13 major differences between successful and unsuccessful people

By Jacquelyn Smith and Shana Lebowitz of Business Insider

In 2014, Dave Kerpen, chief executive of Likeable Local and author of "The Art of People," received a postcard that illustrated the traits and behaviors of successful and unsuccessful people.

The card came from fellow Entrepreneurs Organization member Andy Bailey, the chief executive of Petra Coach. Although the two CEOs have never met, Kerpen said in a 2014 LinkedIn post that the postcard has had a profound effect on him, "reinforcing values I believe in and reminding me on a daily basis of the attitudes and habits that I know I need to embrace in order to become successful."

The postcard pointed out 16 big differences between successful and unsuccessful people. In this article, we highlight six of our favorites, plus seven others Kerpen shared with us in a recent interview.

Read on to find out what distinguishes superstars from everyone else.

1. Successful people embrace change. Unsuccessful people fear it.

"Embracing change is one of the hardest things a person can do," Kerpen says in his 2014 LinkedIn post.

With the world moving fast and technology accelerating at a rapid speed, it's imperative that we embrace these changes and adapt, rather than fear them, deny them, or hide from them, he says. Successful people are able to do just that.

2. Successful people talk about ideas. Unsuccessful people talk about people.

Instead of gossiping about people — which gets you nowhere - successful people discuss ideas.

"Sharing ideas with others will only make them better," Kerpen says.

3. Successful people accept responsibility for their failures. Unsuccessful people blame others.

Truly successful leaders and businesspeople experience both ups and downs in their lives and careers. But they always accept responsibility for their failures.

He says blaming others solves nothing. "It just puts other people down and absolutely no good comes from it."

4. Successful people give others all the credit for their victories. Unsuccessful people take all the credit from others.

Letting people have their moments to shine motivates them to work harder, and, consequently, makes you look better as a leader or teammate.

5. Successful people want others to succeed. Unsuccessful people secretly hope others fail.

"When you're in an organization with a group of people, in order to be successful, you all have to be successful," Kerpen explains.

That’s why the most successful people don't wish for their demise; they want to see their co-workers succeed and grow.

6. Successful people continuously learn. Unsuccessful people fly by the seat of their pants.
The only way to grow as a person, professional, and leader is to never stop learning.

"You can be a step above your competition and become more flexible because you know more," he writes. "If you just fly by the seat of your pants, you could be passing up opportunities that prevent you from learning (and growing!)."

7. Successful people ask how they can help others. Unsuccessful people ask how they can help themselves.

Kerpen told Business Insider that the best question you can ask when you first meet an influential person isn't, "How can you help me?" but "How can I help you?"

Of course, you should be willing and able to help the person if they take you up on your offer.

But regardless of whether they accept or decline, he says simply offering your assistance makes people feel warmer toward you, and makes them more inclined to help you when you need it.

8. Successful people take a chance and ask for what they want. Unsuccessful people are afraid of failure.

"Rejection and failure are two of the most paralyzing fears," he says, and they often prevent people from asking for what they really want.

"If we don't ask for what we want we think on some level that we can't fail; we can't get rejected," Kerpen explains. "But in reality we're almost guaranteed that we're going to fail because we're not going to get what we want."

In "The Art of People," he gives the example of a salesperson who was failing to win any customers, simply because she wasn't asking directly for their business at the end of her pitch. Once she started being more forthright, her sales increased.

If you want to be successful, your mantra should be something like: "Embrace the fear of no; then ask for the yes."

9. Successful people are always looking to better understand themselves. Unsuccessful people don't care about introspection.

"The first step in learning how to better influence others to get what you want in your career and in life, is to understand yourself," Kerpen writes in the book.

Specifically, he says you should understand your unconscious motivations, what shifts your mood, and how you best interact with others.

If you're looking to learn more about yourself, Kerpen recommends the Enneagram assessment, cowritten by Mario Sikora. The assessment divides people into nine categories, including those who strive to be connected and those who strive to be detached. (You can find the Enneagram in Sikora's book, "Awareness to Action," or in "The Art of People.")

10. Successful people listen first and never stop listening. Unsuccessful people talk too much.

Kerpen says the single most important and underrated skill in business, social media, and life in general is listening.
It's hard to do, he said, because when we get excited about our ideas, all we want to do is talk about them. But the less we talk, the easier it is to persuade other people to like those ideas — and to like us.

Kerpen writes: "Listening and letting people talk is key to winning them over in life, in business, and in all human relationships."

11. Successful people are vulnerable and transparent. Unsuccessful people are protected and secretive.

In the book, Kerpen writes that we learn from an early age that crying, and showing emotion in general, is a sign of weakness.

Yet he himself experienced firsthand the power that comes from letting yourself be vulnerable. At a management retreat for Likeable Media's executive team, Kerpen asked everyone to share the most difficult experiences they'd ever had and what they learned from them.

Several people, including Kerpen himself, ended up crying, and as a result they felt "superconnected as a group."

Kerpen writes: As it turns out, sincerely powerful emotions - especially those powerful enough to cause tears - are quite influential in connecting with other people. If you can get yourself to experience a level of vulnerability with someone to the point where you're moved to tears, you will be able to relate to that person - and he or she can relate to you - on a much deeper level.

12. Successful people keep a positive attitude. Unsuccessful people get negative too often.

Kerpen writes in the book that a positive attitude is contagious, especially when it comes from a leader.

At a conference he attended more than a decade ago, one of the speakers recommended that people answer, "Fantastic!" instead of something lukewarm like "fine" when someone asks, "How are you?"

Kerpen writes: The speaker "claimed that by using this word, you'll attract whoever you're talking to and make that person want to be around you, because no matter how anyone else is feeling, fantastic is probably better, and who wouldn't want to feel fantastic?"

13. Successful people are committed to gratitude and acts of kindness. Unsuccessful people put themselves first.

Kerpen concludes "The Art of People" by revealing the ultimate paradox, as explained by his wife: "The secret to getting everything you want at work and in life is treating people well, not trying to get everything you want."

In other words, nice guys finish first, he says.

Here's an example of how being nice may have helped Kerpen's career: After meeting with a venture capitalist named Rich, Kerpen sent him a bonsai tree as a way of thanking him for his time. Unfortunately, before he even received the bonsai, Rich decided not to invest in Kerpen's business. Once the bonsai arrived, however, Rich moved to introduce Kerpen to another VC who might be a better fit, and that second VC ended up investing in Kerpen's business.