

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

How Extraordinary
People Become That Way

BRENDON BURCHARD



HAY HOUSE, INC.

Carlsbad, California • New York
London • Sydney • Johannesburg
Vancouver • New Delhi

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Dedicated to my sunshine, Denise,
the most extraordinary person I know.

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INTRODUCTION

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation.
We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence,
but we rather have those because we have acted rightly.

We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

—Aristotle

“Why are you so terrified to want more?”

A large oak desk separates me from Lynn. She pulls back in her chair and stares out the window for a moment. We’re on the forty-second floor, nearly eye level with the morning mist, looking out over the ocean.

Even before I ask the question, I know she won’t like it.

Lynn is one of those people you could describe as highly effective. She’s focused and gets stuff done. She exhibits strengths for critical thinking and leading others. She’s received three big promotions in five years. People admire her. They say she’s on her way, that she’s got the “it” factor.

“Terrified” is not how most would describe her. But I know.

She glances back at me and starts to reply: “Well, I wouldn’t say that I’m . . .”

I lean in and shake my head.

She catches herself and nods, smoothing her already smooth brown hair. She knows she can’t get away with a fake story right now.

“Okay,” Lynn says. “Maybe you’re right. I’m scared to go to the next level.”

I ask why.

“Because I’m barely surviving this one.”

#

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

This book is about how people become extraordinary, and why others block themselves from that possibility. It will show clearly and unmistakably why some excel, others fail, and far too many never even try.

As a high performance coach, I've worked with a lot of people like Lynn. Achievers fight long and hard to succeed, propelling themselves forward by grit and hustle. And then, at some point they could never have anticipated, they plateau, lose passion, or burn out. To outside observers, they may appear steady and calm as they plod ahead. But deep inside, achievers often feel that they are thrashing about, lost in a sea of priorities and opportunities. They feel unsure what to focus on or how to confidently replicate or scale their success. They've come far in life yet still have no standard operating principles for sustaining success. Even though they're capable, many live in constant fear that they will fall behind or catastrophically fail to handle the demands of the next level of success. Why the fear and hardship? And why do some people break free from this reality, keep rising higher, and enjoy the vibrant well-being and abundant long-term success that so many envy or consider out of reach?

To understand the phenomenon, this book pulls together twenty years of research, ten years of insights gained from elite-level performance coaching, and a vast data set on high performers worldwide gathered through surveys, structured interviews, and professional assessment tools. It will reveal what it takes to become not just an *achiever* but a *high performer*—someone who creates ever-increasing levels of both well-being and external success over the long term.

During the journey, I will expose many of the prevailing myths about “success,” including why grit, willpower, practice, and your “natural” strengths and talents are not enough to take you to the next level in a world that demands you add value, lead others, and manage competing priorities and complex projects. To reach high performance, you have to consider more than your individual passions

and efforts, and you'll have to go well beyond what you like, prefer, or naturally do well, because, to be frank, the world cares less about your strengths and personality than about your service and meaningful contributions to others.

By the end of this book, you will never again wonder what it really takes to succeed when starting a new project at work or pursuing a bold new dream. You will be empowered with a set of reliable habits that research has shown to work with a broad range of personalities, and in a variety of situations, to create extraordinary long-term results. You'll feel a new sense of vital energy and confidence from knowing where to focus your energies and how to serve most effectively. You'll understand how to keep growing after you've enjoyed initial success. If you're ever thrown into a situation where you must work or compete with others at the highest levels of achievement, you'll know *exactly* how to think and what to do.

This isn't to say you will be superhuman, or need to be. You have flaws; we all do. Yet at the end of this book, you'll say to yourself, "I finally know *exactly* how to be consistently at my best. I'm confident in my ability to figure things out, and fully capable of overcoming adversity on the path of success, for the rest of my life." You will have a standard mental operating system and proven set of habits that reliably lead to long-term success across many different situations, and across multiple domains of life. In my own work as a high performance coach, I've seen these habits transform the effectiveness of people from all walks of life—from Fortune 50 CEOs to entertainers, from Olympians to everyday parents, from world-class experts to high school students. If you've ever wanted a serious field-tested and science-backed path to improving your life, you have found it, here in this book.

Armed with the information you'll learn in the pages ahead, you will live a life in which your full potential is in play, you have a vital sense of well-being, you are capable of leading others to excellence,

and you are deeply fulfilled. Assuming you bring full intention and discipline to deploying the high performance habits, you're about to enter a very transformational period of your life and career. You're about to become even more extraordinary.

WHY THIS BOOK? WHY NOW?

I've been blessed to train millions of people worldwide on personal and professional development, and I can report that it's a palpable feeling everywhere right now: People are tremendously uncertain about how to get ahead and which decisions are right for them, their families, and their careers. People want to scale up, but they're wiped out. They're working so hard, but they're just not breaking through. They are driven, but they don't always know exactly what they want. They desire to go for their dreams, yet they're afraid they'll be judged crazy or fail if they try.

Add to that the unrelenting tasks, the self-doubt, the unwanted obligations, the overwhelming choices and responsibilities—it's enough to exhaust anyone. For too many, there is a sense that things will never get better and they'll always be swimming in a churning sea of distractions and disappointments. If that sounds dire, it is. People are hopeful and ready to make a change, but lacking direction and the right habits they risk living unexciting, disconnected, unfulfilling lives.

Of course, many people are living happy, wonderful lives. But consistency is a problem. They may feel capable—even feel that they hit “peak performance” once in a while—but there's always that steep cliff on the other side. And so people are tired of the ups and downs of peak performance. They're wondering how to reach heightened and *sustained* growth and success. They don't need just new tricks to get into better states and moods; they need real skills and methods for holistically advancing their lives and careers.

That's not an easy order. Though everyone says they want to advance in every area of their lives, many, like Lynn, are deeply concerned that pursuing their dreams will cause collateral damage—wrecked relationships, financial ruin, social ridicule, unbearable stress. At some point, perhaps, we all worry about such things. Isn't it true that you already know how to get stuff done, yet sometimes you limit your vision for the future because you're *already* so busy, so stressed, so overextended?

It's not that you're incapable of performing better. You know that sometimes you *crush it* on one project at work, but struggle on another, similar one. You know that you can be a star in one social setting, but not in another. You know how to motivate yourself, but sometimes you hate yourself at the end of the day for having completed nothing but a three-season binge on Netflix.

Perhaps, too, you've noticed other people advancing more quickly than you. Maybe you've seen one of your peers just waltz with grace from project to project, succeeding each time no matter what gets thrown in their way. It's as if you can put them in any context, any team, any company, any industry, and they'll just *win*.

Who are these people, and what's their secret? They are high performers, and their secret is their habits. The good news is you can become one of them, and you can leverage those same habits whatever your background, personality, weaknesses, or field of endeavor. With the right training and habits, anyone can become a high performer, and I can prove it. That's why I wrote this book for you.

THE BASELINE MOVED

Many of us feel a gap between our ordinary lives and the extraordinary lives we wish to have. Fifty years ago, perhaps, it was easier to navigate the world and get ahead. The baseline for success was more straightforward: "Work hard. Play by the rules. Keep your

head down. Don't ask too many questions. Follow the leader. Take time to master something that will keep you around here."

Then, twenty years ago, the baseline began to shift. "Work hard. Break the rules. Keep your head up—optimists win. Ask questions of the experts. You are a leader. Hurry up and figure it out."

Today, for many, the baseline feels distant, blurred, almost unknowable. Gone are the days when our work was predictable and the expectations of those around us were "fixed." Change accelerated. Now everything feels chaotic. Your boss, lover, or customer always wants something new, *now*. Your work isn't as simple or siloed as it used to be. And if it is, the odds are a computer or a robot will soon replace you. To compound the stress, now *everything* is connected, so if you mess up one thing, it messes up an entire network of other things. Mistakes are no longer private affairs. They are public and global.

It's a new world. Certainty is down, yet expectations are up. Instead of mantras about working hard, following the rules, keeping your head down or up, we have an unspoken but widely accepted norm: "Pretend you're not working as hard, so your friends are impressed with your leisurely posts and photos at breakfast, but yes, work hard. Don't wait for instruction, because there are no rules. Try to keep your head on, because it's a madhouse here. Ask questions, but don't expect anyone to know the answers. There are no leaders, because we all lead, so just find your groove for right now and add value. *You'll never figure anything out—just keep adapting, because tomorrow everything changes again.*"

This isn't just unsettling. Getting ahead amid the chaos feels like trying to run under ten feet of murky water. You can't see where you're going. You're flailing about, but there's no progress. You're looking for help, an edge, a lifeline, *anything*, but you're not finding any air or any stairs out. You had good intentions and a strong work ethic, but you don't even know where to apply them. You have people counting on you, but you're not sure which direction to point.

