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## The more you work, the luckier you get

**Peak performance is the result of dedicated, disciplined and persevering efforts in your field of work**

**By K Jayshankar**



With the exam season on currently, most parents are working overtime in their quest to transform their child into the next Einstein.

For most lower and middle-class parents, the one true inheritance they pass on to their child is education. While it is the dream of every parent that the next generation should do better than them materially, the primary route that they often choose is education. Invariably, the pressure begins to tell on the child and sadly a rebellious child is termed a 'loser' or worse an 'idiot' who cannot cope with the demands of the modern school systems in India. Consequently, the child becomes

fodder for the coaching classes that have mushroomed into India's most prolific, unregulated and recession-proof growth industry.

While 'geniuses' and 'prodigies' are those rare individuals with extraordinary intellectual and creative power, what does it take for an average person to become successful?

One clue lies in the standards that we set for ourselves, often as the result of expectations that others have of us. This self-fulfilling prophecy that works its magic is called the Pygmalion effect and has been used to emphasise that the expectation of an event can actually make the event happen.

This is not only true as far as markets are concerned ('bank runs' begin and succeed when we make the joint run to the bank to withdraw our deposits, thereby causing the bank to fail and proving our prophecy right) but also in the way people (both children and adults) respond to the expectations placed on them. However, it can be asked whether having a Professor Higgins alone can transform Eliza Doolittle to a respectable lady?

Tracing the reasons why people succeed led Malcolm Gladwell to his recent work, *Outliers*. Through his interesting research, Gladwell says that successful people find their work satisfying. He goes on to elaborate that there are three facets that combine to make our work satisfying and meaningful — autonomy, complexity and connection between effort and reward. Gladwell's thesis is that when these three aspects combine, work becomes meaningful and this enjoyment is necessary to create our success.

But stressing that this does not happen in isolation, Gladwell also points out that the key ingredient for success is the fact that one has to apply oneself with 10,000 hours of practice to achieve the level of mastery associated with becoming a world class expert. Quoting the research of neurologist Daniel Levitin, Gladwell notes that 'the brain seems to take this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery'.

Ten thousand hours is roughly 10 years of practice and the dedication necessary to achieve this level is rare and only comes through the effort of a driven individual — be it an obsessed parent or a focused child.

What is it, therefore, that is missing in most of us? Geoffrey Colvin, the well-known business writer in his book *Talent is over-rated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else* emphasizes that the path to greatness lies in hours of intense application. Peak performance is not caused by genetic factors, but the consequence of dedicated, disciplined and persevering efforts – hour after hour, year after year – in your chosen field.

Interestingly, Colvin stresses that what matters is not any kind of hard work; he offers the concept of 'deliberate practice' for success. He defines it as 'activity that's explicitly intended to improve performance that reaches for objectives just beyond one's level of competence, provides feedback on results, and involves high levels of repetition.'. Illustrated with numerous examples of how champions in various fields have walked the path to excellence. Colvin emphasizes that it is only through practice and by closely monitoring progress to learn from mistakes, can one achieve genuine success in the long run.

Truly, to paraphrase the legendary golfer; 'It's a funny thing the more I practice the luckier, I get.

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