

Let One Success Lead You to Still More Success

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Your character traits make an enormous difference in what and how much you accomplish. Harmful traits hold some people back from achieving what they might:

--An impatient person will become frustrated and spend more time complaining than seeking improvements.

--An undisciplined person will randomly switch from one thing to another before accomplishing much of lasting value.

--A lazy person will be looking for a place to take a nap just when opportunity knocks.

Positive character traits create momentum that leads to success:

--A thoughtful person who likes to help others will learn a lot more about cooperation than those who selfishly seek to help themselves.

--An optimistic person who looks forward to developing new skills will eventually add many fruitful capabilities.

--A scrupulously honest person will gain and benefit from the respect and cooperation of many people who have learned not to trust most others.

Even if you don't yet have a lot of good character traits, you can start eliminating harmful ones and building better ones. Where should you start?

Having provided career advice to dozens of young managers who later became CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, I see success patterns that you may find helpful as well. Let me spell out some of those lessons for you:

-- Seek to continually improve yourself and whatever you are responsible for managing.

- Respond to adversity and setbacks by looking enthusiastically for a better solution.
- Look for help in finding better ways of accomplishing your work.
- Build and continually improve a high-performing team that you lead.
- Ask everyone why they do what they do.
- Try new things.
- Develop a friendly relationship with everyone you come into contact with.
- Encourage people by praising them and suggesting opportunities.
- Use knowledge as an advantage in career development and besting business competitors.
- Prepare for career advances long before opportunities for advancement present themselves.
- Follow the highest possible ethical standards.
- Become adept at developing and implementing improved business strategies.

Recently, I corresponded with a former doctoral student of mine, Dr. Thabo Mosala, about his career experiences. Let me share with you some of the ways that his career has benefited from following the success pattern I just described.

Dr. Mosala grew up in a small village in Lesotho as the fifth of seven children. As a youngster, he often took school books with him to study while tending the animals but these books were written in his native language, Southern Sotho, and he felt that he could accomplish much more if he could only learn to read English books. As you can see, he was looking to improve himself.

During high school, he excelled in math and struggled in English. To enter a university, he had to pass English. He didn't. Not discouraged, Dr. Mosala found a bridging program that would help improve his English and allow him to learn more in his strong subjects of math and physics. At the end of the program, he passed the English exam and won an award for physics. He succeeded by looking for a better solution.

An older brother asked Dr. Mosala what he wanted to study. Not being aware of many alternative careers, he responded that he wanted to be a physician. His brother noticed how well Dr. Mosala did in math and asked him how he felt about a career in computer sciences. He wasn't sure, but discussed it with his principal. Encouraged by the opportunity to use an Apple computer at school, he progressed to a Bachelor of Science degree in computer sciences and math at the University of Lesotho, honored with part-time employment at the university's computer center during his studies. He made progress because he was open to trying new things.

The university experience paid off when he was hired to work in the government's computer center, part of the Ministry of Finance. After seven months, the urge to learn more overtook him. Dr. Mosala next earned a Master of Science degree in computer sciences from Rhodes University in South Africa. To help cover expenses, he tutored other students and worked as a residence warden. In this way, he added new knowledge to gain career advantages over others.

Considering what to learn next, Dr. Mosala realized he needed more commercial skills to balance his computer science knowledge. As a result, he took a self-study program to earn a certificate in banking and had a temporary setback when he failed accounting. In these studies, he was continuing to seek career advantages from new knowledge.

His next job proved to be a career breakthrough. He was hired as an Information Technology manager by a large firm involved in rail transportation. Through his employer, he was able to earn a Master of Business Leadership (an MBA-equivalent program) degree at a local business school. In this program, Dr. Mosala developed a lifelong love for finance. By being persistent at trying new things, he found a discipline that excited him.

In his next two jobs, Dr. Mosala was able to travel extensively to other countries, first in Africa and later beyond his home continent. These experiences broadened his understanding of business opportunities.

From those responsibilities, Dr. Mosala rose to be Director of Operations for Diners Club South Africa. In that role, he learned to play golf and gained much good experience in becoming acquainted with new people, especially high-income individuals.

His next assignment was as Executive Director--Retail Banking for the Standard Bank. Now, he needed a banking certificate. Because of his Master's degree in Business Leadership, he was exempted from the first level program and took the more advanced one in which he earned a certificate in International Banking and Treasury Management.

Dr. Mosala had long wanted to earn a Ph.D. degree. At this point in his career, that was the ideal next step for educational advancement. But there was a problem: How would a busy banking executive find the time to earn a doctorate? Dr. Mosala reports feeling blown away with excitement when he discovered that he could earn a degree at Rushmore University by working on it part-time from his home, while centering much of his research and writing on issues that he was working on for the Standard Bank. This opportunity gave him a great ethical opportunity to advance his career while helping his employer. As you can see, he was also maintaining his commitment to continuously improving himself and his organization.

Dr. Mosala also realized that entrepreneurial activities might contribute to his success. He formed a partnership and began to look for talented entrepreneurs he could work with to explore interesting opportunities. As a result, they bought a radio station and greatly improved its operating performance. He reports that the directors of the radio station are currently in disagreement about certain issues, pointing out to him how important it is to have the right partners and colleagues if you wish to succeed.

Dr. Mosala and his partner also formed an IT company with a few professionals and began looking for acquisition opportunities involving related firms that could be strengthened by such a merger. They also started a professional accounting and consulting service firm.

Dr. Mosala intends to eventually purchase major companies which need to have their operations improved. In the meantime, Dr. Mosala and his cousin have started a bottled water business that they hope to expand into soft drink bottling.

After he graduated and became used to the idea of being called Dr. Mosala, he began to realize that he liked the sound of Professor Mosala even better. With a Ph.D. degree, that door opened up, and he soon gained a position as a lecturer at two business schools. He enjoyed this work very much, and his students became a source of consulting assignments. In addition, he formed relationships with other professional service firms to provide their offerings.

Wanting to advance in his teaching career from being a lecturer to a full professor, he plans to write the necessary academic articles to make that possible during 2009 and has started a master's program in economics, focusing on development and government policy issues. At this point, he still has to write a thesis.

Wanting to share his good fortune with others by being a socially responsible person, Dr. Mosala started a project in his village to improve farming and also sponsors an award in computer science at the University of Lesotho.

As you can see, Dr. Mosala has been following the path that successful CEOs have trodden. It's pretty clear to me that his pursuit of building success in ways that lead to more success will serve him well so that his finest accomplishments are far ahead of him. There is no limit to how much he can achieve.

Are you ready to start applying these lessons for your career?

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