The Self-Mastery Secrets Of CEOs

We can only control what we control. That seemingly simple idea can yield big results.

"The hardest victory is the victory over self."
- Aristotle
CEOs are different people than most, according to a recent survey of about 1,000 top leaders in the U.S. by John R. Graham, Campbell R. Harvey, and Manju Puri of Duke University. While 64% of the general population can be described as "risk-averse," only 9.8% of CEOs fall into that category. Moreover, 80% of CEOs are optimistic and proactive—a number also those findings make complete sense. Effective leaders can't be afraid to make tough choices—and must be able to envision successful outcomes. And one more key trait they need to have in place is self-mastery.

We can only control what we control. Overall economic conditions and political movements are beyond our individual control. Laws and taxes are also unchangeable. Nor can we expect to fully control other people's opinions of us—or whether they choose to treat us fairly or unfairly.

What we can control, however, is ourselves—and that doesn't mean just how we react to all of the above. No, what we really should work on controlling is the pace of our own growth and development, as well as our approach to each day of our lives. Instead of accepting where we are in life, we can put self-mastery into action—and be as proactive as possible to create the kind of success we want to experience in our lives.

The business greats—people like Jack Welch and
Richard Branson—all display self-mastery on a daily basis. They have focus, motivation, and the passion to constantly seek to move themselves and their enterprises forward. Their success and fame can't be chalked up to luck or coincidence—because their ongoing fortune is a consistent effect of their self-mastery.

The late, great Stephen Covey perhaps summed up self-mastery best in his mammoth best-seller, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: "The ability to subordinate an impulse to a value is the essence of the proactive person."

In other words, when we exchange what we want to do now for what we want to achieve later, we display the most powerful aspects of self-mastery. We demonstrate the discipline that prepares us for success. We can't change our future and our outcomes until we change ourselves.

Here are a few important ways in which you can harness your own individual power—and work toward being, as the old Seinfeld classic episode had it, "master of your domain."

**CREATE CONCRETE GOALS**
If you don't know where you're going, how can you steer yourself in the right direction? When you are able to brainstorm challenging but realistic objectives that you're excited about achieving, you're motivated to do what it takes to attain them.
Without these kinds of goals in place, self-mastery often seems senseless. When we do have a desired destination in mind, we're more able to channel our
passion and energy to reach it.

MOLD YOUR EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES
We can't completely change who we are; we all have certain traits, talents, and dispositions that we're born with. However, we can reprogram and transform our basic "circuitry" so we can be as proactive and productive as possible. Studies show that up to half of our happiness potential is directly under our control—so make the most of what you have and greet each day with a positive attitude and a strong plan.

FIND YOUR FOCUS
You can have a wonderful goal and an amazing attitude—and still wander through your days not getting any closer to what you want out of life. That's why focus is important. When you drill down on what you need to actually do to create a successful outcome, you actually advance yourself and your business ambitions.

INCREASE YOUR WILLPOWER

Willpower is an essential element of leadership. If a leader shows strength in avoiding impulsive and destructive behavior, he or she inspires followers to do likewise. Temptation, of course, is always the arch-enemy of willpower—but the more we fight temptation and show self-restraint, the more we make self-mastery an ingrained part of our DNA, and the closer we get to our goals.

The very traits that cause CEOs to be successful—
being unafraid to take a risk and being overly positive about the future—can also lead to self-indulgence and disaster. Self-mastery prevents that from happening. We should always keep a firm hand on the wheel of our own personal behavior, especially when our success takes us into the fast lane. That's how we make sure we win the race.

[Image: Flickr user Ian Sane]
One writer puts it bluntly: "Being awesome and waiting around for recruiters to notice isn’t enough." Here’s what to do instead.

[Source photo: Peter Milne, Motion Picture Directing; The Facts and Theories of the Newest Art via Wikimedia Commons]

**Ever wonder how some people seem to be** swimming in interviews and job offers, even though you never hear about them talking about pounding the job-hunt pavement?

It’s totally annoying, right?

I’ll let you in on their secret: They’re still hustling,
just not in the "here’s my resume and cover letter" way everybody else does. When you see a friend steeped in opportunities, it’s safe to assume she’s been doing some creative behind-the-scenes work to get noticed by people who can help her build her career.

