if it doesn't, then I didn't meet my promise. I didn't keep my word. I risk looking like a fool or like someone lacking integrity, neither of which I want.

All this leads me to suggest that you affirm your whys, to yourself and to others, more consistently.

When I say affirm your why to yourself, I mean literally talk to yourself using affirmations. Here's a personal example. About eleven years ago, I decided I wanted to reach more people with my work in motivation and personal and professional development. At the time, YouTube, online video marketing, and online education were all in their infancy but gaining steam. So I decided I should start shooting videos and creating online courses. The thing was, I was terrible on camera. I couldn't remember three sentences if you paid me, and I didn't know how to be myself, or what to do with my hands, when the lights went on. I was a mess.

But I did have one advantage. I knew about this practice of affirming the why to myself and others. So right before I started

filming, I would say something like this to myself: “Brendon, you’re doing this because it’s important. Remember your students. You can inspire them and help them reach their goals. That’s your purpose. Do good for them. You’re going to love this, and you’re going to help a lot of people.”

When I said this, I wasn’t trying to be confident in my ability to be awesome on camera. That’s not the point at all. I was speaking confidently about *why* I wanted to do well on camera that day. And it was this reminder of the why that created the performance necessity.

Also, note that I spoke to myself in the second person and that the affirmation was based more on intrinsic rewards (helping people, loving the process) than on extrinsic rewards (finishing the video, making money selling the course, winning awards, or getting positive feedback). This is something you might want to model because not all affirmations are created equal—intrinsic affirmations are stronger.²⁴

If any of this sounds hokey, then you really need to spend more time with high performers, because they actually say and do these kinds of things. They talk to themselves—out loud—and remind themselves what’s really important. Go stand in the tunnel before Olympians walk out onto the field, and you see them talking to themselves. They’re affirming their whys, even if that’s not what they call it. Listen to a world-class speaker backstage. They’re not just rehearsing their lines—they’re connecting with *why* they are there. Researchers have found this in therapeutic settings, too. When those with anxiety disorders find the courage to overcome their symptoms, the strategy they list most commonly for how they did it is to remind themselves about the value of the goals they are after.²⁵

To get better on video, I also affirmed my why to a lot of people who knew me. I started telling friends and family I was going to shoot an online course and why it was important to me. I declared I would send them access to my course the following week, and asked them to send me feedback that same week. Many, of course, laughed

or played along. But I didn't need them to affirm me; I needed to affirm myself publicly so I could create a situation where I needed to honor my word. As soon as I promised it, my human need for congruence motivated me even further to perform well and on time. I created the external expectation that I was going to do something, and I did. Had I not done this, the million-plus students who have now completed my video series and courses would never have benefited from them. Affirming the why has always been my secret to being prolific.

When we verbalize something, it becomes more real and important to us. It becomes more necessary for us to live in alignment with that truth. So the next time you want to increase your performance necessity, declare—to yourself and to others—what you want and why you want it.

Performance Prompts

1. Three things I would like to become extraordinary at doing are . . .
2. My whys for becoming excellent in each of these areas are . . .
3. The people I will tell about these goals and the whys behind them include . . .
4. The things I can say out loud to myself to affirm these whys—my affirmations—are . . .
5. Some ways I can remind myself about these important goals and whys are . . .

PRACTICE THREE

LEVEL UP YOUR SQUAD

“Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you, spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life.”

—Amy Poehler

When I’m hired to coach someone to high performance, one of the easiest quick wins is to have them spend more time with the most positive and successful people in their support network. Your support network comprises the people who are consistently closest to you at home, at work, and in your community. It’s the people you talk with or see the most. I tell my clients that their job is to start spending more time with the best in their peer group, and less with the more negative members. That’s an easy win. But it’s not the full picture.

If you truly want to increase your performance in any area of your life, get around some *new* people who expect and value high performance. Expand your peer group to include more people who have greater expertise or success than you, and spend more time with them. So it’s not just about increasing time with your current squad of positive or successful peers, but about adding new people to the squad as well.

You probably already know that you should do this because you’ve heard there is power in your peer group. But you may not appreciate just how powerfully your social environment affects you.