Even if you don't feel as if you are drowning, you might sense that you are plateauing. Or maybe you have the sinking feeling that you're about to be left behind. Sure, you've gotten ahead so far by sheer passion, guts, and hard work. You've climbed a few mountains. But the next questions are throwing you off: *Where to now? How to go higher? Why are others climbing more quickly than I am? When, if ever, can I relax and set down some roots? Does it always have to feel like such a grind? Am I really living my best life?*

What you need is a reliable set of practices for unleashing your greatest abilities. Study high performers and you will see that they have systems built into their days that drive their success. Systems are what separate the pro from the novice, and science from armchair philosophy. Without systems, you cannot test hypothesis, track progress, or repeatedly deliver exceptional results. In personal and professional development, these systems and procedures are, ultimately, *habits*. But which ones work?

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

When we try to deal with the difficult demands of today, what advice do we receive? The same thing we've been told for hundreds of years, perhaps with a few feel-good twists:

- Work hard.
- Be passionate.
- Focus on your strengths.
- Practice a lot.
- Stick to it.
- Be grateful.

No doubt, this is popular, positive, *useful* advice. It's solid and it's timeless. You can't go wrong with this philosophy. And it certainly makes one hell of a commencement speech.

But is this advice *adequate*?

Do you know any hardworking people who have *all* these things going for them, yet they're *still* not even close to the level of success and fulfillment they want in life?

Isn't it true that there are billions of hard workers on the bottom of the pile? Don't you know plenty of passionate people in your hometown who have plateaued? Haven't you met plenty of people who know their strengths but still struggle with clarity, don't have a clue what to do when a new project starts, and keep getting surpassed by people with lesser strengths?

Maybe all these people should practice more, right? Put in their ten thousand hours? But lots of practices happen and championships are still lost. Maybe it's their attitude? Maybe they should just be more grateful and mindful? Yet there are plenty of folks gratefully persevering themselves into dead-end jobs and relationships.

What gives?

MY SEARCH FOR A BETTER WAY

I was one of those people. As a young man, I was the one drowning. When I was nineteen, I had become despondent and suicidal after a breakup with the first woman I ever loved. It was a very dark time. Ironically, what pulled me through the emotional wreckage at that point of my life was a car accident. My friend was driving when we flipped off the highway going about eighty-five miles per hour. We both ended up bloody and terrified but alive. The incident changed my life, giving me what I call "mortality motivation."

I've written about my accident in my previous books, so I'll just share what I learned: Life is precious beyond words, and when you get a second chance—and every morning, every decision, can be that second chance—take a moment to define who you really are and what you really want. I realized I didn't want to take my life; I wanted to

live. My heart had been broken, yes, but I still wanted to *love*. I felt I was given a second chance, so I wanted to make it *matter*, to make a difference. *Live. Love. Matter*. That became my mantra. That's when I decided to change. That's when I started looking for answers to live a more charged, connected, and contributing life.

I did the things you would expect: I read all the self-help books. I took psychology classes. I listened to the motivational audio programs. I went to the personal development seminars, and I followed the formula they all espoused: I worked hard. I was passionate. I focused on my strengths. I practiced. I stuck to it. I was grateful on the journey.

And you know what? *It worked*.

The advice changed my life. Over a period of years, I ended up with a good job, a good girlfriend, a good set of friends, and a decent place to live. I had much to be grateful for.

But then, even while practicing all that basic good advice, I plateaued. For six or seven years, life didn't really advance that much for me. It was maddening. There's something frustrating about working hard, being passionate and grateful, and still not advancing, still not feeling it. There's also something depleting about it all: excelling sometimes but feeling exhausted too often; having grit and getting paid but not feeling rewarded; being motivated but not creating real momentum; engaging with others but not really connecting; adding value but not making a dent. That's not a vision of the life we desire.

Slowly, I realized that I'd had some success, though I couldn't say *why*. I wasn't as disciplined as I wanted to be, I was far from world-class, and I wasn't contributing at the level I desired, either. I wanted an exacting plan for what I needed to do every day, and in every new situation, so I could learn faster, contribute better, and, yes, also enjoy the journey more.

I realized that the problem with the old formula for success—work hard; be passionate; focus on your strengths; practice a lot; stick to it; be grateful—is that so much of it is geared toward *individual*

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results and *initial* success. These things get you in the game and keep you in the game. But what happens *after* you've gotten those first wins? What happens after you have earned those grades, found some passion, gotten that job or started that dream, developed some expertise, saved some money, fallen in love, built some momentum? What helps when you want to become world-class, to *lead*, to create lasting impact beyond yourself? How can you generate the confidence you need to reach the *next* level of success? How can you joyfully *sustain success* over the long term? How can you inspire and empower others to do the same?

Answering such questions became my personal obsession and, ultimately, my profession.

HIGH PERFORMANCE LESSONS

This book is the culmination of the intervening twenty years as I have sought answers to three fundamental questions:

1. Why do some individuals and teams succeed *more quickly* than others and *sustain* that success over the long term?
2. Of those who pull it off, why are some *miserable* and others *happy* on their journey?
3. What motivates people to reach for higher levels of success in the first place, and what kinds of habits, training, and support help them improve faster?

My work and research into these questions—what have become known as high performance studies—have led me to interview, coach, or train many of the world's most successful and happiest people, from CEOs to celebrities, from high-level entrepreneurs to entertainers such as Oprah and Usher, from parents to professionals in dozens

of industries, to more than 1.6 million students from 195 countries around the world who have taken my online courses or video series.

The adventure has taken me into tension-filled boardrooms and Super Bowl locker rooms, onto Olympic tracks, up in private helicopters with billionaires, and to dinner tables around the world, where I've talked with my students, research participants, and everyday people striving to improve their lives.

This work helped me create the world's most popular online course on high performance, the most widely read newsletter related to the topic, and the largest data set on high performers' self-reported personal characteristics. It also led to the founding of the High Performance Institute, where a team of scholars and I conduct research on how high performers think, behave, influence others, and win. We've created the world's only validated high performance assessment as well as the first professional certification program in the field: Certified High Performance Coaching™. We have now been blessed to train, coach, and measure more high performers than any other organization in the world, and I personally certify over two hundred elite-level high performance coaches per year.

The insights from all these efforts fill this book. The research not only spans twenty years of my own personal development and self-experimentation, but also includes data from coaching interventions with thousands of clients, detailed before-and-after assessments from thousands of live-workshop attendees, structured interviews with hundreds of people at the top of their fields, insights gleaned from academic literature reviews, and hundreds of thousands of codified comments from my students and from my free online training videos, which have received over 100,000,000 views.

From this vast data set and two decades of experience, I've found habits that have been tested and proved in both personal and professional contexts. Here's what I've learned:

With the right habits, anyone can dramatically increase results and become a high performer in almost any field of endeavor.

High performance is not strongly correlated with age, education, income, race, nationality, or gender. This means that many of the excuses we use to explain why we can't succeed are simply wrong. High performance is not achieved by a specific kind of *person*, but rather by a specific set of *practices*, which I call *high performance habits*. Anyone can learn them, regardless of experience, strengths, personality, or position. People who are struggling to make new progress can use this book to revitalize their lives, get ahead, and fulfill their potential. And those who are already successful can use this to get to the next level.

Not all habits are created equal.

It turns out that there are bad, good, better, and best habits for realizing your full potential in your life and career. It matters which practices in your life come first and how they are arranged to create effective habits. If there's anything special about the work of my team of researchers, it's that we've cracked the code, figuring out *which habits matter most* and how you can set up practices that strengthen and sustain these habits. Yes, you can start a gratitude journal and that will make you happier, but is it enough to propel you toward real progress in every area of your life? Yes, you can start a new morning routine, but will that be enough to significantly improve your overall performance and happiness? (The answer is no, by the way). So where to focus? We've found that six deliberate habits move the needle most in helping you reach high performance across multiple domains of your life. We've also learned that there are habits for tactically getting ahead, and strategic habits for enjoying life. You'll learn both.

Achievement is not your problem—alignment is.

