

SUCCESSFUL EXECUTIVES ARE DIFFERENT

Successful executives behave differently than most people. Yes, they tend to relish being in charge and enjoy the financial reward that comes with success. But if you ask if their primary goal is to have power and money, most would state their main focus is to be really good at what is important or meaningful to them. Money and power are seen more as the rewards for a job well done.

PSP has studied corporate executives for some 60 years, and we have found that the biggest difference separating successful executives from others is their behavioral competencies.

Executives Behave Differently

How do they behave differently? First of all, they adapt to the world, rather than expect the world to adapt to them. They tend to be more objective than most people, seeing things as they are and not only as they want them to be. They recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their employees and make adjustments accordingly. They also seek to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and have a commitment to continuous learning to enhance their strengths and shore up their weaker areas. While independent, they are not afraid to seek help from others.

Successful executives tend to be at least moderate risk-takers and recognize that failure may be a consequence. Indeed, they are inclined to push themselves out of their comfort zone, recognizing that success comes from not being satisfied with the status quo. They accept the fact that there will be obstacles and mistakes. When unexpected consequences do happen, they learn what they can from the situation, move on, and do not dwell on problems or lament lost opportunities. They see results, whether positive or negative, as feedback rather than as an end point.

While very goal and achievement oriented, successful executives recognize the value of persistence and realize that success is not linear. They handle stress well and are able to keep their perspective when there are problems, accepting responsibility and seldom blaming others. They tend to focus on the present and future, rather than the past. They have good resilience, with the ability to bounce back from problems.

While successful executives are assertive, they are not always the most outgoing nor do they always need to be the center of attention. They do, however, have good people skills and recognize the importance of social networking. As a rule, they can be tolerant and understanding, seeing the importance of building strong relationships with different constituencies. Although not all are understanding, given the current business culture, they are developing greater emotional intelligence. They know when to keep the pressure on and when to provide support and encouragement. They know the importance of, and are skilled in, gaining the trust and support of others for organizational change.

Successful executives are committed continuous learners and recognize the importance of steadily improving themselves and their organizations. While not all are strong analytically, most are readers and see the importance of staying informed. They tend to have strong verbal skills. They are involved in numerous activities, with the energy and drive to keep going both day and evening, often even into the weekends.

Longitudinal Studies

At PSP, we have had the opportunity to assess the skills and attributes of successful executives longitudinally, watching a diverse group of younger managers, including women and minorities, grow into executive roles. We also have coached and

developed executives who have already reached senior levels. These successful individuals seek to grow and develop in order to meet their present and future job challenges all the way to the end of their careers. They do not take their success for granted and, while many could retire with ample freedom and money, more often than not they continue to work. They have developed a lifelong behavioral pattern to perform at their best, and that is difficult to turn off.

Recognizing these behavioral patterns in young managers can help companies groom future executive talent. Spotting these patterns in more seasoned executives can enable companies to tap existing talent from the outside when it is needed.

Successful executives are different and this difference helps them to be successful. As their behaviors are modeled within the organization, they also help their companies to succeed.