Over the past decade, researchers have made fascinating discoveries about a phenomenon called “clustering.” They found that behaviors, attitudes, and health outcomes tend to form in social clusters. The people around you even affect how much you sleep, the food that you eat, and how much money you spend or save.²⁶ This dynamic, which has been dubbed “social contagion,” has been shown to have both detriments and benefits.

On the negative front, researchers have found that bad behaviors and outcomes such as smoking, obesity, loneliness, depression, divorce, and drug use tend to grow in social clusters.²⁷ If your friends smoke, you probably will, too. The more of your friends who are overweight or divorced, the higher the odds you'll get there, too.

Likewise, positive things such as happiness and prosocial behavior also seem to spread within social groups.²⁸ For example, if you have a friend who is happy in life, your chances of feeling happy go up by 25 percent. Researchers have even noted that expertise and world-class performance in music, soccer, art, baseball, tennis, and other fields happen in clusters.²⁹

This “contagion” effect is usually relevant up to three degrees of separation. This means that it's not just your friends and family who can affect you. Research shows that your friends' friends exert an influence. So do your friends' friends' friends. With each degree of separation, the effect of your environment becomes less, with nonsignificant effects beyond three degrees of separation.³⁰ This is why it's so important to carefully curate who is in your social circle.

Of course, we can't always determine who is in our circle, especially when we're young, which is why so many people have poor behaviors today—they had bad influences. Those who grow up in homes with major household dysfunction (e.g., divorce, drug abuse, mental illness, neglect, or abuse) have an increased risk of negative future outcomes related to mental and physical health.³¹ These children also suffer significant cognitive and emotional ramifications of the abuse they experience (e.g., smaller prefrontal cortexes [the decision-making area of the brain], smaller hippocampi [the memory center of the brain], and hyperactive stress responses).³² Kids who grow up in poverty also face significantly higher levels of crime, violence, incarceration, lack of parental supervision, drug use, and sexual and physical abuse.³³

All this evidence may seem overwhelming for people who aren't lucky enough to have hit the social lottery. It can make people ask, “Am I just doomed to live at the level of my peer group?”

The answer is an unequivocal and resounding *no*. It turns out that high performance is *not* tied to your culture or social environment. That's because high performance, as you'll remember, is about the long game. And over time, you can take back your life from negative influences and direct your mind habits and social environment toward high performance. This isn't just rah-rah stuff. Research has consistently shown that people can rise above their cultural programming and influence if they have the right beliefs and strategy. Simply adopting the belief that you can improve with effort, for example, has helped kids in disadvantaged neighborhoods go from terrible scores to the top of their class in study after study.³⁴

A recent study of over 168,000 tenth-graders helps us prove the point. Researchers collected data related to students' academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and beliefs about their ability to improve with effort.³⁵ As you might predict, students from higher socioeconomic strata performed significantly better than students from low-income families. This relationship, however, was offset in children who believed they could improve with effort. In fact, children who came from the lowest 10 percent socioeconomically yet believed in their ability to improve performed as well as kids in the top 20 percent who believed that their abilities were unchangeable. This means that the economic gap—and all the negative factors that often accompany lower economic status, such as higher stress, worse schools, poorer nutrition—were largely erased in children who *believed they could improve with effort*.

Scientific research consistently shows that certain people maintain their strength even when the environment or culture around them is less than ideal.³⁶ The difference is how they *think*. This means that with or without social support, you can use your thoughts to improve your mind, mood, memory, reactions, happiness, and performance.³⁷

None of us is shackled to our past or environment. We have tremendous personal control over the factors that improve our lives and performance. I share this because too many people think they can't win

without the ideal peer group. So before I tell you to improve your peer group, don't for one second think you can't improve your life on your own. Social support just makes personal development and overall life success *easier*, faster, and more enjoyable.

For all these reasons, high performers spend more time with positive people than with negative people.