If you're reading these words, then the odds are that achievement is not the issue. You already know how to set goals, make checklists, knock off to-dos. You care about excelling in your chosen field. But odds are, you're experiencing your fair share of stress and overwhelm. You can deliver, sure, but you'll learn something every achiever must discover: Just because people want to put things on your plate because you're good doesn't mean you should let them. *What's achievable is not always what's important.* You have a lot of things you *can* do. So the central question shifts from "How do I achieve more?" to "How would I like to *live*?" This book is an escape plan from the soul-killing singular pursuit of external success for no other reason than achievement for achievement's sake. It's about realigning your thoughts and behaviors so that you can experience growth, well-being, and fulfillment as you strive.

Certainty is the enemy of growth and high performance.

Too many people want certainty amid the chaos of this world. But certainty is the fool's dream and, thus, the charlatan's selling point. Certainty ultimately blinds you, sets false or fixed limits, and creates "automatic" habits that become predictable bad thinking and openings for your competitors to surpass you. The person who is certain is most closed to learning, most vulnerable to dogma, and most likely to be blindsided and overtaken by innovators. You'll learn that high performers outgrow their youthful need for certainty and replace it with curiosity and genuine self-confidence.

Technology won't save us.

We've been sold this alluring vision of a world where new gadgets will make us smarter, faster, and better. But many of us are beginning to see behind the hype. Tools cannot replace wisdom. You can have all the gadgets in the world and dive deep into the “quantified self” movement, where every step, second of sleep, beat of your heart, and moment of your day is tracked, scored, gamified. But a lot of people are connected and tracking and remain alone and troubled. Too many are checking in to all the apps and stats and still losing touch with their real ambitions and soul. Amid all the excitement about technology improving our lives, it turns out that what does the job better than anything else are simple human habits of high performance.

WHAT IS HIGH PERFORMANCE?

For our purposes in this book, high performance refers to *succeeding beyond standard norms, consistently over the long term.*

However success is defined in any given field of endeavor, a high performer—be it a person, team, company, or culture—simply does *better for longer periods.* But high performance isn't just about never-ending improvement. Mere improvement does not always result in high performance. Lots of people are improving but not necessarily crushing it—they're inching forward, but so is everyone else. Lots of people make progress but not real impact. High performers break the norms. They're consistently exceeding the standard expectations and results.

High performance is also very different from mere expertise development. The quest isn't just to learn a new skill or language, or become a chess master, a world-class pianist, or a CEO. A high performer in any field isn't just good at a singular task or skill—she or he has learned adjacent competencies to complement a particular

expertise. They are not a one-hit wonder. They have multiple skill sets that allow them to succeed over the long term and—importantly—lead others. They practice meta-habits that enable them to excel in multiple areas of their lives. A Super Bowl–winning quarterback doesn’t just know how to throw a ball. He has had to master mental toughness, nutrition, self-discipline, team leadership, strength and conditioning, contract negotiations, brand building, and so on. Someone who reaches high performance in any career must have competence in many of the areas that touch that career.

In our definition of *high performance*, “consistently” followed by “over the long term” may seem redundant. But the two are, in fact, different. For example, high performers don’t “end up” successful at the very last minute of a decade’s efforts. They don’t come crashing across the finish line of success. They’re *steady*. They regularly beat expectations. There is a consistency to their efforts that eludes their peers. That’s why, when you look at them post-success, you come to realize they are *not* surprise winners.

As you will learn, meeting this definition of “succeeding beyond standard norms consistently over the long term” requires habits that protect your well-being, maintain positive relationships, and ensure that you serve others as you climb. *You simply can’t beat the norms if you’ve driven yourself into the ground.* As it turns out, high performers’ sustained success is due in large part to their healthy approach to living. It’s not just about achievement in a profession or in just one area of interest. It’s about creating a *high performance life*, in which you experience an ongoing feeling of full engagement, joy, and confidence that comes from being your best self.

That’s why the high performance approach extends beyond such popular concepts as “focus on your strengths” and “just put in your ten thousand hours.” Lots of people have amazing personal strengths, but they destroy their health in their quest for success and, thus, can’t maintain high performance. Lots of people obsessively practice or put

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in the hours to such a degree that they destroy the relationships they need to support their continuing growth. They push away the coach who was helping them progress; they ruin a relationship, and the emotional fallout knocks them off their game; they upset their investors, and suddenly there's no money coming in to keep growing.

**I care that you succeed *and* have a healthy life
full of positive emotions and relationships.**

High performance, as I define it and as the data confirms, is not about getting ahead at all costs. It's about forming habits that help you both *excel in* and *enrich* the full spectrum of your life.

Organizations, too, move in and out of high performance. Today more than ever, organizations worldwide struggle to stay consistently out front. Many senior leaders are fighting disengaged or underperforming organizational cultures. They desperately want to take on bold visions and push their people harder, but they already realize that their people are burning out. That's why executives will love this book: They'll be thrilled to learn that their organizations can be healthy and high performing. In fact, the latter requires the former. The habits in this book work just as well for teams as for individuals.

To those individual high achievers and leaders who want to help their organizations excel: Trust that you can reach the next level of success more sanely, swiftly, and confidently than last time. There is indeed a better way to live and lead, and the good news is that it's not a mystery. The high performance habits in this book are precise, actionable, repeatable, scalable, and sustainable.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HIGH PERFORMERS

What do we know about the people who succeed beyond standard measures consistently over the long term?

High performers are more successful than their peers, yet they are less stressed.

The myth that we have to grin and bear more burdens and anxiety as we become more successful simply isn't true (as long as we have the right life habits). You can live an extraordinary life that is far different from the battle that most people endure as they fight for survival or experience achievement only by bluster or burnout. This isn't to say high performers don't ever feel stress—they do—but they cope better, stay more resilient, and experience less severe performance dips related to fatigue, distraction, and overwhelm.

High performers love challenges and are more confident that they will achieve their goals despite adversity.

Too many people avoid any sense of hardship in their lives. They fear they can't handle it or that they'll be judged or rejected. But high performers are different. It's not that they lack any self-doubt at all. It's that they look forward to trying new things and they believe in their abilities to figure things out. They don't shrink from challenge and that not only helps them progress in life but it inspires those around them.

High performers are healthier than their peers.

They eat better. They work out more. The top 5 percent of high performers are 40 percent more likely to exercise three times per week. Everyone wants health, but they may think they have to trade it for success. They're wrong. In survey after survey, we find high performers to be more energized—mentally, emotionally, and physically—than their peers.

High performers are happy.

We all want to be happy. But many people are unhappy achievers. They get a lot done but don't feel fulfilled. Not so for high performers. It turns out that every single habit of high performance we've discovered, even if practiced without the others, increases overall life happiness. Taken together, the six habits you'll learn here won't just get you to excellence, they'll make you happier—and the data proves it. The positive emotions of engagement, joy, and confidence that define the high performer's emotional state can be *yours*.

High performers are admired.

Their peers look up to them, even though the high performers are outperforming them. Why? Because to become a high performer, ego takes a backseat to service. High performers have mastered the art of influencing others in such a way that others feel respected, valued, and appreciated—and more likely to become high performers themselves.

High performers get better grades and reach higher positions of success.

High performance is statistically correlated with GPA. In one study of two hundred collegiate athletes, we found that the higher their score on the High Performance Indicator—an assessment tool for measuring high performance potential—the higher their GPA. High performers are also more likely to be CEOs and senior executives. Why? Because their habits help them lead others and climb organizational charts.

High performers work passionately regardless of traditional rewards.

High performance does not correlate with compensation. This means that what you get paid doesn't affect your odds or your ability to perform at a high level. High performers work hard not because of money but because of something called *necessity*, which you will soon learn about. They are not in it for the trophies or accolades or bonuses; they're in it for the meaning. That's why, in surveys, high performers almost always indicate that they feel well rewarded regardless of income level. They also rarely feel their work is "thankless" or that others don't appreciate how hard they work. It's not because their work is unique or always their dream job. Instead, it's that they approach their work in a more purposeful manner, which helps them feel more engaged, competent, and satisfied.

High performers are assertive (for the right reasons).

They jump into experiences and express themselves, not to "conquer" or even to compete. They are assertive because of a habit of courage in sharing new ideas, engaging in complex conversations, expressing their real thoughts and dreams, and standing up for themselves. The data also shows that they speak up for others and champion other people's ideas more often. That is to say, they're perfectly queued to be direct and inclusive leaders.

High performers see and serve beyond their strengths.

There's a myth that our innate "strengths" are what we all should be focusing on. But the time for navel-gazing is long since over. We must see beyond what comes naturally to us, and develop into what we must be in order to grow, serve, and lead. High performers

get that. They're less into "finding their strengths" and more into "adaptive service"—exploring what needs fixing and growing into the person who can fix it. The question they ask is less often "Who am I and what am I good at?" and more often "What is required to be of service here, and how can I grow into that or lead others to deliver that?" High performers do *not* report working on their strengths any more than other people do, so that focus isn't what gives them the edge.

