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10 Things the Most Successful People Do Every Day

[Eric Barker](#)

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Barker is the author of [Barking Up The Wrong Tree](#)

What habits, tactics and routines do the most successful people use to achieve their earth-shaking accomplishments?

One guy wanted to know. So he talked to over 200 world-class achievers to learn from them.

Now I happen to enjoy interviewing experts to get insights — but if somebody wants to do all the heavy lifting for me, well, I'm not gonna say no. So I figured I should give that guy a call...

[Tim Ferriss](#) is the bestselling author of [The 4-Hour Workweek](#). His new book is [Tools of Titans: The Tactics, Routines, and Habits of Billionaires, Icons, and World-Class Performers](#).

So where to start? How about the activity that almost all of these A-players do first thing every single day?

1) Have A Mindful Morning Ritual

You wake up most mornings and the world is already screaming at you. Emails are coming in asking for everything under the sun, the kids are yelling, and there's stuff you didn't get done yesterday that's still plaguing your mind. And you're still in your jammies.

So you start the day *reacting*. You're not following a plan and getting your goals accomplished, you're desperately responding to all the things the world is throwing at you. But that's not how you get Big Things accomplished in life.

The vast majority of the people Tim talked to have a morning ritual that involved some type of [mindfulness](#). Getting your head straight and your priorities in line so you could face the day doing what matters to you. Here's Tim:

More than 80% of the 200-plus people interviewed have some type of mindfulness practice, typically done in the morning, that helps prepare you to be more self-aware of your thoughts and less emotionally reactive during the day.

Don't worry; it doesn't have to be hard to add to your schedule. In fact, at first it definitely should not be. Here's Tim:

The key is to make it as simple and easy as possible for your first five sessions. This is a critical, critical point, because you need it as an integrated piece of your routine before you get too ambitious. That could mean just one mindful breath in the morning.

That's not too difficult. But you might have a bigger problem. You might feel like you don't have it in you to be a huge success. Maybe you have flaws. Weaknesses. Stuff that holds you back that you've tried to overcome and couldn't. Guess what?

The second most common thing Tim heard addressed exactly that...

2) Turn Your Weaknesses Into Strengths

Nearly everyone Tim spoke to mentioned how they had taken something that was a weakness and — rather than trying to fix it — they leveraged it into a superpower that pushed them forward. Here's Tim:

“Turning weaknesses into competitive advantages” came up repeatedly. “How might I frame my weakness as a strength?” or, “If my weakness had to be a strength, how could I make it a strength?” Many people in the book have used this exact phrasing.

What many of them realized was that their flaws were not scientifically and objectively “bad.” They were qualities that went against the grain or were merely unpopular.

Sound like a vague, inspirational platitude? It's not. Dan Carlin has one of the most popular and respected podcasts out there: Hardcore History. (I'm a huge fan, myself.) But when Dan started out in radio everyone said his manner of speaking was terrible.

Dan didn't fix it. In fact, he deliberately called attention to it and made it his signature style. Here's Tim:

Early on in his radio career he was criticized and coached to fix his verbal style, which tended to peak on meter. He would talk very, very loudly and then talk very, very quietly. It drove people at the radio station nuts, but he turned it into a feature instead of a bug. He had the person introducing him say, “Here comes Dan Carlin, folks. You know, he yells and then he whispers. Here he is.” It became his signature style.

Dan didn't become one of the best in his field by doing what everyone else did. As he told Tim:

Copyright your faults.

(To learn the morning ritual that will keep you happy all day, click [here](#).)

So you're meditating in the morning and taking a Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer approach to your “flaws.” But some people might say that “mindfulness” and “turning weaknesses into strengths” are both clichés. And you know what? They're right. But that's not a problem...

3) Don't Ignore The Clichés

Shay Carl co-founded Maker Studios which sold to [Disney](#) for nearly a billion dollars.

When he wanted to lose weight and get in shape, he didn't focus on the latest diet book, or look for cutting-edge secrets. He realized all he needed to do was stop ignoring the clichés and actually listen to them.

