

SUMMARY

HOW SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE THINK

JOHN C. MAXWELL



Summary of “How Successful People Think” by John C. Maxwell

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Changing your mindset can make you successful.

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Introduction

Do you ever feel like you're sleep-walking through your life? It's easy to go through the motions of waking up, going to work, eating, and sleeping, only to find yourself wondering where all the time went and what you did with your day. And the worst part is that for most of us, this cycle repeats on a seemingly endless loop forever. Are you tired of that? Do you ever find yourself wondering what it would be like if your life had turned out differently? If you had a job that you enjoy? If any of these feelings sound like something you've experienced, then it's time for a radical change! It's time to feel the way you do when your iPhone is at 100%: like you're fully charged and ready to go! That's why, through the course of this summary, we're going to explore the mindset that all successful people have in common and how you can cultivate this mindset in your own life.



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Cultivate Big Picture Thinking

How would you describe the attitude with which you start each day? Would you say you start by thinking, “I’m going to be good at my job” or “I’m going to get better at my job?” Are you thinking about how to get through the day? Or are you asking yourself how today’s habits will impact your future? Most of us fall pretty squarely into one of these two categories, so think carefully about which one defines your day to day outlook on life. Because even if you don’t like the answer, the truth is that your answer to these questions will determine both your present and your future success!

That’s because someone with a “be good” attitude just wants to show that he can perform the specifics of his job as required. He’s not really focused on improvement or growth; he just wants to be good-- or maybe even just okay-- at his current job. And that’s never going to put you on the fast track to success. Instead, you’re more likely to remain trapped in the same old unfulfilling job. You won’t accomplish a lot with that attitude and, even worse, you’ll feel as though you’re lacking a sense of purpose and meaning. No one wants to live like that! By contrast, someone who wants to be the best version of themselves is always looking for new opportunities to succeed and excel. So far from being content with where he is in the moment, a person with this attitude is constantly measuring his progress against what he accomplished yesterday and asking himself if he’s better today. Measuring your progress against your own personal best is vastly different from comparing yourself to others and this is another trademark difference in the way successful people think.

It’s easy to get caught up in the petty insecurities and anxieties that arise from comparing yourself to your co-workers. It’s easy to waste time wondering if you’re as smart, as competent, or as likely to get that promotion as Suzie from Marketing. But a successful person knows that you should never waste time comparing yourself to anybody else! In fact, a successful person understands that Suzie’s success doesn’t matter to you because it has absolutely no bearing on your own worth, value, or potential. That’s because

your goal isn't to compete with other people. Your goal isn't to be better than other people. Instead, your goal is to be the very best version of yourself that you can be. So, rather than comparing himself to others or feeling defeated by setbacks, the successful person focuses on self-improvement and views challenges as another gateway to improvement.

If that sounds pretty good to you and you'd like to swap your "be good" attitude for "get better," the good news is that the human brain is highly adaptable. In fact, it's pretty easy to train yourself into developing better habits! Here's how: start by relinquishing your fear of mistakes. We're all a little bit afraid of looking foolish or messing up, but studies show that the most successful people are those who freely and openly acknowledge their capacity for making mistakes. And in doing so, they actually make themselves less likely to mess up because they've removed the crippling fear factor that often causes people to make sloppy mistakes.

Another healthy habit is being willing to ask for help. Often, we want to look like we have it all together and we know what we're doing on our own, so we're afraid to be vulnerable enough to ask for help. In this case, the answer is as simple as, "Stop being afraid to look silly!" If your focus is on growing and improving in your personal and professional life alike, then you'll realize that not knowing something is an opportunity to learn! So, don't be afraid to ask someone else for advice; chances are, they'll be happy to let you learn from them!



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Never Stop Learning

As you probably guessed from the previous chapter, learning is essential for success! And that's why this chapter is entirely devoted to the benefits of learning. Successful people understand that, in order to be successful, you must constantly adapt. Because as you adapt, you learn what does and doesn't work. You learn to reject unhealthy thoughts and habits and replace them with better ones. So, in this chapter, we'll take a closer look at some of the most important lessons you should learn if you want to be successful.

The author observes that thinking outside the box is one of the most vital ingredients for anyone's success. No matter what your goals are, no matter what industry you work in, thinking outside the box is crucial to your personal development and improvement. But it can also be one of the hardest mindsets to cultivate. That's because we spend the first eighteen years of our lives learning to conform to society. We learn, for example, to be quiet and respectful of others when they are speaking. We learn not to be know-it-alls or show-offs or tattle-tales. And as a result of this teaching, we often allow our ideas and accomplishments to take a back seat to those of others. But the author observes that sometimes, this can harm us. Because although it's important to be respectful and kind and to know when to be quiet, it's also important to know when to speak up. In other words, we have to know when to go with the flow and when to challenge the status quo.