High performers are uniquely productive—they've mastered prolific quality output.

No matter the field, they produce more quality output that matters in their field. It's not that they get more done, per se; lots of their peers might do more tasks. It's that high performers get more things done that are *highly valued* in their primary field of interest. They remember that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That focus and effort to create only output that will be meaningful helps them excel.

High performers are adaptive servant leaders.

What separates my work on high performance from the hype around world-class experts is that I'm not seeking out lone experts or individual outliers. High performers don't think, live, or practice in a vacuum. They're influencing people and adding tremendous value to those around them, not just trying to win spelling bees or chess matches. They tend to be leaders who can adapt to challenging circumstances and guide others to their own successes and contributions. In this capacity, high performers can go from project to project and succeed, over and over. It's as if you could put them in any context, any team, any company, any industry, and they would

win—not because they’re geniuses or lone wolves, but because they positively influence others to rise. **They don’t just develop *skill*; they develop *people*.**

I’m aware that reading a list like this can make a high performer sound like an infallible wonder-worker. But that’s not it at all. The list above is a good general description of high performers, but of course, there is plenty of room for individual differences and variability. Some high performers, for example, may not be as healthy as others even though they generate more productive output. Some may be happy and healthy but are not as admired. In other words, these descriptions are not 100 percent accurate for 100 percent of individuals. But the odds are that over time, their habits detailed in this book lead to the listed benefits, and to extraordinary lives.

If any of the descriptions above don’t sound like you yet, don’t worry—high performers aren’t “born that way.” Having trained over one million people on this topic, I can share that there are no superhumans in the mix. High performers are not fundamentally different from you or anyone else because of some special talent, signature strength, genetic miracle, or fixed personality makeup. High performance isn’t a natural strength; it’s the result of a specific set of deliberate habits. You can learn these habits and reach high performance in nearly any endeavor you choose. And we can measure it and prove it.

THE HABITS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

If anything defines my research and training approach, it’s that certain habits give a competitive advantage, turning an average performer into a high performer. High performers have simply mastered—either on purpose or by accident through necessity—six habits that matter *most* in reaching and sustaining long-term success.

We call these six habits the HP6. They have to do with clarity, energy, necessity, productivity, influence, and courage. They reflect what high performers actually *do* continually—from goal to goal,

from project to project, from team to team, from person to person. Each of the habits is learnable, improvable, and deployable across all contexts of life. You can start using these habits today, and they will make you better. We'll cover each habit in the chapters ahead and give you practices to develop them.

Before we get into the HP6, though, let's talk habits. As traditionally conceived, habits are created when we do something so many times that it becomes almost automatic. Do a simple action that's easy to remember, do it repeatedly, and get rewarded for it, and you start to develop a habit that will soon become second nature. For example, after doing it a few times, it's easy to tie your shoes, drive a car, type on a keyboard. You can now do those things without much thought. You've done them so many times, they became *automatic* routines.

This book is *not* about that sort of habit. I'm not interested in teaching you simplistic routine behaviors that can be done with little or no conscious thought. I want you *fully aware* as you fight big battles, strive for the mountaintops, and lead others. That's because the habits that really matter in improving performance are *not* unconscious. They don't necessarily become automatic or easier with time, because the world gets more complex as you seek greater success. Thus, you need to be mindful of your footing as you climb higher.

This means that the high performance habits you'll learn in this book are *deliberate habits*. These must be consciously chosen, willed into existence, and continually revisited to strengthen your character and increase your odds of success.

Deliberate habits usually won't come easily. You have to practice them with real mental focus, especially in changing environments. Every time you feel stuck, every time you start a new project, every time you measure your progress, every time you try to lead others, you must deliberately think about the high performance habits. You'll have to use them as a checklist, just as a pilot uses a preflight checklist before every takeoff.

I believe this is a good thing, too. I don't want my clients getting ahead unconsciously, reactively, or compulsively. I want them to *know* what they do to win, and do it with full intention and purpose. That way, they are captains of their own fate, not slaves to their impulses. I want you in charge, conscious, and clear about what you're doing, so you can see your performance get better and better—and so you can help others get better, too.

It's going to take a lot of work to deploy the high performance habits you're about to learn, but don't shy from the effort.

**When you knock on the door of opportunity,
do not be surprised that it is Work who answers.**

Some will say I could have given easier habits and I would probably sell more books. But in improving your life, *ease* is not the point; *growth* is the point. And the data is clear that these six habits will make a significant difference for you even though they do require consistent attention and effort. If our aim is high performance, then you and I will have to work to implement and develop these habits in every context of our lives—for the rest of our lives.

Just as athletes never quit training, high performers never stop consciously conditioning and strengthening their habits.

Real success—holistic, long-term success—doesn't come from doing what's natural, certain, convenient, or automatic. Often, the journey to greatness begins the moment our preferences for comfort and certainty are overruled by a greater purpose that requires challenge and contribution.

The skills and strengths you have now are probably insufficient to get you to the next level of success, so it's absurd to think you won't have to work on your weaknesses, develop new strengths, try new habits, stretch beyond what you think your limits or gifts are. That's why I'm not here to sell you the easy solution of just focusing on what is already easy for you.

Just so we're clear: There's a lot of work ahead.

PERMISSION GRANTED

Beyond habits, what else holds most people back? I've found that many people simply feel undeserving or unready to rise to the next level. They question their value or await some external validation—promotion, certification, award—before they can start playing a bigger game. This is wrong, of course. You deserve extraordinary success just as much as anyone. And you don't need anyone's permission to start living life on your own terms. You just need a plan. And I promise you it's in this book.

Sometimes, people haven't sought greater success in their lives because they're surrounded by people who say, "Why can't you just be happy with what you have?" Those who say this don't understand high performers. You can be wildly happy with what you have, and still strive to grow and contribute. So don't ever let anyone discourage you from your ambition for a better life. Don't minimize yourself or your dreams for any reason. *It's okay that you want more.* Don't fear your new ambitions. Just understand how to reach for them with more focus, elegance, and satisfaction than you did last time. Just follow the path outlined in this book.

The next chapter will reveal six high performance habits, the HP6, and give you more detail about how they were discerned. Knowing the science behind these findings will help you understand the nuance and power of this approach. Then we'll jump right into each of the six habits. Each habit has its own chapter, which will teach you three new practices to help you establish the overall habit. Finally, I'll warn you about the traps that can cause you to plateau or fail, and I'll leave you with the number one thing needed to maintain your progress.

As your guide, I will inspire new thinking, challenge you along the way, and help you become more mindful of what *really* matters. If, at times, I seem overzealous, forgive me. I've just spent a decade coaching extraordinary people, and I know the incredible results that await you. Unlike a podcaster or academic, I'm only compensated for getting measurable results, and I've done it for individuals and teams from all

walks of life and all over the world. I've seen what's possible for you, and it enlivens my entire soul as I write this sentence. My tremendous passion for sharing these ideas comes from seeing my students and the data prove these methods over and over again. So yes, you'll have to forgive my exuberance at times. I truly geek out about this work. But if you'll allow me to do that, you might also allow me to ask the tough questions and suggest actions that may seem tedious or make you a little uncomfortable. If I were sitting next to you, I'd ask permission to push you and challenge you and demand that you give your all. Since you chose this book, I have no doubt that you're ready for the journey.

I should also share what you *won't* find in the pages ahead. I've worked hard to keep this book as practical as possible, favoring *strategies* that you can apply to improve your life over *stories* about people you don't know and academic details that you probably don't care about. I don't pretend that this book is a complete work of human psychology or achievement science; it is an attempt to filter twenty years of insights into a practical road map for you. In a work of such scope, there will inevitably be generalizations and open questions, and I've done my best to call them out.

Narrowing this book to practical habits was difficult. The first draft was 1,498 pages, and I had to make some hard choices on what to cut. To make the decisions, I followed the advice I shared earlier, which so many high performers have taught me:

**To succeed, always remember that the main thing is
to keep the main thing the main thing.**

In this book, the “main thing” is to teach you the habits that will make you extraordinary. It is to help you understand the habits conceptually and also be able to practice them confidently.

