

The Top-Grade Performer



During any crisis period— and in many respects, 2020 was the worst we have ever seen, business-wise—it's pretty easy to separate the top performers and everyone else. But what's surprising is that this crisis has increased the divide between A+ players and A- players. There were so many challenges, so much work, and all of it coming so fast that it created many opportunities to step up. It led to a dramatic rise in the pace and amount of work that was expected to be completed in a day. There's the axiom of 80/20, that 80 percent of an organization's overall success is attributable to just 20 percent of its employees. This period pushed that figure to 90/10. The A+ players had an incredible year and are keeping that breakneck pace in 2021. Others did well but did not capitalize at the same level, and it was noticed.

While other very good players may go five steps forward and take two steps back, A+ players only go forward. They have optimized their professional habits to work both very smart and very hard. After working with many of these very top performers during these unprecedented times, I've observed that they shine in three key areas.

MASTERING THE MINDSET

Whether it was fixing a sudden slowdown in the supply chain, plugging financial holes, managing sick, anxious employees, or any of the myriad challenges that this pandemic threw at them, A+ performers just did not get fazed. They recognized the overwhelming nature of these issues but were not swayed or frustrated by the struggle. They weren't distracted by the "time sucks" that can entice us all, and tackled the problems that needed to be addressed. If they made mistakes, they didn't waste time blaming others. They stayed accountable to themselves and made others accountable for their own work.

These very top performers weren't machines. Fatigue was always a factor, but they pushed their bodies and minds, building their endurance.

And yet they also knew when they were truly exhausted, giving themselves breaks critical to both themselves and their organizations.

GETTING STUFF DONE

All top performers are accomplished, but during the pandemic, the A+ performers were successful at scale. They fixed multiple catastrophic problems in a short period of time. They did this with a smart decision-making process. They spent some time on direction and strategy to figure out how to get projects moving in the right direction at full speed. Then they acted decisively. They delegated well and didn't let issues linger. They gave feedback to help their colleagues. When something wasn't working, they admitted it and made adjustments quickly.

And while process was important, A+ers prioritized work. They did their hard to-dos first, not last. This was critical, because most people do their easy to-dos first, leaving "no time" for

the hard ones. Then they have a list of excuses for why the hard ones don't get done, complaining that they are just too busy to get to them. When you do the hard jobs first, you always find time to do the easy ones.

MANAGING BAD HABITS

There were plenty of times during the last 18 months when it was easy to avoid conflict or procrastinate on hard problems or overthink or be overly competitive. A+ players had these weaknesses as much as everyone else did. The big difference is that they were always aware of their limitations and didn't let those sabotage themselves or others. Attribute that to their ability to focus on the tasks at hand and block out the noise.

A+ players are impressive and are changing the landscape of work as we know it. By taking a page out of these peak performers' playbook, any solid performer can navigate heavy workloads with more focus and purpose to rise to new heights. ▀

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