“Eat less and exercise more” is about as trite as they come. It also works. Here's Tim:

The answers are sometimes hidden right in front of us. We've all heard about “crying over spilt milk”, or “eat less, exercise more”, but we never really take a moment to ponder why they became clichés in the first place. Whenever you hear a cliché, actually pay attention. Don't just let it go in one ear and out the other because it's been repeated so often. Many of us fail to achieve our goals not because we lack the capacity, but because we overcomplicate.

(To learn how 5 post-it notes can make you happy, confident and successful, click [here](#).)

So an oldie can be a goodie, always look on the bright side, and all's well that ends well. But sayings are one thing and skills are another. What fundamental abilities do we need to develop that will promote success in any arena?

4) Be Able To Think, To Endure, And To Wait

A lot of people ask super-successful folks what their favorite books are. But Tim asked them which books they give as *gifts* the most often. This got him less idiosyncratic, taste-based answers and more muscular recommendations.

A few books were mentioned over and over like [Sapiens](#), [Poor Charlie's Almanack](#), [Man's Search for Meaning](#), and [Influence](#).

But one of the most frequently gifted books stood out because it contained lessons that we all need to learn. That book was [Siddhartha](#).

The key lessons from [Siddhartha](#) are that to accomplish anything, we need to be skilled at thinking, at enduring, and being patient. Here's Tim:

Siddhartha talks about the benefits of being able to think, being able to fast, and being able to wait. If you were to boil down the skill sets and unique strengths of the people I interviewed, they can almost all be put into one of those three categories. Thinking is being able to critically problem-solve and ask better questions than most people, and therefore get less obvious answers. Then you have “to fast” and that is developing a comfort with discomfort, which is something you can condition yourself to withstand in greater and greater intensities and quantities. Then “to wait” is selective patience. The reason I say selective is that it's possible to marry an impatience for high standards and results on one hand, with an understanding that winning macro-level long games is going to take time.

Thinking, enduring and waiting are critical. They're also hard. What's a tip that's easy? Really easy. In fact, as easy as sleeping...

5) Have An “Overnight Task”

[Reid Hoffman](#) is the billionaire founder of LinkedIn and one of the co-founders of PayPal. When he has a tough problem to crack he doesn't think straining your brain is the only way to go.

He writes the problem down before he goes to bed, lets his subconscious take a stab at it and writes about it some more the next morning. Often, this simple process helps him get the answer he needs. Here's Tim:

He'll pose a question, or a project, or situation in journal form before going to bed, and then allow his subconscious to digest and ruminate on that, and journal first thing in the morning to try to elucidate some type of non-obvious solution.

Sound too easy? I thought the same thing. But another of the “titans” — [Josh Waitzkin](#) (the chess prodigy that the film [Searching for Bobby Fischer](#) is about) said the same thing. He writes his problem down after dinner and reviews it the next morning.

Oh, and another successful guy was a big believer in this, too. His name was Thomas Edison. He once said: “Never go to sleep without a request to your subconscious.”

So far everything we've talked about is very you-you-you focused. And a lot of the people giving advice are self-employed. What tips do they have when you've got a boss who has an awful big say in your success?

How do you please El Jefe, become an expert in your field and gain the help of powerful mentors — all at the same time?

6) Clear The Path

[Ryan Holiday](#), bestselling author of [The Daily Stoic](#), draws a lesson from ancient history that is still very effective today. For thousands of years, the concept of “apprenticeship” was the cornerstone of becoming one of the greats.

But these days we tend to just think about what is and is not in our job description. “These are my duties. I do these things. That's it.”

How people pleased their bosses back then, learned the ropes and got ahead wasn't by checking boxes. They “cleared the path” for their superiors. They anticipated problems, did stuff they weren't required to do, and proactively made things easier for those more experienced than them.

This doesn't just “fulfill the dictates of your job description” it builds trust, loyalty and turns a boss into a mentor. In [Tools of Titans](#), Ryan says this:

It's worth taking a look at the supposed indignities of “serving” someone else. Because in reality, not only is the apprentice model responsible for some of the greatest art in the history of the world — everyone from Michelangelo to Leonardo da Vinci to Benjamin Franklin has been

forced to navigate such a system — but if you're going to be the big deal you think you are going to be, isn't this a rather trivial, temporary imposition? ...It's not about kissing ass. It's not about making someone "look" good. It's about providing the support so that others can "be" good... Clear the path for the people above you and you will eventually create a path for yourself.

