

E is for Exceptional

Rob Yeung

The science and stories of success

The inventor Thomas Edison famously quipped that genius was 99 per cent perspiration and only 1 per cent inspiration. Every successful person I've ever interviewed talked about the perspiration they put in. Successful people work hard. But people who work hard don't always succeed. Because there's a big difference between working long, hard hours and working on the *right* things. And that's what this book is about: the often subtle, yet crucial differences that separate the best from the rest.

As you can imagine, the study of success has attracted quite a few researchers over the years. Scientists all over the globe have looked at the behaviours and techniques that separate high-flying individuals from the rest. Without the backing of scientific evidence, we risk wandering into the realm of self-help quacks and fraudsters.⁷ So throughout the book I shall also draw on world-class research to demonstrate what works and what doesn't.

I've also listened to many stories of success first-hand. So I shall share some of these narratives too. I've changed a few of the names of people I interviewed. Occasionally they revealed sensitive information. In other cases, large organisations decided that they didn't want to single people out for special treatment. By allowing one person to be mentioned as a high achiever, they feared that other colleagues who didn't get profiled may feel left out and not so special. Thankfully, many of the entrepreneurs I interviewed own their businesses and make their own rules. So I've been able to use real names and details more often than not.

I can't promise startling secrets that guarantee your success. However, I will use scientific evidence and swirl in stories of successful people to construct a picture of what separates exceptional people from the rest to help you achieve more in life.

The capabilities of exceptional people

Many consultants and academics like to use the term 'competencies' to describe the skills and behaviours of successful people. But I don't like the word. Who only wants to be *competent*? Surely we want to be extraordinary, outstanding, exceptional?

I prefer to describe the different categories of behaviours as 'capabilities', because these are skills that we are all capable of. So, broadly speaking, what does distinguish exceptional people from everybody else? In today's ever more hectic, multicultural, technologically advanced world, eight broad capabilities seem to make the difference:

- **Awe.** Exceptional people aren't just born more creative – they fuel their imaginations by actively pursuing new experiences and consciously staying open-minded about, or 'in awe' of, new possibilities. Rather than assuming they know enough about their field or industry, they remain curious and realise that there is always more to learn and consider.
- **Cherishing.** We all have built-in abilities that allow us to sense how other people might be feeling, or what they might be thinking. But we need to make a conscious effort to use these skills – they don't always come automatically. High-performing individuals take the time to listen and understand other people's feelings and their perspectives because it helps them to smooth over any interpersonal differences and influence and persuade others.

- **Authenticity.** High performers in any field routinely say that they love what they do. Authenticity is the ability to discover our own motivations and our sometimes hidden strengths, and then to find both work and personal situations that allow us to feel fulfilled and ‘alive’. People who feel passionate every day give themselves the best shot at achieving extraordinary results.
- **Centredness.** High achievers have the ability to remain focused and motivated even in the face of extreme adversity. They recover quickly from both personal disappointments and professional catastrophes. By dealing with even toxic emotions such as despair or anger, they restore their emotional equilibrium, which allows them to perform at their best.
- **Connecting.** High-fliers recognise the power that comes from working with others. They value and seek out collaborations, partnerships, teams, networks, and coalitions. Rather than trying to take on everything themselves, they reach out to diverse others, asking for help and building many, many mutually rewarding relationships.
- **Daring.** While many people shy away from failure, exceptional people are ready to chance failure time and again by taking calculated risks. High achievers realise that it’s only through unfettered exploration, taking opportunities when they arise, and making the occasional mistake that they can truly push themselves and achieve outstanding results.
- **Citizenship.** Exceptional people with the skill of Citizenship think about the bigger picture of their work and lives. They consider the broader impact of what they do and how it affects everybody around them. They have integrity and behave ethically and responsibly. And, rather

than thinking only in terms of months and quarters, they think in terms of years and decades – they take the long view.

- **Visioning.** This capability is about creating a balanced vision of the life that we crave to lead. While many people are talented and ambitious, exceptional individuals realise that their visions must encompass not only *what* they want to achieve but *who they want to be* on a day-to-day basis. Because success – not just *being* successful but *feeling* successful and fulfilled – comes from working towards future goals while at the same time savouring day-to-day events.

I shall use scientific evidence to argue that these capabilities already distinguish many iconic people from their less stellar counterparts. And, if anything, I believe that these will become even more indispensable in the near future as global competition and the pace of change continue to increase.

A book to read, a plan to follow

Reading about virtuoso individuals, the skills they possess and the actions they take is no doubt stirring and uplifting. By all means read this book if you wish simply to be entertained.

If you wish to apply the lessons contained within this book, you will have to *use* the book. Based on the research and knowledge we have available, I provide practical tools to help you achieve your goals – whether that's to become a thriving entrepreneur, manager, parent, fund-raiser, whatever. I include 'Over to you' boxes, which are quick opportunities for you to reflect on what you've read or try something that will take no more than a minute.

'Become your best' boxes offer deeper exercises or techniques to try. These take more time, but could help you to become more effective, make better decisions, and move closer towards your goals. Taking the book as a whole, you will find sensible, hype-free advice for achieving your potential in either your life or the lives of those around you.

Shall we get started?

If you are ready to get started then you can buy E is for Exceptional by Rob Yeung at Dymocks stores.