

47 Habits of Highly Successful Employees

What do the most successful people out there—the ones who get promotions, raises, and opportunities seemingly handed to them—know that everyone else doesn't?

Turns out, quite a bit.

We turned to our career experts to bring you a complete guide to how the best of the best approach their work lives. The good news? Every one of these habits is something that you can start doing—today.

1. They Think About the Skills They Need for the Next Job

We all (OK, most of us) try to be awesome at the skills in our job descriptions, but the most successful people also focus on what they'll need to know to succeed in their next jobs. Not sure what skills you should be developing? Check out [career expert Laura Katen's tips](#) for honing in on exactly what to reach for next.

2. They Speak Up in Meetings

Especially if you're in a large meeting, intimidated by the higher-ups there, or don't know much about what's going on, it's easy to sit tight and listen. But the people who get ahead don't wait for permission or an invitation to speak—they make sure everyone in the room knows they have something to contribute. Even if you don't have a suggestion? "Speaking up to advocate for a co-worker's point of view or asking a well thought-out question can go just as far," [says leadership coach Jo Miller](#).

3. They Dress for the Job They Want

You've heard it a thousand times—but it consistently holds true. People who get ahead at work look to those above them and emulate not only the clothes they wear, but the ways in which they present themselves in the office, interact with others, and approach their work.

4. They Get to Know the Higher-Ups

It's pretty hard to get promoted if your boss' boss doesn't know who you are—so make it a point to get to know the higher-ups in your department. Check out [Sara McCord's tips for talking to your boss' boss the right way](#).

5. They Know How to Communicate With Those Higher-Ups

If you've ever been in an executive-level meeting, you know that c-suiters communicate a bit differently than the rest of us. So, if you want to make it there someday, it's key to learn how to talk the talk. Career coach Lea McLeod [gives a few tips for getting started](#).

6. They Don't Panic When They're Caught in the Elevator With a CEO

Instead, they make the most of the opportunity. The good news? [We've got three conversation starters](#) so you'll always be prepared.

7. They Take Charge

When faced with a workplace challenge, a project roadblock, or low team morale, most people shrug and say, “Well, there’s not much I can do about it.” The most successful people, on the other hand, take action.

8. They Look for Leadership Opportunities

Whether it’s offering to lead a project team, volunteering to mentor a junior employee, or taking it upon themselves to train the new interns, people who want to (and do!) get promoted don’t wait for leadership opportunities to come from them—they look around, see where a leader is needed, and jump in.

9. They Make Allies Across the Organization

Most people work hard to impress their bosses. The most successful people work hard to impress everyone from the mail room clerk and receptionist to their peers and superiors—because they know they’re nothing without a team of people on their side.

10. They Give People Their Full Attention

“Listening is one of the top skills employers seek in potential and current employees, and it’s correlated with perceived ability to lead,” [McLeod explains](#). Giving people undivided attention, helping them feel motivated and energized, and showing them that you care about their thoughts and opinions is more powerful than you know.

11. They Stay Professional

Would you want a manager who misses deadlines, forgets to answer emails, and gossips about other employees? Of course not—so if you want to get ahead, you shouldn’t be displaying those behaviors, either.

12. They Show Up on Time

Not just because it’s the nice thing to do, but because it ensures they get a seat at the conference room table, not one that’s crammed in the back of the room.

13. They Think Like Managers, Not Employees

Employees wait to be told what to do—managers think strategically about what needs to be done, and then they do it. Employees do their own job well—managers are committed to the team doing well—so they mentor other employees, pitch in when they’re needed, and go that extra mile if it means the works going to be done better.

And people who get promoted think like managers.

14. They Record Their Accomplishments

Unfortunately, even if your boss generally thinks you do a great job, he or she probably doesn’t keep a running tally of your achievements. And that’s why the most successful people keep track of their own sales numbers, project results, and awesome client feedback. (To get started, we recommend keeping a [“brag folder”](#) in your inbox.)

15. They Communicate Those Accomplishments

To take it one step further, they don't just keep those accomplishments to themselves—they communicate them at regular check-ins, at the end of big projects, and most definitely at their official reviews. (Here are [a few ways to do it](#) without sounding like a jerk.)

