

Career Path: Your Attitude is the Best Predictor of Success

Career Development



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We usually think it is our abilities that determine what we can achieve. Our abilities are, of course, relevant, but I've come to believe that they are not determinant. The reason is that if you want something badly enough, you will find a way to make it happen. You will gather to yourself new abilities, find new paths to achieve your objectives, and enlist others to your cause.

Hiring for attitude

I was running with a friend recently. Among other things, he spent some years working in HR. We were talking about our experiences hiring new employees. I said that for me a person's attitude was the most important criteria in making a good hire. Far more important than their school, where they worked previously, or what projects they worked on. Most of that tells me little about how they'll perform on their new tasks in this new setting.

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A person of average abilities but a superior attitude will outperform a person with great abilities and a poor attitude. And I know which one I want on my team, because I see how they perform in practice.

Because it's important to understand the point, let me elaborate on what I mean by a superior attitude.



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Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

A person with a superior attitude is humble, enthusiastic, and optimistic. They know that they don't know everything they need to, and that they can't yet do everything they'll be asked to do. But they are open to trying new, hard things and figuring out along the way how to do them well. Their optimism is reflected in their volunteering for new projects, but also in their response to challenges. When inevitable setbacks arise, they are not thrown off course or out of balance. They rise to the challenge and find a way to overcome. This attitude makes all the difference between giving up and pushing through to success.

A person with a superior attitude doesn't make excuses for their performance. When they mess up, they acknowledge it. More importantly, you can see they are motivated to learn from their mistakes and to not repeat them. They certainly don't blame others for what happens to them. Even when external circumstances play a role, they focus on what they can control and don't lose time in worrying about what they cannot.

Attitude helps on the journey

I came across a person with an amazingly superior attitude and willingness to put in the hard work necessary for success. This is Nims Purja, the celebrated Nepali climber who smashed a number of mountaineering world records, after serving with the British Armed Forces as a Nepalese Gurkha and

a soldier in the Special Boat Service (SBS) elite special forces unit of the Royal Navy. He describes his feats in the recent book Beyond Possible: One Man, 14 Peaks, and the Mountaineering Achievement of a Lifetime.

Although his physical feats defy many people's comprehension, I was struck most by Nim's descriptions of his attitude along his journey. He set out on a mission to climb all 14 of the world's 8,000 meter peaks in a record time: less than seven months, compared to the prior record of seven *years* and 10 months. Why? He says he wanted to "prove to the world that everything, *anything*, was possible if you dedicated your heart and mind to a plan."

Over and over, he talks about his attitude as being the single most important factor in his success. He repeatedly dealt with skepticism, doubt, and negative emotions by shrugging them off and by reframing each situation to find something positive:

> From an early age, I believed in the power of positive thinking and willed myself through illnesses and chronic ailments.
>
> I believed.... It surrounded me like a force field and I soon learned that with relentless self-belief, anything was possible.
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> Getting angry about the situation wasn't going to help ... remaining emotionally strong was imperative: Flipping a negative event into positive momentum was the only way to remain focused on my primary objective.
>
> I attacked everything with positive thinking.
>
> I never moaned when the going got tough. Instead, I ... led by example, maintaining team morale through hard effort and positive thinking.
>
> Nims Purja

There are many more statements like this, but you get the point – it is Nims's indomitable will, as much as his physical abilities, that got him through his many challenges. Our challenges may not be matters of life and death as when summiting 8,000-meter peaks. But the attitudes we bring to our challenges may be just as determinative of our success.

> Tell yourself you will not only deal with adversity, you welcome the unexpected troubles that are sure to arise.
> Tell yourself you will be stronger, and happier, and better by virtue of all that you do.

Tell yourself you are up to the challenges you face, and that you will do everything necessary to succeed. Tell yourself that you will not only deal with adversity, you welcome the unexpected troubles that are sure to arise. You will think of a way to find the positive in every situation. Tell yourself you will be stronger, and happier, and better by virtue of all that you do.

If you keep telling yourself these things, chances are good others will be telling the stories of your amazing accomplishments for you.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.