**They are more *strategic* and *consistent* in seeking
to work with others *at or above* their level
of competence, experience, or overall success.**

They seek networking activities or group affiliations with more successful people. At work, they communicate more with people who are more experienced and often "above" them on the organizational chart. In their personal lives, they volunteer more, spend less time in negative or conflict-ridden relationships, and ask for help from their more successful peers more than others do.³⁸

This doesn't mean that high performers have gotten rid of *all* the negative or challenging people in their lives. Somewhere, there's this myth that to be happy or succeed, you have to "get rid of" all negative people in your life. We hear things like: "If someone doesn't support your dream, dump them as friend." "Your spouse doesn't cheer you on and meet your every need? Get a divorce!" "The kids at school don't like your son? Change schools!"

This is half-baked advice. Learning to live with people who are different from you and who challenge you is just part of becoming a mature and resilient adult. "Cutting people out" of your life just because they're not a bright and shiny ray of light all day every day will only result in you, alone on an island, talking to coconuts.

Everyone has bad days. Everyone struggles in life. And not everyone needs to cheer you on every step of the way. We need to accept that and not bail on everyone who isn't in a cheery mood all the time.

Your family, friends, and coworkers are going to have a lot of bad days, and a lot of their attitude toward you has *nothing* to do with *you*.

They're in their own world and going through difficulties. Most people will have their lives affected by a mental illness. Most of your friends will come and go in your life. This idea of just swiping people out of our lives isn't mature or reasonable. Sometimes love equals compassion and patience.

BUILD WHAT YOU NEED

"Make a conscious effort to surround yourself with positive, nourishing, and uplifting people—people who believe in you, encourage you to go after your dreams, and applaud your victories."

—Jack Canfield

Still, you don't need to spend extraordinary amounts of time or give tremendous mindshare to negative people. People on a path of purpose don't have a lot of time for drama. So here's what I advise: Instead of "getting rid of" all the negative people in your life (especially if they are family, friends, loyal peers, or those who are just in need), spend more time (a) hanging with your positive and successful peers and (b) *building a new positive peer group*.

You can give your time to the drama and conflict of telling people they aren't what you want or need in life, or you can use that same time to *build a new circle*. Tear down relationships or build new ones? I'd focus on building.

I also want to address the excuse I hear all the time, especially from younger people, that "I have no access to successful people." That's almost always an unexplored personal belief, not a reality. In fact, in a globally connected world, it's a pretty thin argument to say you don't have access to somebody, somewhere, who you can learn from, collaborate with, work for, or follow to advance your life. The real question isn't whether they exist; it's whether you're willing to do the work to find them, contact them, hound them, or work hard enough to rise until you get in their orbit.

How do you do that? Here's my go-to list for helping someone get around a more successful peer group:

1. Add one more awesome friend.

To make a difference in your life, you don't need dozens of new friends. You need one more positive person who brings out the best in you. So find your most positive and successful friend and ask him to bring one or two of his friends to your next night out. Then start hanging with them a little more often, just a half hour more per week. One more positive person leads you one more step toward the good life.

2. Volunteer.

This is always my first move in working with people who feel surrounded by negative people. Volunteers are spirited, positive people. They are givers. You want to be around that spirit of service for your own personal and spiritual development anyway. You also want to be around volunteers because they tend to be more educated and successful people. People with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer than those with less education. In the United States, almost 40 percent of those over the age of twenty-five who have a bachelor's degree or higher volunteer. That compares with 26.5 percent for those with some college or an associate's degree; 15.6 percent of high school graduates; and only 8.1 percent of those with less than a high school diploma.³⁹ Often, the people who staff nonprofit organizations, especially at the board and committee levels, are the richest people in a community.

But volunteering isn't just about getting around richer or more educated people. It's about serving others and developing the kind of empathy and spirit of service required to deal with all your relationships in life. If you have a negative person who keeps getting under your skin, the perspective you gain about the world through volunteering might help you chill out.

To find great volunteer opportunities in your hometown, start by asking your friends. You'd be surprised how many already volunteer. Also, look up your town's name and "volunteer" and you'll see plenty of options. And do it this week. When you meet more people who strive to make a big difference in the world, it makes a big difference in yours.