Does this work today? Yup. Tim spoke to billionaire [Chris Sacca](#). When Sacca was starting out at [Google](#) he invited himself to high-level meetings and volunteered to take notes for the senior executives. Here's Tim:

Clear the path for the person that you work for and go above and beyond the call of duty to take on additional responsibilities, even if you're not compensated for them... This is exactly what Chris Sacca did when he worked at Google. He would sit in on meetings he wasn't invited to and got to know the entire business and all of the higher-ups by doing this. But he was adding value. He was taking notes in this case.

Helping people isn't always that hard. Now dealing with people, that can be a real challenge at times. What's the right perspective to take so it doesn't make you want to pull your hair out?

7) They're Not Evil. They're Exhausted.

[Alain De Botton](#) is the highly respected author of [How Proust Can Change Your Life](#). He's well-known for having a profound but accessible insight into human affairs that changes the way people think.

De Botton says we're far too inclined to assume people are being difficult because they're mean. No, they're usually tired or anxious or frustrated themselves. Tim summarizes:

Usually they don't have a personal vendetta or agenda against your better interests. It can be really, really simple. They didn't sleep, or a water main burst in their house the day before. They got in an argument with their husband or wife. Don't attribute to malice what can be explained by incompetence, busyness, hunger, or something else. Don't retreat into a story that you're telling yourself; actually observe what is happening in front of you.

Sometimes we're better off if we see people just as big kids who cry when they are hungry or tired. As De Botton explains in [Tools of Titans](#):

When we're handling babies and the baby is kicking and crying, we almost never once say, "That baby's out to get me" or "She's got evil intentions."

So people can be children. But it's important to understand how those people affect you. And that's why we need to talk about chimpanzees...

8) Remember The 5 Chimps Theory

[Naval Ravikant](#) is the CEO and co-founder of [AngelList](#). He's been an early investor in a number of startups you just *might* have heard of — like Twitter and Uber.

But he's not just another Silicon Valley tycoon heavy on the smarts — this guy is *wise*. He knows that we're not as independent as we might like to think. Those around us influence us, whether we realize it or not. And if you're not taking action based on that truth, you'll never be as successful or as happy as you'd like. Naval explains in [Tools of Titans](#):

There's a theory that I call 'the five chimps theory.' In zoology, you can predict the mood and behavior patterns of any chimp by which five chimps they hang out with the most. Choose your five chimps carefully.

Others in the book echoed similar sentiments. Tim sums it up:

The belief, if I were to generalize it, is that you are emotionally, physically, financially, or otherwise the average of the five people you spend the most time with.

Look at the people around you. Are they who you want to be? Because that's probably what you'll become. And by the same token, if you have kids or employees, think about the influence you're having on them. Not your words, but your actions. As mega-bestselling author [Paulo Coelho](#) says in the [book](#):

The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion.

Okay, we've talked about a lot of tricks and tips. But what about deep stuff like values and morals? Would you hate me if I said that there is a time — however brief — to completely set them aside?

9) Know When To Use Your Moral Compass

[Stephen J. Dubner](#) is co-author of the bestseller [Freakonomics](#). Dubner says there's a time to ignore your moral compass.

Just for a minute, mind you. (And don't go stabbing people or encouraging others to stab me in that minute.)

This isn't Machiavellian or evil. It's all about judging before we've done any listening. Values and morals are the things we rarely change, and that's good. But if you always lead with them and don't hear the other side out, guess what? You can't change your mind. In fact, you can't even properly hear what they're saying. They're already "evil" and you didn't even hear them out.

Blaming, pointing fingers and demonizing at the beginning of a conversation or negotiation never helped anyone achieve anything. People so often reply to you with, "You're right. I am evil. You've convinced me." No. No, they don't.