Knowing when to do those things is especially important from a business perspective. Because if you're unable to think outside the box, you might miss out on a lot of opportunities that require creative thinking. For example, let's say that your company is trying to come up with a product that will be the next big thing. You need to think of something that will beat your competitors and be a national sensation. (No pressure at all, right?!) Coming up with an idea like that can be tough, especially if you're not able to think critically and creatively. Faced with that amount of pressure, it might be easy to give in and avoid trying something new. After all, you might get it wrong. You might come up with an idea that nobody likes. And both of those things are totally

possible. But if you never try, one thing is for certain: your competitors will beat you to it. Because sure, you might have had a bad idea or two along the way, but you might have had a great one in the end! But if you never try, you'll never know. And you'll always be beaten by the people who do keep trying, who aren't afraid of failure, and who push on to develop those awesome ideas. So, in the end, your business will likely become obsolete.

No one wants that! And that's why the author argues that our mindsets need an update. If we want to survive in the ever-changing business world, our thought processes will need a complete overhaul. And that means learning new ways of thinking and new strategies. Adopting an entirely new mindset might be tough, but the author believes that it's absolutely vital for survival.

To help you adopt that new mindset, the author posits that you must first get your emotions under control. Human beings naturally fear what they do not understand. It's an evolutionary defense mechanism that has helped us survive and evolve. But while this might have been helpful to our neanderthal ancestors, today, it often means that we're hesitant to try new things. That's usually because we're afraid of leaping into the unknown. We worry that we'll get it wrong, that we'll fail, or that we'll look silly. In fact, sometimes we're so afraid that we just never try anything new at all! And that's why you have to get your emotions under control if you want to learn new things.

So, how do you do it? Well, the first step is to admit that failure can be an opportunity. No one likes to fail or admit that we did something badly, so we often imagine failure to be the worst possible outcome in any situation. But the truth is that failure is an opportunity to learn! Because every time we get something wrong, we have a chance to learn how to get it right. So, if we can start by relinquishing our fear and embracing failure as an opportunity, we'll be on the path to learning new things!



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Successful People Make the Most of Their Potential by Getting Their Priorities in Order

Do you ever feel like your to-do lists have to-do lists? Or like you're drowning under all the planners, organizers, and productivity accessories you buy? You buy them under the assumption that if you can just have the right tools in your tool belt, you'll be able to take control of your life and maximize your productivity. Unfortunately, however, you've probably already noticed that it doesn't work that way. Because all of those tools are exactly that: tools. They're helpful things for you to use in the same way that a tire gauge can help you fix a tire. But, just like a tire gauge, they don't have the power to jump up and magically fix your life for you. Your planner will never check off the items on your to-do list while you sleep. No, sadly, these tools will only work for you if you put in the effort yourself. But that's often easier said than done.

In the digital age, our attention spans are shorter than ever and we have more interruptions than ever. Staying on track with a singular task can feel impossible. The same is true with self-incentivizing. Sure, you could tell yourself, "Get this done and then you can have a cupcake," but we all know that you could just eat a cupcake right now whether you get that task done or not. So, how can you do it? How can you make a plan, stick to it, and truly accomplish your goals? The author believes that prioritizing your tasks is the first key to unlocking your best, healthiest, and most productive life. Forgetting to plan ahead is easy; with the hectic pace of our modern life, it seems like the next week-- or year's!-- workload is upon you in the time it takes to blink. But if you want to stay on top of your schedule instead of letting it roll over you, Pozen believes that planning ahead is crucial.

So, how can you plan effectively? One great strategy is to organize and categorize the types of things you're planning for. For example, there is a world of difference between planning for next week's board meeting and planning a change of career. That's why the author recommends categorizing your plans in terms of "aims," "objectives," and "targets." You can think of

“aims” as broad, big issues that have to do with your career. For example, if you wanted to expand your business and open a new, second branch, this would be an aim and you would likely be strategizing that aim over a period of several years. Therefore, an aim is very different from an objective, which might take anywhere from a few months to a couple of years to accomplish. A good example of an objective might be starting an internship at your company. Lastly, targets are smaller tasks that have to do with the here and now. Targets typically take under two months to accomplish, so they’re more immediate goals like completing your paperwork or designing an ad campaign. And because your targets and objectives are more likely to be the stuff of your everyday life, it’s important that you remember to stay on top of them and schedule them appropriately.

For example, if you have a mountain of work to do, try making choices that will help you break that mountain down into small, manageable chunks. Let’s say that you have to read a 50-page document and then design a powerpoint presentation that reflects the information you’ve read. If you consider that task in its entirety, it sounds overwhelming! It will take hours! It’s enough to make you give up and start binge-watching your favorite show on Netflix. But what if you broke that big task down into smaller increments and addressed each one at a time? You can start by reframing your task in your mind and thinking, “I have to read this document first.” If you can do this in a relaxing workspace, preferably with a delicious coffee or tea for a dash of yummy motivation, then it’s easier to focus on one task at a time. And once you’ve accomplished that task, reward yourself with a little break or a cupcake and move on to the next one!



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Final Summary

The author Charles Swindoll once wrote, “I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it.” And the same is true of our approach to success! It’s easy to think that some people are inherently more successful than others, but the author affirms that nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, success is all about your mindset. So, if you want to be more successful, you simply need to discover the right way to think! And the best part is that the success mindset isn’t difficult at all! All you have to do is cultivate big picture thinking, give yourself the freedom to fail, never stop learning, and put your priorities in the correct order. That’s all there is to it!



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