3. Play sports.

Join that intramural league. Visit that racquetball club. Get that golf membership. Hit the park and join more pickup games. Being in competitive situations teaches you to pay more attention to your own performance, and as we've learned, self-evaluation of performance promotes increased performance. Competition can bring out the best in us when we view the process of competing as a striving for excellence, personal bests, and team contributions. It's only "bad" or maladaptive performance when all you care about is rank, outcome, or smashing the competition.⁴⁰

4. Seek mentorship.

I tell high performers to have one or two lifelong mentors: older, wiser, highly respected, successful people. I want you to call them once per month. I also want you to have one new "domain mentor" every three years. This means someone who has precisely the expertise you need to succeed in your field. You should also call that person every month. These two mentors, one for life and another for specific domain expertise, will give you extraordinary perspective. To find mentors, start again with your friends and family. Ask, "Who do I know who has great wisdom and influence, who I might be able to learn from?" You might find a mentor at your workplace or by doing the actions above—say, volunteering or playing sports. You can also type my name and "how to find a mentor" into YouTube and watch my video for more ideas.

5. Earn it.

You want to get around more successful people? Then earn your way into that party by becoming exceptional at what you do. Work hard. Practice the high performance habits. Never give up, add a tremendous amount of value, and stay on the path to mastery. When you become supremely skilled and successful at what you do, doors will open and you'll meet more and more extraordinary people.

Imagine how much better your life would be if you got better people into your social network. And no, I don't mean your Facebook group. I mean real people with real pulses who you actually see, call, work with, hang out with, exercise with, have fun adventures with. Choose to surround yourself with people who bring joy and growth into your life and are secure enough in themselves to be real and solid whether you shine or struggle.

Bring your squad and their standards up. You'll become a more extraordinary person by having more extraordinary people around you.

Performance Prompts

1. The most positive people in my life who I should hang out with more include . . .
2. To add to the number of high performers in my network, I should . . .
3. Some new routines or get-togethers I could create to bring together the positive and supportive people in my life could include . . .

NO OTHER CHOICE

“First say to yourself what you would be;
and then do what you have to do.”

—Epictetus

We all know someone who wasn't the smartest kid in the class, who seemed underprepared for life, who seemed to have more weaknesses than strengths, and who somehow went on to surprise everyone with their success. Asked how they rose above others who were more privileged or qualified than they, such people often say, “I was hungry. I *had* to succeed. There was no other choice.” They had necessity. The flip side is how many people without this mentality never reach their full powers. No necessity, no drive, no fulfillment of their potential.

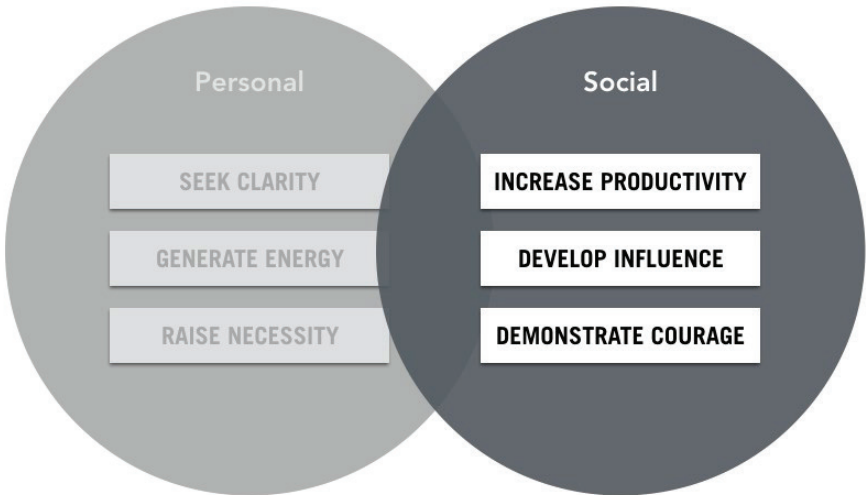
As with all high performance habits, you have to be deliberate about raising your level of necessity. You must consistently think it through: “Have I associated the important activities of my day with my identity and my sense of obligation? Why is chasing this dream so important to me? Why *must* I do this? When must I do it? How can I get around more amazing people who up my game and help me serve at the next level?” These questions, frequently revisited, can be the prompts for an entirely new level of commitment and drive.

You are only as strong and extraordinary as you give yourself reason to be. So determine your musts, my friend. Make them real. Feel them in your gut. Because the world needs you to show up now.