So I cut some entertaining, thought-provoking material—profiles of historical figures or contemporary leaders, fascinating stories about lab experiments—because those things were better suited for my blog or podcast than for this book. I made this choice so the book

would be more of a user manual than a collection of case studies or academic notes. I will share vignettes about working with high performers, as well as a lot of our broad research findings, but for the most part, I'll focus on what *you* should actually *do* to reach the next level of success. If you would like even more human stories or case studies, check out my blog or podcast via Brendon.com. If you want a more academic approach and a deeper look into our methodology, visit HighPerformanceInstitute.com.

Here, I'll focus on making this book useful and timeless so that no matter how often you return to it throughout your life, the instruction will still be relevant and exacting. Because our students always ask how these topics apply to me as a public figure, I will share some personal examples. But even those are ultimately illustrations of what I've learned from high performers. Since what matters most in improving your performance are six specific habits, I won't spend time telling you about some high performers' diets, childhoods, favorite books, morning routines, or favorite apps—all those things are highly variable, and we haven't found any of those things to be strongly correlated with high performance. So I'll leave those types of lifestyle discussions to podcasters and journalists who ask fascinating people fascinating questions. This book is different because it's about performance, not personality or intrigue. It's not a book of profiles; it's a book of proven *practices*.¹ Here, it's about *you*. It's about how to think, and the habits that you need to begin deliberately implementing in your life. Now, let's get to work.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW

You're busy, I know. You have lots to do today. Perhaps I've piqued your curiosity, and you truly are committed to improving your life right now. But I also know there's a risk that your interest won't translate to immediate action. So I have two suggestions you can do right now, to break through *today*.

1. Take the assessment at HighPerformanceIndicator.com.

Don't worry, it's *free* and it takes just five to seven minutes to complete. You have five to seven minutes. You'll get scores across the six categories that correlate with high performance. You'll learn where you're not doing well and where you are. This assessment will help you predict whether, on your current trajectory, you are likely to achieve any long-term goals or dreams. Once you take your assessment and receive your scores, you'll get course recommendations and other free resources. You're welcome to share that link or your results with your peers or team. Feel free to compare how you score with others, but be sure to come back to this book and learn how to get better.

2. Read the next two chapters today.

Yes, today. Now. It won't take long. If you'll just jump in and commit to reading the next two chapters, you will learn the factors that make the statistical difference in helping you succeed over the long term, no matter what you do. You'll come away with measurable ways to improve, and you'll never again wonder what matters most in achieving lasting success.

High performance can be yours. An extraordinary life awaits. Just turn the page.

BEYOND NATURAL:
THE QUEST FOR
HIGH PERFORMANCE

“Don’t bother just to be better than
your contemporaries or predecessors.
Try to be better than yourself.”

—William Faulkner

An e-mail that changed my life:

Brendon,

I am an INTJ on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. This tells you absolutely nothing about me or my ability to succeed. Not now. Not over the next few years.

My top two strengths on the StrengthsFinder are “Developer” and “Achiever.” This also tells you absolutely nothing about my ability to get things done or attain any specific outcomes.

On the Kolbe, I score highest as a Quick Start. This means nothing because over time I’ve had to deal with real life and improve at the other modes I suck at like Fact Finder, Follow Thru, and Implementor.

I prefer blue over green.

I’m more like a lion than a chimp.

I’m gritty but too often lazy. I identify more with a circle than a square. I eat mostly a Mediterranean diet but like hamburgers. I like being around people, for a while, but often I long to escape into solitude with a pot of tea and a thick book. I shop weekly at Whole Foods, but many of my lunchtimes are spent at a cheap Mexican place.

Nothing about *any* of this can tell you anything, at all, about my capabilities, my odds of success, or my future performance.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

So please, man, stop trying to bucket me into a “type” or assume that my “strengths” or background give me any edge whatsoever. Labeling people sucks, regardless of how it’s done. I hear you that these assessments are for exploring and learning about myself, not labeling me or directing me per se.

But look, we know my supposed “strengths” and they’re *still* not helping me get ahead. My natural tendencies don’t do the job. As a leader, I have to be honest—sometimes it’s just not about who *I* am, what *I* prefer, or what *I’m* naturally good at. It’s about me rising to serve a mission, not the mission bowing down to match my limited strengths.

I know you like to ask about my background, too. You know I’m from the Midwest but now live in California. My mom raised me and my sister by herself. She was a hair stylist in the mornings and a hostess at a buffet at night. Dad quit on her and us when I was 14. I got average grades. I was only bullied once or twice. I loved to play golf in college. In about a five-year period after college, I went through two pretty bad relationships. I was fired once. But I found some good friends, too, and I gradually acquired confidence. I sort of stumbled into the work I do now, but it’s great.

This background, too, tells you *nothing* about my potential. It gives no definitive clues or path to get ahead today.

So, I’m just being honest, Brendon. I know you like personality assessments and to ask about my background. But if everyone has a past and a story, then certainly a person’s past or story is not what gives them an edge.

I guess I am saying that I can do the navel-gazing just fine on my own. I hired you to tell me what to *do* to get to the next level.

I need to know what to *do*, Brendon. What practices work *regardless* of personality?

Don’t say who high performers *are*. Tell me what they *do* at a granular level, across projects, that can be replicated. That level of detail. That’s the gold.

Find it for me, and you have a client for life.
Otherwise, it's time to part ways.

#

I received this e-mail from Tom, a coaching client, early in my career. To say the least, it took me by surprise. Tom was a kind person and a successful executive. He was collaborative and always willing to try new things.¹ An e-mail like this, putting our working relationship on notice unless I found “the gold,” was unusual from him. The follow-up conversation I had with him was even more direct. He was exasperated.

Tom wanted *results*. But I wasn't sure how we could get them.

This was a decade ago. Back then, when I was just a run-of-the-mill “life coach,” it was common to do four things to figure out how to help someone improve their performance.

It often began with asking the client questions about what he or she wanted, and what “limiting beliefs” got in the way. You also interviewed them about the past, trying to spot any events that might be influencing current behaviors.

Second, you used assessment tools to help determine personality styles, patterns, and preferences. The goal was to help people better understand themselves and any behaviors that might help them succeed. Popular tools included Myers-Briggs, the Clifton Strengths-Finder, the Kolbe ATM Index, and the DiSC[®] Test. Often, the life coach would hire experts or consultants certified in these tools, to help administer them.

Third, the coach would sift through performance reviews from work and talk to the people around the client, using 360-degree assessments to figure out how others perceived them and what others wanted from them. You'd talk to the people they lived and worked with.

Fourth, you'd evaluate their actual *output*. You'd look at their past results to see what stood out, what processes helped them create good work, how they most loved to make an impact.

So in this tradition, I did all these things. Because Tom liked tangible data and reports, we spent a lot of time taking and then discussing the assessments. We worked with several high-level consultants who were experts in the various tools. We had binders full of information.

Then, over a span of two years, despite knowing my client's traits, talents, scores, and background, I watched him continually *fail*.

I felt terrible. I couldn't figure out why he wasn't achieving the results he wanted. That was about the time he sent the e-mail.

THE LAB

Fast-forward a decade from Tom's e-mail, and I'm now blessed to have one of the largest personal and professional development "labs"—which is how we think of my global audience and platforms—in the world. As of this writing, that audience includes over *ten million* followers across our Facebook pages; two million-plus newsletter subscribers; one and a half million students who have completed my video series or online courses; thousands of attendees at our multiday live high performance seminars; millions of book and blog readers on the topics of motivation, psychology, and life change; and over half a million YouTube subscribers. This audience has now helped my personal development videos exceed 100,000,000 views online—and all without a single cat video.

What's unique about the audience is that they come to us solely for personal development advice and training, which gives us an illuminating view into what people are struggling with, what they say they want in life, and what helps them change. At the High Performance Institute, we use this large public following to take surveys, conduct interviews, mine data from student behavior and comments,

and study before-and-after results from online training courses and one-to-one performance-based coaching sessions. Every time we want to understand something about human behavior and high performance, we go to our lab for insights.

Much of what we've learned from these large audiences and data sets sounds like common sense. In becoming successful, hard work, passion, practice, resilience, and people skills are often more important than IQ, raw talent, or where you're from. Nothing here should be surprising, since this knowledge dovetails with contemporary research on success and world-class performance. Read any of the latest social science (and I've provided plenty of endnotes in case you want to read the studies for yourself), and you'll see that success in general, in almost any endeavor, is made possible by malleable factors—things you can change and improve with effort. For example:

- the mindset you choose to adopt²
- the focus you give to your passions, and the persistence you pursue them with³
- the amount of practice you dedicate yourself to⁴
- the way you understand and treat others⁵
- the discipline and constancy with which you strive for your goals⁶
- the way you bounce back from losses⁷
- the amount of physical exercise you do to keep your brain and body fit and your overall well-being cared for⁸

What has emerged in our work and in the scientific and academic literature is that success is achieved not by *a specific type of person* but rather by people from all walks of life who *enact a specific set of practices*. The question that inspired this book was “What, exactly, are the most effective practices?”