16. They Focus on Results, Not Just Activities

Just like you would on a resume, don't just talk about the to-dos you've knocked off your list—talk about the quantitative results of your work. Think: “In last week's vendor meeting, I was able to negotiate a 10% discount, which will save us \$20,000 next year,” versus, “Last week's vendor meeting went great!”

17. They Pay Attention to Who Else is Getting Promoted

The rules of promotions are a bit different every place you go. Some companies reward their top-performing salespeople, others advance those who can smooth-talk their way through any meeting. Even if there's no real pattern, you can learn a lot about what it takes to (eventually) move up at your organization by watching the actions, habits, and accomplishments of others who've been successful.

18. They Don't Compare Themselves to Others

Of course, it's easy to think that just because Tim got a raise after being at the company for a year, you should, too.

Bad idea. You'll make a much better case for advancing within your company by focusing on what you've accomplished—and what you can continue to do in your new role—than whining about how you stack up to your colleagues.

19. They Pitch In

At most companies, there'll be opportunities to join committees or take on responsibilities that aren't necessarily part of your job description: Your company is overhauling its social media procedures and needs a representative from every department to sit on the project team, say, or your office is putting on a major fundraiser and needs someone to coordinate with the event planning company. The most successful people pitch in—so they're always right there where the action is.

20. They Listen to Feedback

Feedback can be tough to take. But top employees have figured out how to take it seriously without taking it personally—and more importantly, how to put it into action. (Here's [how they do it](#).)

21. They Solve Problems

Anyone can drop a complaint into the suggestion box, but the marker of a truly brilliant employee is coming up with solutions to those problems. Becoming a problem solver shows that you care—not only about your own career, but about the long-term health of the business as well.

22. They Identify Inefficiencies

Even if there aren't big problems, there are probably things in your workplace that could be done better or more efficiently. And if you can be the one who identifies those things—as well as the way to fix them? You won't only make your life easier—you'll prove to your boss that you're ready to improve the entire department's operations.

23. They Steer Clear of Gossip

You can and should identify problems within your company, but you should not pontificate about those problems in the break room—which gives the impression that you’re looking for an audience, instead of a solution.

24. But They Don’t Avoid Politics Altogether

Knowing the unofficial rules of your office—how communication happens, who’s on the CEO’s side (and who’s not), which teams move and shake and which stagnate—may be playing the politics game. But it’s a game that will get you ahead. ([Here’s why](#)—and how.)

25. They Keep Tabs on the Business as a Whole

Senior leaders don’t just know what’s happening in their own functional area—they know what’s going on in their business as a whole so they can contribute to the big picture. To get started, set up a Google Alert with your company’s name so you’re always kept up-to-date on what’s happening.

26. They Keep Tabs on Other Parts of the Business

If there’s an area you don’t know much about—like finance, HR, or supply chain—introduce yourself to people in that department and ask if you can shadow them for an afternoon to learn about what they do.

27. They Commit to Learning

Learning about the company, the industry, and the world at large—the most successful people are asking questions, attending conferences and courses, and always working to improve upon their skill set and learn something new.

28. They Stay Positive

“You don’t need to blind every passerby with your pearly whites, but remember that no matter how close your deadline or how heavy your workload, other people will take their cues from you,” says [LearnVest’s Libby Kane](#). “If you’re snapping at co-workers and frowning, they’ll snap and frown right back. Instead, take a breath, put on a smile, and show your boss you appreciate the opportunity.” It’ll go further than you know.

29. They Socialize

Fair or not, bosses promote people they enjoy spending time with (and will enjoy spending a lot more time with). Promotable people work hard from 9 to 5, but they also make a point to make it to happy hour.

30. They Pay Attention to Body Language

Because 93% of what we say has nothing to do with our words. To look like a leader when you speak, “stand up to speak if possible, with feet comfortably apart, shoulders back, chin up, and expansive arms, so that your body language adds credibility to your message,” says Miller. “It works when seated, too; sitting up straight with arms out increases the space you take up, which is a demonstration of power.”

