

10 bad habits of unsuccessful people

Instead of looking for traits to emulate, focus on ones to avoid. The first successful person I ever met — truly successful, with accomplishments I admired and ambition I strove to emulate — was an entrepreneur in his forties, a client of mine in the first real business I'd ever started. I was 24 and eager to learn; he was constantly cheerful and had more money than he could count.

We became close friends, and he told me eventually that he'd lost his wife, the love of his life, a half-decade before we met — the kind of loss, he said, that you never get over. It was a story that made his positive outlook seem all the more remarkable to me: here was someone who had been through tragedy, and yet still made it a priority to do good things with his time and his money. He seemed to truly care about other people.

Often, he'd tell me what he saw as the secret to his success: "I just try to avoid being unsuccessful," he said. He studied what made someone (avoidably) unhappy, broke, or unmotivated — and then he avoided making the same mistakes.

I knew in my bones that he was right. Too often, we adopt a plug-and-play attitude: "If I do x, I'll be successful." But if success was easy and predictable,

we wouldn't be seeking advice on how to achieve it. Instead of studying what's worked for other people, I've followed my friend's advice, paying close attention to the habits that hold people back from reaching their goals.

Here are 10 of the most common self-imposed barriers. If you find yourself bumping up against one, use them as a signal to reevaluate, reflect, and reverse course.

Always being distracted

In his book *Essentialism*, time-management consultant Greg McKeown describes running into a former classmate who was between jobs and looking for career advice. Midway through the conversation, the man looked down at his phone and began typing.

"Ten seconds went by," McKeown recounts. "Then 20. I simply stood there as he continued to text away furiously." After a couple minutes, he gave up and walked away.

I think of this story whenever I feel pulled in many different directions, as a way of reminding myself to focus on the moment I'm in and the people I'm with. If that old classmate of McKeown's had reminded himself the same thing, he might have made a connection or gotten a tip that led him to a job.

Only talking the talk

"I'm training for a marathon." "I'm starting a business." You know what's better than announcing something on social media? Doing it.

In his 2010 [TED talk](#), "Keep Your Goals to Yourself," entrepreneur Derek Sivers argued that broadcasting your plans can be counterproductive rather than motivating. People will often applaud you simply for stating your intention, he said, and somewhat counterintuitively, that applause can sap your will to actually follow through on the plans you've just outlined.

"When you tell someone your goal and they acknowledge it, psychologists have found that it's called a 'social reality,'" Sivers explained in his talk. "The mind is kind of tricked into feeling that it's already done. And then because you've felt that satisfaction, you're less motivated to do the actual hard work necessary."

There's nothing wrong with sharing your joy. But try to hold your tongue until you've got good news, not just good intentions.

Spending time with the wrong people

The friends you surround yourself with can encourage you to be your best self, or they can bring out your worst tendencies. Do you have a goal to get healthier, for example? Hang out with people who will encourage you to make those changes in your life. Want to utterly fail in that goal? Spend time with ones who revel in their own bad habits. People feed off each other's energy.

Always focusing on the negative

As my friend showed me years ago when he told me about his grief, you can focus on the positive without pretending life is easy. You can have a realistic perspective without pointing out the bad in everything you see.

We all know the person who complains about everything. "Ugh, it poured this morning, and my shoes got soaked." Yes, that sucks. No, you can't change the weather. You can put on a new pair of shoes.

Having a bad day is okay — everyone gets irritable once in a while. But if you always hate everything, you're having a bad life. It's that simple.

Procrastinating

In college, I once asked a professor to extend a deadline for an essay. His reply: "I'm perfectly happy to extend your deadline by a week. The only thing I'm asking you is, will your essay be better if you hand it in a week from now?"

We both knew the answer was "no." I worked my ass off to finish it on time.

Only delay things when you'll do a better job with that extra time. Do it now, or do it better later.

Not listening to others

Being a good listener can steer you in the right direction, but in the long term, it also helps you maintain close valuable relationships.

Everyone can give a hug, but not everybody calls just to ask, "How are you?" Put in the time. Ask, listen, care, repeat.

Giving in to laziness

We all have moments where we're tempted to cancel plans. Sometimes, the effort of leaving the house can feel Herculean, even for something "fun."

But new and novel experiences are what makes life beautiful. When you give in to laziness, you're not fully participating in your own life — which also isn't fair to your friends, family, partner, and the other people who want to share it with you.

Not being curious

It used to be that if your dad was a farmer — and you were a man — you became a farmer. Women didn't get to choose what they wanted to be. And the ability to learn things beyond your immediate world was limited, if not impossible.

Today, access to information is easier than it's ever been. Obviously, there are still structural barriers that limit what people can do, but those who take advantage of this access to information — who read books, who ask questions, who follow their curiosity — have more power to envision, and shape, their futures. It's hard to dream about what you don't know.

Not being nice

Just be a nice person. If you have difficulty defining what a "nice person" is, you're likely a jerk.

Giving up

"The most certain way to succeed," Thomas Edison once said, "is always to try just one more time." Success, however you define it, never came from not trying. And often, it comes after first failing time and time again.

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