FINDING WHAT MATTERS

“Motivation is what gets you started.
Habit is what keeps you going.”

—Jim Rohn

Over the past several years, we’ve zeroed in on what moves the needle most in helping people achieve long-term success. And we’ve found what Tom knew intuitively: High performers *do* things differently from the way others do, and their practices can be replicated across projects (and almost any situation) regardless of your personality, past, or preferences. In fact, we’ve found that there are six deliberate habits that made most of the difference in performance outcomes across domains. Even your greatest strengths or natural abilities are moot without these habits to support them.

To uncover which habits mattered most, we used relevant concepts from the academic literature, data from our global lab, and insights from over three thousand high performance coaching sessions. We then marshaled all these inputs to create structured interview questions that we could ask high performers.

We identified high performers through standard social science practices, such as survey identification and objective performance measures (e.g., academic performance, athletic performance, objective business and financial outcomes, etc.). For example, we asked people how strongly they agreed with statements such as the following:

- Most of my peers would consider me a high performer.
- Over the past few years, I’ve generally maintained a high level of success.
- If “high performance” is defined as succeeding at what you do over the long term, compared to most people, I identify as a high performer.

- In my primary field of interest, I've had success for a longer time than most of my peers.

For those who strongly identified with these statements, we then conducted one-on-one interviews with them (and often their peers). We also took additional surveys asking the self-reported high performers questions such as:

- When you start a new project, what do you consciously and consistently do to set yourself up to win?
- What personal and professional routines help you stay focused, energized, creative, productive, and effective? (We asked about each trait in turn.)
- What habits have you started and discarded, and what habits have you kept that *always* seem to work?
- What recurring thoughts or affirmations do you purposefully say to yourself, to perform your best when you (a) go into new situations, (b) respond to adversity or disappointment, and (c) help others?
- If you had to discern three things that make you successful, and you knew you could deploy only those three again in your next major project, what would those three things be?
- When you prepare for a meeting (or match, performance, scene, conversation) that really matters, how do you go about (a) your preparation, and (b) your practices?
- If you took on a major new team project tomorrow, what, exactly, would you say and do to set your team up for success?

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

- Which habits get you quick wins, and which are longer-term practices that make you stand out?
- When you're under the pressure of a near-term deadline, how do you maintain or protect your well-being?
- What do you habitually tell yourself when you experience self-doubt or disappointment or feel that you're failing?
- What makes you confident, and how do you "turn on" confidence when you need it?
- How do you approach dealing with other people in your life who (a) support you, (b) don't support you, and (c) you want to support you but who don't?
- What practices keep you happy and healthy as you strive for bigger goals?

These questions and dozens more like them helped us begin narrowing down the factors and habits that high performers reported as making the greatest difference in their success. Clear themes emerged, and an initial list of almost two dozen high performance habits was created.

Next, we rolled out surveys to the general public, with questions similar to those we asked the self-reported high performers. After studying which habits best differentiated high performers from those in our general surveys, we narrowed the list even more. Finally, we pared it down to the habits that were deliberate, observable, malleable, trainable, and, most important, effective across domains. That is, we wanted habits that would help someone become successful not just in one domain of expertise but across multiple topic areas, activities, and industries. We wanted habits that anyone, anywhere, in any field of endeavor, could apply over and over again to measurably improve performance.

Ultimately, just six habits made the grade. We call these final six the high performance habits, or HP6.

Once we identified the HP6, we worked to conduct additional literature reviews and validity tests. We created the High Performance Indicator (HPI), based on the six habits as well as other proven success measures. We tested the HPI pilot with over 30,000 people from 195 countries and quantitatively proved its validity, reliability, and usefulness.⁹ We found that not only do the six habits *combine* to correlate with high performance, but *each* habit correlates with high performance on its own. And together they correlate with other important life outcomes, such as general happiness, better health, and positive relationships.

The HP6 will help you succeed whether you are a student, entrepreneur, manager, CEO, athlete, or stay-at-home parent. Whether you are already successful or not, these habits will help you reach the next level.

While dozens of other factors can affect your long-term success—luck, timing, social support, or sudden creative breakthroughs, to name a few—the HP6 *are under your control* and improve your performance more than anything else we’ve measured.

If you want to reach higher levels of performance in anything you do, you must *consistently* do the following:

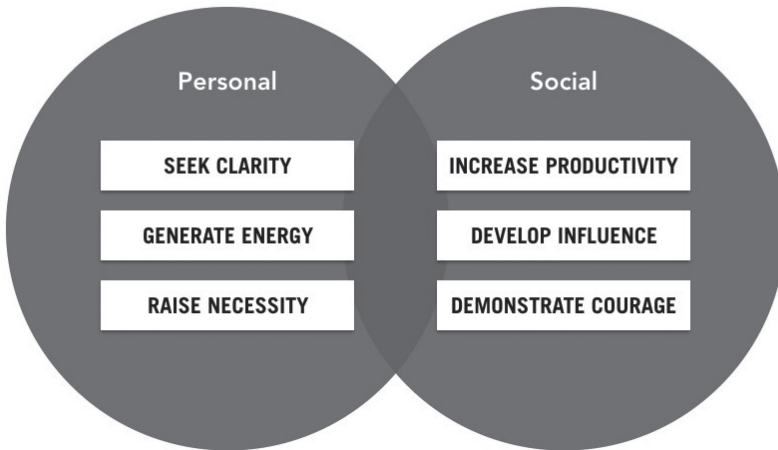
1. *Seek clarity* on who you want to be, how you want to interact with others, what you want, and what will bring you the greatest meaning. As every project or major initiative begins, you ask questions such as “What kind of person do I want to be while I’m doing this?” “How should I treat others?” “What are my intentions and objectives?” “What can I focus on that will bring me a sense of connection and fulfillment?” High performers ask these types of questions not only at the beginning of an endeavor but consistently throughout. They don’t just “get clarity” once and

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS

develop a mission statement that lasts the test of time; they consistently seek clarity again and again as times change and as they take on new projects or enter new social situations. This kind of routine self-monitoring is one of the hallmarks of their success.

2. *Generate energy* so that you can maintain focus, effort, and well-being. To stay on your A game, you'll need to actively care for your mental stamina, physical energy, and positive emotions in very specific ways.
3. *Raise the necessity* for exceptional performance. This means actively tapping into the reasons you *absolutely must* perform well. This necessity is based on a mix of your internal standards (e.g., your identity, beliefs, values, or expectations for excellence) and external demands (e.g., social obligations, competition, public commitments, deadlines). It's about always knowing your *why* and stoking that fire all the time so you feel the needed drive or pressure to get at it.
4. *Increase productivity* in your primary field of interest. Specifically, focus on *prolific quality output* (PQO) in the area in which you want to be known and to drive impact. You'll also have to minimize distractions (including opportunities) that steal your attention from creating PQO.
5. *Develop influence* with those around you. It will make you better at getting people to believe in and support your efforts and ambitions. Unless you consciously develop a positive support network, major achievements over the long haul are all but impossible.
6. *Demonstrate courage* by expressing your ideas, taking bold action, and standing up for yourself and others, even in the face of fear, uncertainty, threat, or changing conditions. Courage is not an occasional act, but a trait of choice and will.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS



Seek clarity. Generate energy. Raise necessity. Increase productivity. Develop Influence. Demonstrate Courage. These are the six habits that you need to adopt if you are to reach high performance in any situation. In the hundreds of personal efforts and social behaviors that we've observed, these habits move the needle the most in dramatically improving performance.

In the next six chapters, we'll address the extraordinary power unlocked by developing these habits.

STRENGTHS ALONE ARE NEVER ENOUGH

You may have noticed that nowhere in this list does it say to focus on your innate gifts, talents, blessings, past, or strengths. That's because no matter how great a personality you have, how many supposed innate strengths you possess, how much money you have, how beautiful you are, how creative you are, what talents you've cultivated, or how brilliantly you've succeeded in the past—none

of these things would mean much on their own. They wouldn't matter if you didn't know what you wanted and how to go get it (clarity), felt too wiped out to perform (energy), didn't have a sense of drive or any pressure to get things done (necessity), couldn't focus and create the outputs that matter most (productivity), lacked the people skills to get others to believe in you or support you (influence), or failed to take risks or speak up for yourself and others (courage). Without the HP6, even the most gifted person would be lost, tired, unmotivated, unproductive, alone, or fearful.