31. They Know How to Pitch Ideas (the Right Way)

Smart people are full of ideas—but brilliant people also have the ability to sell those ideas to everyone else, sharing not only why the idea is a great one, but how it will impact the team and business. [McCord has a few great pointers.](#)

32. They're Comfortable With Pressure

“Start getting comfortable with pressure. In fact, go out of your way to put yourself in uncomfortable situations,” [says Jeff Vijungco](#), vice president of Adobe’s Global Talent organization. “When you do this often enough, you’ll be more immune to pressure when you are stress-tested—like in an impromptu meeting with the CEO.”

33. They Look Cool, Calm, and Collected (Even When They're Not)

When you’re angling for a raise, in the running for a promotion, or just flat-out trying to impress, there’s no doubt your superiors will look at how you handle your workload (translation: stress). So, when you’re crashing on a deadline or tackling a new assignment, it’s important to handle stress in style, with the appearance of an unshakeable, “I got this” attitude. (Here are [a few pro tips](#) for doing just that.)

34. They Don't Over-Apologize

“You may think apologies are a good way to build relationship and express concern for another’s well-being, but they can actually undermine your professional demeanor,” [notes McLeod](#). “In her book, *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office*, Lois Frankel posits, ‘Apologizing for unintentional, low-profile, non-egregious errors erodes our self-confidence, and in turn, the confidence others have in us.’”

35. They Look for Opportunities to Get in Front of Others

How do people get the opportunity to present at conferences, get involved in big projects, or attend the right meetings? They ask for those opportunities (and they never turn them down when they come along).

36. They Don't Worry About Perfection

“I know perfection is an ideal many of us strive to achieve, but when you get down to it, ‘perfect’ rarely comes up in performance reviews or is given as grounds for a promotion,” [says career expert Jennifer Winter](#). What’s more important? Trying new things, being willing to learn and grow, and constantly striving to get to the next level, even if you make a mistake or two along the way.

37. They Own Up to Their Mistakes

Of course, they know how to deal with those mistakes the right way—by apologizing (once), figuring out how to fix what went wrong, and making a plan to make sure it never happens again.

38. They Take Opportunities They're Afraid Of

“When you’re offered a big opportunity, consider it carefully—even if it scares the heck out of you. In the end, high risk often leads to high reward. But if you turn down every opportunity that comes your way, you won’t even have the chance to succeed,” [says Daily Muse writer Avery Augustine](#).

39. They're Not Afraid to Ask for Help

“Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength,” [says Elliott Bell](#), director of marketing of The Muse. “No one got to where they are today without help along the way.”

40. They Don't Say Yes to Everything

Because if they did, they'd never finish what's truly important. "As you go through the day, do frequent reality checks. Stop each hour and quickly ask yourself: Did the last hour contribute to my most important goals?" [says McLeod](#). "If not, vow to make the next 60 minutes better and start again."

41. They Constantly Think About Their Careers

Upwardly mobile people don't let a couple of years go by without really thinking about moving up—where their career is headed is regularly on their mind. "Every year or two, spend some time really thinking about your career," [says career coach Christie Mims](#). "Go out and warm up your network, check out new opportunities, and do some salary comparisons. You make smarter career decisions when you have real data."

42. They Always Know What They Need to Work On

Do you know exactly where you need to grow, your boss' goals for your future, the timing of your next review, the timing of promotions and raises at your company, and who besides your boss you should be impressing? Hint: [You should](#).

43. They Know What They Need to Do Their Best Work

Whether it's a full no-meeting day, a quiet hour in the morning to get focused work done, or regular check-ins with their team, successful people know exactly what they need to get their work done—and they're not afraid to make it happen. (Want to up your own productivity? Sign up for our free "[Hack Your Work Life](#)" class.)

44. They Actually Like Their Jobs

Because, otherwise, what's the point?

45. They Ask for What They Want (and How to Get There)

We're sure there are people out there who've been promoted without asking for it, but a much more certain approach is to tell your manager exactly what you want. Try: "I'm not sure I've shared this before, but I'd really like to make manager level, and I feel I'm more or less ready for the challenge. What can I do to get there?"

46. They Don't Stop Reaching Higher

While a promotion is something to (seriously) celebrate, successful people don't see it as the end goal. They see it as just one step on a path to a long, fulfilling career.

47. They Read The Muse's Daily Newsletter (Obviously)

[Sign up now](#) to get the best tips for how to get ahead at work, delivered to your inbox every morning.