So listen before you judge if you want to achieve anything and especially if you want allies. Here's Tim:

When you want to collaborate and problem-solve, especially when people are polarized on an issue, if you come into it leading with your moral position, it is a huge obstacle to progress. When you're in the idea generation phases, not the idea vetting stage, you should temporarily put away your moral compass. Don't enter the conversation pointing the finger at "guilty" parties and blaming, when you need to be looking for solutions that may involve the help of those parties.

So what if you do all this stuff and you become a success? We've all heard stories of people who burn out or are otherwise still unhappy after big achievements. So what's it take to be a happy successful person?

10) Get A "Jar Of Awesome"

Research shows that [savoring](#) the good times is an incredibly powerful happiness-boosting technique. [Studies](#) show that celebrating those hard-earned achievements is critical to future smiling.

Tim has a personal story about this insight — one that resonated strongly with many of the super-achievers he interviewed.

A while back, a woman Tim was dating noticed something about him. He was really good at achieving things but really bad about *appreciating* them. Once he had finished slaying one dragon he was already eyeing his next fire-breathing target before taking any time to really enjoy his accomplishment.

And so when things didn't go his way, he'd sometimes feel despondent (despite the enormous pile of dragon bones around him.) So she made him a "Jar of Awesome." Here's Tim:

It's a large mason jar with "The Jar of Awesome" written on the side in glittery letters. I was instructed to every day write on a piece of paper something good that happened, to fold it up and then put it in the Jar of Awesome. Then when I am feeling down, unsuccessful, anxious, whatever it might be, to dip into the Jar of Awesome and to reflect on all of these good things that happened so that I'm not wearing Gloomy-Gus-lenses, which I am prone to. As silly as it sounds and how nauseous my 20-year-old self would be to hear me talking about something called "The Jar of Awesome," it became a fantastic tool for raising my happiness set-point maybe 10-20%. It's something that a lot of my fans have started doing with their families. They've started having their kids do it.

Mason jars and glitter are the key to happiness. Tim sums it up:

If you can't enjoy what you have, then you'll never be made happy by anything you get.

Alright, we've learned a lot. Let's round it all up and find out the most surprising thing Tim learned from his 200+ interviews...

Sum Up

Here's some of what Tim learned from talking to a bunch of the most successful people:

- **Have a mindful morning ritual:** Don't start the day reacting. Get focused.
- **Turn weaknesses into strengths:** Channel your inner Rudolph.
- **Don't ignore the clichés:** Many are spoken so often because they work.
- **Be able to think, to endure and to wait:** Far more valuable skills than being good with [Microsoft Excel](#).
- **Have an "overnight task":** Sleep on it. Your muse works while you rest.
- **Clear the path:** Do more than you're required to do and you'll get to do what you want.
- **They're not evil. They're exhausted:** We can all be big kids. They don't hate you. They need a nap.
- **Remember the 5 chimps theory:** You're the average of the 5 people you spend the most time with. Choose wisely.
- **Know when to use your moral compass:** If you start out judging, you won't be listening.
- **Get a "Jar of Awesome":** Don't just achieve. Appreciate.

What was the most surprising thing Tim learned from the "titans" that mere mortals like you and I need to know?

That they're mere mortals too. Here's Tim:

The most surprising thing was realizing that every one of these titans that we see on the magazine covers, and that we think of as doing things that are unattainable by mere mortals, all of these people have many flaws, as we all do. To hear these people talking about their dark periods, their moments of complete self-doubt or when everyone they approached told them they were going to fail or had no talent... They've suffered tremendous setbacks, but they've figured out how to be themselves and to form habits around one or two core strengths. Strengths which often in many, many cases they resisted for a decade or more. A strength that they thought was a weirdness they had to keep hidden.

You too can be titanic. (Not the Titanic. I don't recommend you go head-butt an iceberg and drown.)

Stop denying your inner weirdness. Cultivate it. Accept that you're not perfect. Neither are the people on the magazine covers. You don't need to be superhuman to be super-successful. Now go work hard...

And get a glittery mason jar so you enjoy what you achieve.

[*This article originally appeared on Barking Up The Wrong Tree*](#)