Effectiveness in life does not come from focusing on what is automatic, easy, or natural for us. Rather, it is the result of how we consciously strive to meet life's harder challenges, grow beyond our comforts, and deliberately work to overcome our biases and preferences, so that we may understand, love, serve, and lead others.

When I make this argument, people often balk due to the popularity of the "strengths" movement. Personally, I'm a fan of any tools that help people learn more about themselves. I also greatly admire Gallup, the organization that has led the strengths-based revolution. But I don't recommend that people use the strengths assumption to lead others or to seek the next level of success in their own lives. The strengths movement is based on the idea that we have "innate" strengths—talents that we are born with. It assumes we are "naturally" good at some things from birth, and that we might as well focus on those things. Without question, that's a feel-good formula, and it's certainly better than obsessing about our weaknesses all the time.

My main reservation about the strengths movement is that in a complex and rapidly changing world, reaching the top doesn't come naturally to *anyone*. Regardless of what you are naturally good at, to rise higher you must go beyond what came naturally to you at birth or in your teen years, right? That's why the *innate* argument doesn't hold up so well. To reach exceptional performance and win over the

long term, you will be required to develop *well beyond* what is easy or natural to you, because the real world is full of uncertainty and ever-increasing demands for growth. Your “natural” birth strengths will not be enough. As Tom said in the e-mail to me at the beginning of this chapter, “It’s about me rising to serve a mission, not the mission bowing down to match my limited strengths.” If you have great ambitions to contribute extraordinary things, you’ll have to grow and stretch far beyond what’s natural to you. To rise to high performance, you’ll have to work on the weaknesses, develop entirely new skill sets beyond what you find easy or what you “like to do.” It should be common sense: If you really want to make your mark, you’ll have to grow more to give more, and that won’t feel easy or natural.

In the end, even if you don’t agree with my thinking process here, knowing your personality type or supposed innate strengths just isn’t all that useful in helping you achieve your next big goal in uncertain environments. Knowing your label or strength and just trying to be “more of that” is like telling a bear that’s trying to get honey out of a nest high on an unexplored cliff, “Just try being more of a bear.”

To my friends and colleagues running companies: Let’s stop spending all this money on expensive strength and personality assessments in vain attempts to categorize people, and instead focus on training our people in proven habits that anyone can use to up their performance.

The good news is, no one “innately” lacks any of the high performance habits. High performers are not lucky stiff’s loaded with a great big bag of strengths at birth. They simply deploy the habits we’ve discussed, and do it more consistently than their peers. That’s it. *That’s the difference.*

So it doesn’t matter whether you are an extrovert or an introvert, an INTJ or an ESFP, a Christian or an atheist, a Spaniard or a Singaporean, an artist or an engineer, a manager or a CEO, an achiever or an analyzer, a mom or a Martian—the six high performance habits

each have the power to make a dramatic impact on the areas that matter most to you. Together, they have the power to revolutionize your performance across every meaningful domain in your life. You are not supposed to be innately good at the HP6. You have to work at them all the time. Whenever you hope to succeed at a new goal, project, or dream, you have to bust out the HP6. Every time you find yourself performing below your full potential, bring the HP6 to bear. If you ever wonder why you're failing at something, just go take the HPI and identify which habits you're scoring low in. Then improve that area and you'll be back on track.

This deliberate focus is an important distinction, especially because it frees us from the myth that success comes more “naturally” to some than to others. Looking across my decade serving so many elite-level achievers as well as all our surveys and professional assessments, we just haven't seen high performance consistently correlate strongly with personality, IQ, innate talent, creativity, years of experience, gender, race, culture, or compensation.¹⁰ In the past two decades of research in neuroscience and positive psychology, researchers have begun to notice the same and flip the old model on its head. What we do with what we have tends to be far more important than what we have in the first place. What you're innately good at is less important than how you choose to see the world, develop yourself, lead others, and remain persistent through difficulty.

We all know someone who has all the cards stacked in their favor—blessed upbringing, great personality, creative mind—but who still doesn't get off the couch or succeed. Lots of people are highly paid but not high performing. Anyone in an organization who has had their team take a strengths assessment can surely attest that plenty of their peers know their strengths, and even do work related to their strengths, but *still* fail to deliver great work. And in any given great company culture, there are always high performers and low performers. Why? Because high performance is not about a

specific *type* of person. It's not about winning the genetic lottery, how long you've worked, the shade of your skin, how many people are supporting you, or what you're getting paid. It's about your performance habits—which *you* have complete control over.

This finding is worth hammering home, because too many people use these factors to explain their poor performance. Just think how often you hear things such as:

- “I just don't have the *personality* to get ahead. I'm just not [extroverted, intuitive, charismatic, open, conscientious].”
- “I'm just not the smartest person in the room.”
- “I'm just not naturally gifted like they are. I wasn't born good at that. I don't have the right mix of strengths.”
- “I'm not a right-brained person.”
- “I don't have enough experience.”
- “I'm a [woman, black man, Latino, middle-aged white guy, immigrant], and that's why I'm not succeeding.”
- “My company culture doesn't support me.”
- “I'd be a lot better if they paid me what I'm really worth.”

It's time we all recognized these reasons for what they are: lame excuses for suboptimal performance, especially over the long term.

This is not to say intrinsic factors don't matter *at all*. There is strong evidence that they are important, especially in childhood development, and many of these factors can dramatically influence your mood, behavior, choices, health, and relationships as an adult. (If you'd like a more academic treatment of why those factors are important but matter less for long-term

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success than most people imagine, please visit our published articles at HighPerformanceInstitute.com/research.)

Leaders should take note: Focusing on any of the factors I mentioned in that list won't get you very far in helping your people improve performance. Those factors are just not that easy to define, manage, or improve. For example, imagine you're working on a project with a few teammates. You have one person in particular who is not performing well. Imagine how ridiculous it would be for you to walk over to that person and say:

"If you could just improve your personality for us . . ."

"If you could just up your IQ for us . . ."

"If you could just change how you were innately gifted . . ."

"If you could just be more right-brained . . ."

"If you could just have five more years' experience under your belt here . . ."

"If you could just be more [Asian, black, white, male, female] . . ."

"If you could just improve the culture here real quick . . ."

"If you could just pay yourself the perfect amount to be more productive . . ."

You get the point. **These are simply not useful categories to focus on.**

The bottom line is that if you're going to focus on *anything* to improve your or your team's performance, start with the HP6.

A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS— ONE HABIT LIFTS ALL OTHERS

We like to think of the HP6 as “meta-habits” because they make all other good habits in life fall into place. By seeking clarity, you develop a habit of asking questions, looking within, observing your behaviors, assessing whether you’re on track. By generating energy, you’ll be better rested, you’ll eat healthier, you’ll exercise more. And so on.

What’s fascinating about our research into the HP6 is that each improvement in any one area improves the others. This means that if you increase clarity, you’ll likely see improvement in energy, necessity, productivity, courage, and influence. Our analysis also suggests that even though people who score high on one habit tend to score high on the others, each habit is giving them a little extra edge in increasing their overall high performance score. Improve just one of these habits, and you improve your performance.

Another fascinating thing we learned is that *all* the HP6 predict overall happiness, meaning the higher your score in *any* habit, the greater the odds you’ll report being happy in life. Taken together, then, the HP6 are a powerful predictor of not just whether you’re a high performer but also whether you’ll be *happy*.

IS THERE A HIGH PERFORMANCE “STATE OF MIND”?

“Ecstasy is a full, deep involvement in life.”

—John Lovell

People often ask me whether there is a specific “state” that will enable them to succeed over the long term. Well, by definition, emotional and mental states don’t endure. They’re fleeting. Moods stick around longer, and habits hold the longest, which is why we focus there.

But I think what people are really getting at is, “How will I *feel* when I’ve hit high performance? What does it feel like, so I can reverse-engineer that?”

The question can be answered by the data. In a keyword analysis of public survey data on over thirty thousand high performing respondents, it’s pretty clear: When people talk about how they feel in high performance, they report feeling *full engagement, joy, and confidence* (in that order).

**This means they tend to be fully
immersed in what they are doing,
they *enjoy* what they’re doing, and they have
confidence in their ability to figure things out.**

Rounding out the top five were *purposefulness* and *flow*, as in “I feel like I’m in flow.” (“In the zone” was not an option in our surveys because it’s a phrase rather than a word, but it was the most common written-in descriptor.) *Determination, focus, intention, deliberateness, and conscientiousness* rounded out the top concepts people used to describe what being in high performance felt like.