SECTION TWO

SOCIAL HABITS

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS



HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #4

INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY

“Don’t think about making art, just get it done.
Let everyone else decide if it’s good or bad,
whether they love it or hate it.
While they are deciding, make even more art.”

—Andy Warhol

INCREASE THE OUTPUTS THAT MATTER

CHART YOUR FIVE MOVES

GET INSANELY GOOD AT KEY SKILLS

“It’s just not happening fast enough.”

Athena, a school administrator, says this in a defeated tone.

We’re in her office, discussing her goals and how productive she feels that her career has been. Thick binders are crammed into the shelves behind her. There’s a tiny window next to her desk. No pictures adorn the white walls, which seem yellowed with time. I can’t help but feel that this office—no, make it the entire admin building—was built in the 1970s and never painted again. Athena has worked in this room for fourteen years.

“I’m busier now than I’ve ever been in my whole career. There’s a lot of urgency right now because they’re about to close two of my schools. I barely leave this office, even for lunch.” She points at two take-out boxes on the windowsill. “I have meetings all day with teachers, principals, parents, community leaders. In between, I try to cram in e-mail. I’m up late every night reviewing proposals. I’ve worked around the clock for what feels like four years. I don’t feel like I’m making enough progress, even though I’m ticking off one thing after another.”

I decide to ask a question that type A’s dread when discussing their productivity: “Are you happy?”

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PLANNER

Need help managing your daily workflow and priorities, setting goals, and evaluating yourself each week so you can succeed over the long term? Get the High Performance Planner by Brendon Burchard! Available in multiple sizes.

Brendon goes LIVE online every month just for his High Performance Monthly members. For only \$49 per month, you get new training from Brendon as well as seminar tickets, book recommendations, new tools, and so much more!

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MASTER'S

Get rewarded for your personal and professional development! Complete HPI's 5-week online Master's Program and then attend the 4-day live training event. Graduates receive a Certificate of Achievement from the High Performance Institute and an exclusive online community.

Want to become a Certified High Performance Coach™? CHPC is the world's most elite training and certification program for life coaches, executive coaches, and human resource professionals. Application only.

CERTIFICATION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



BRENDON BURCHARD is the world's leading high performance coach and one of the most watched, quoted, and followed personal development trainers in history. *SUCCESS* magazine and *O, The Oprah Magazine* have both named him one of the most influential leaders in personal growth and achievement. He has trained and certified more people on the topic of high performance than anyone in the world.

After suffering depression and surviving a car accident at the age of nineteen, Brendon faced what he calls life's last questions: "Did I live fully? Did I love openly? Did I make a difference?" His intention to be happy with the answers led to dramatic personal transformations and, later, his life's purpose of helping others live, love, and matter. After graduating with a master's degree in organizational communication, he worked as a change management consultant for Accenture. In 2006, he began his career writing books, hosting seminars, coaching individual clients, and creating online courses.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

Brendon is now a Top 100 Most Followed Public Figure on Facebook and the star of the most watched self-help show on YouTube. His personal development videos have been viewed over 100,000,000 times. Over 1.6 million people have taken his online courses or video series. For these results, Oprah.com named him “one of the most successful online trainers in history.”

Brendon is a #1 *New York Times*, #1 *USA TODAY*, and #1 *Wall Street Journal* best-selling author, and his books include *The Motivation Manifesto*, *The Charge*, *The Millionaire Messenger*, *Life's Golden Ticket*, and *The Student Leadership Guide*. His first podcast, *The Charged Life*, debuted at #1 on iTunes across all categories and spent over 100 weeks in the top 10 of its category.

As CEO of the High Performance Institute, Brendon leads a team of coaches, creators, and researchers whose mission is to help people create and enjoy extraordinary lives. He travels the globe speaking and serves as the lead trainer at High Performance Academy, the famed four-day personal and professional development seminar. *Entrepreneur* magazine ranked his seminar for social media thought leaders, Experts Academy, as “one of the Top 5 Must-Attends for all entrepreneurs.”

Recognized as a worldwide authority on both human motivation and business marketing, Brendon is the recipient of the Maharishi Award and sits on the Innovation Board at the XPRIZE Foundation.

Visit him at Brendon.com.