Knowing this, you might as well start with the end in mind. Start bringing your full attention to the moments of your life. Start bringing more joy. Start bringing more confidence. These things will not only make you feel better, they’ll also help you perform better. Still, the same caveat applies to states as to strengths: Without effective habits, they’re just not enough.

TESTING THE HP6

The HP6 gave me a proven game plan for succeeding at my projects in life. Now they are a standard operating system for entering any new situation. I’ve been using them in my professional career, and the results have been astounding and quite public.

Beyond myself, the habits and concepts in this book have measurably improved the lives of tens of thousands of our students. These students take the HPI before and after our online programs, live training events, and coaching experiences. They love seeing *demonstrable data* that they are improving their lives. We regularly see our students significantly increase their overall high performance scores (and overall life happiness). We've also used the HPI in organizations to help them pinpoint where their employees and teams should focus their development.

Further, we've seen remarkable results through client coaching interventions. Over three-thousand hour-long coaching sessions led by independent Certified High Performance Coaches™ reveal that people can dramatically change their behaviors and reach higher performance in many areas of their lives in *weeks*, not years.

This isn't to say that high performance habits are a silver bullet for all life's challenges. Over the past decade as a high performance coach and researcher, I have sought plenty of disconfirming evidence for the HP6, and I'll happily share that here. In seeking disconfirming evidence, we have looked for people who are *not* high performing despite practicing the habits in this book. Are there individuals in the world who actively seek clarity, generate energy, raise necessity, increase productivity, develop influence, and demonstrate courage who are in fact underperformers, or even *failures*? I have never seen that to be the case, but common sense says there is bound to be an exception somewhere. Can someone lack one of the habits and still become successful? For example, can someone be a wild success yet still lack clarity? Absolutely. Can someone lack courage and still be a success? You bet they can. But remember, we aren't talking about *initial* success here. We're talking about the *long term*. Odds are, if you lack any of the HP6 for too long, your high performance scores (and happiness scores) will drop. You simply wouldn't be as effective or as extraordinary as you could be.

Some critics will say that our descriptions of high performance habits, or statements used in the HPI, are too vague or open to interpretation. That, of course, is always a risk when describing human behavior. If we say that someone “has grit,” “is creative,” “is an extrovert,” or “struggles to maintain focus,” one could always argue that such descriptions are vague or generalized. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t attempt to define them, measure them, or educate people about them. Studying human psychology is an imprecise endeavor, but it’s worth the work if it helps us learn what makes someone high performing. All we can do is use the validated yet inexact tools available and continue homing in on how to describe and correlate the statements and habits that are true for high performers. And that’s what we’ve been doing.

In addition to actively seeking to disconfirm our own assumptions, we have sought to overcome self-reporting biases by checking to see that what people reported in our initial surveys was true in their real lives. We did this by randomly interviewing them, comparing objective performance measures, and seeking peer feedback. For the most part, we’ve found that people share their honest responses in this field, because they want to accurately assess where they are and discover where they can improve. We’ve also included reverse statements and scoring in many of our surveys, to see whether responses held true.

Like any researcher, I’m always open to new evidence, and I look at findings, including those in this book, as merely another messy step in the long march of understanding humans and how they work. I’ll remind you, I am not a psychologist, psychiatrist, neuroscientist, biologist, or any other title I’m aware of that ends in “-ist.” I am a professional high performance coach and trainer who is paid for results, not discussion or theory. And this, inevitably, biases me toward what I’ve seen work. And while I feel blessed to have become the world’s highest compensated and most followed on this topic, I am without

question as fallible as any writer or practitioner trying to take on a topic of such scope and complexity. I have a lot more to learn about high performance. There's plenty that this entire field does not yet know and that needs to be explored. What effects do mental illnesses, childhood experiences, and socioeconomic and neurobiological factors have on forming and sustaining these habits? Which of the habits move the needle most in specific industries, careers, or educational levels?

Throughout this book, I openly invite you to ask your own questions as well as question my assertions. In our published articles, I have openly called for further testing of our ideas, and I'd love to hear your feedback, too. Every day, my team and I try to learn more and finer distinctions about this subject. I'll be studying it for life. I'd love to hear what works for you and what doesn't. And whether or not you agree with what you'll find in the pages ahead, I merely suggest you keep what works for you and discard the rest.

TEST IT FOR YOURSELF

Will the HP6 get as dramatic results for you as we've seen in our research, training, and coaching? I would love to test them with you. That's why, once again, I invite you to be the judge of how effective these habits are. In case you haven't yet gotten around to following my advice in the previous chapter, before you read further, take the HPI. It takes only a few minutes, and it's free online at HighPerformanceIndicator.com. It will give you a score on each of the six habits, and no, it won't "label" you. Take the survey. Do it now. And be sure to enter your e-mail so I can send you another link to take the assessment again in seven to ten weeks. (Between now and then, read this book and watch the videos you'll receive after you take the assessment, so that you have the tools needed to

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improve.) You'll know by your own responses to the assessment in a few weeks just how much this work can begin to change your life.

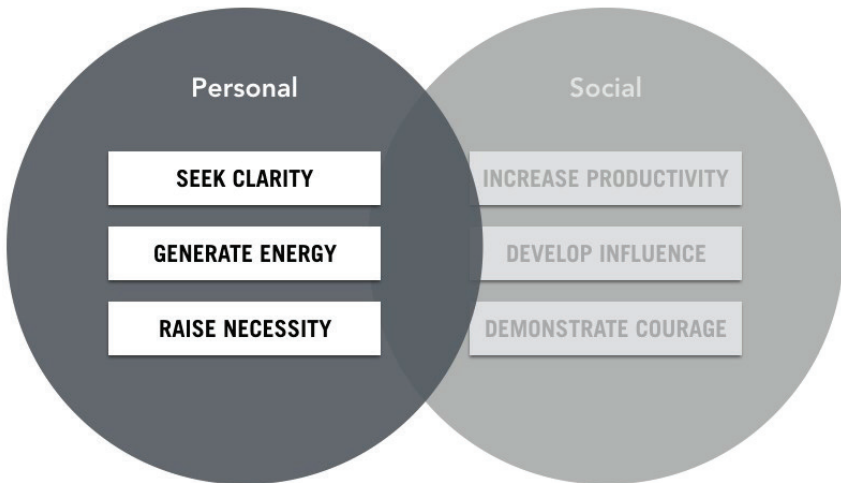
One thing is abundantly clear from our findings: You should never wait to pursue a dream or add value out of fear that you lack the "right stuff." High performance happens because of what you deliberately think and do on a routine basis in order to excel and serve at higher levels. It is this quest to challenge yourself to develop good habits that will make you feel enlivened and help you realize your full potential.

In Montana, where I grew up, we had this saying: "The time to have the map is before you enter the woods." Someday soon, you'll enter an uncertain situation where your performance really matters. Before that day, read this book and begin the six high performance habits. This is your map, and it will lead you through the thicket of life to your highest levels of success. In the next chapter, we put an X on that map. We get clarity about who you are and where you want to go *at this stage* of your life.

SECTION ONE

PERSONAL HABITS

HIGH PERFORMANCE HABITS



HIGH PERFORMANCE HABIT #1

SEEK CLARITY

"If you don't have clarity of ideas,
you're just communicating sheer sound."

—Yo-Yo Ma

ENVISION THE FUTURE FOUR

DETERMINE THE FEELING YOU'RE AFTER

DEFINE WHAT'S MEANINGFUL

Kate, the woman sitting in front of me, crying, “has it all.”

She manages thousands of employees at one of the top companies in her industry. She’s an admired leader with dozens of years’ experience. Because her company is wildly profitable, her high six-figure salary is almost double the average for her position. But she never lets that go to her head. Her bragging is limited to talking up her team. She’s proud of how hard they work and support one another.

No matter what Kate is talking about, you can tell she’s genuinely interested in *you*. She has an indescribable grace about her. Whenever I see her walk into a room, I think of the saying “There are two types of people. One walks into the room and announces, ‘Here I am!’ The other walks in and says, ‘Oh, there you are!’”

Kate is raising three children. Her mother died from cancer when Kate was fifteen, so she puts a high value on being present with her kids.

Recently, she got another promotion, so her husband, Mike, quit his job to be home with the kids. They’re happy they have more time together.

Kate has hired me as her coach, and in order for us to get to know each other better, she invited me to their house in the suburbs for a barbecue. Within a few minutes of arriving at her home that sunny

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PLANNER

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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.

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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.