If you're tired of sending out resumes and hoping for the best, try one of these approaches on for size.

1. MAKE SOME NOISE WITH GREAT CONTENT
Establishing yourself as a voice in your field is an awesome way to be noticed by influential companies (and people) in your industry. Call it thought leadership; call it "authority marketing."
Positioning yourself as someone who has incredibly useful ideas—and is ready to share them—is a surefire way to attract interest.

And don’t worry, you don’t have to be a writer to make this trick work for you. Many people with published articles or interesting blogs aren’t operating alone. They bounce ideas off more experienced friends or team up with freelance editors to make sure their stuff is top quality. Sneaky? Some might say so, but others would probably call that very smart—look where it gets them!

Once you have a few pieces of content you love, load them onto your personal
website's blog or publish them on your LinkedIn profile to establish a track record. Then, if you want bonus points, start pitching your best ideas to relevant press outlets. Shoot for publications favored by leaders in your industry. Before too long, you'll have a growing reputation and the emails requesting chats over coffee will start trickling in.

Hint: Making noise for yourself with great content works especially well when you want to branch out into new industries. It's the perfect chance to build your credibility and show that you're not a one-trick pony.

2. STOP WAITING FOR RECRUITERS TO NOTICE YOU
I've always loved Steve Martin's advice: "Be so good they can't ignore you." His words totally capture the way you should be thinking if you want to avoid soul-crushing job application portals. That's because polishing up the elements of your brand, like your LinkedIn profile, is only half the battle. Translation: Being awesome and waiting around for recruiters to notice isn't enough.

Think of it this way: Would you rather attempt to stand out from a list of 10 candidates within a recruiter's LinkedIn search results, or get a decision-maker to focus on you alone so you can wow him or from there?

Stop being passive and reach out to top recruiters in your industry. Seriously! Try a note like this:
Hi Herman,

I’m looking to use my 10 years of experience managing agencies and building digital products for brands like Carmex, Sharpie, and Scotch with a local company when I move to Dallas this fall.

Teams like those at BuzzShift, JDM Digital, and Boxcar Creative stand out to me because of their approach to translating data into creative campaigns for their clients.

If my current direction and the experience on the attached resume align with the needs of one of your clients, I’d love the chance to connect over the phone to share more about my background.

Best,
Lois

Remember: It’s all about initiating a conversation. You've already got the whole “can’t ignore you” part on lockdown with a strong personal brand, so you're sure to get some responses that don't involve clicking a "Submit Applicant" button in no time.

3. GET NOTICED WITH A LITTLE "WINK MARKETING"
Confession: When I wanted to write for The Muse, I didn’t pitch the editorial team outright. Instead, I tried to put myself on their radar before reaching out with my first article idea. I shared, liked, and commented on the content they’d written or ideas they tweeted.

My actions were small and nuanced, like the wink of an

Would you
eye, but after a few weeks, a
member of the team
actually reached out to me
before I’d had a chance to
submit my first article idea.
She said she loved my blog
(see? Great content works!),
and asked if I’d consider
penning an article?

The rest is history.

Wink marketing is a killer
way to build relationships
in the digital realm. It’s also
the happy medium between
waiting around and the direct outreach method I
outlined above.

Let’s say there is a recruiter you weren’t comfortable
contacting directly. You could follow her on Twitter
one day, share one of her job postings with your
LinkedIn network later that week, and comment on
her posts the next. Before too long, she’ll be curious
about you and unable to resist poking around your
knock ’em dead web presence. Once she does, it’s
prime time to officially introduce yourself.

You can wink market yourself to just about anyone
you’re hoping to have a chat with: Potential
mentors, professionals with the job title you crave,
and decision-makers of all kinds. Just bear in mind
that the more noteworthy the person or company,
the harder they might be to connect with.
These approaches take a little time. They're the "long game" as far as job hunting goes. But when you add up the time you might spend applying to a zillion online openings and hearing nothing back, backdoor approaches to landing interviews actually save you time in the long run. Start creating interesting things and drawing attention to them today so that there are opportunities waiting for you when you’re ready for your next career pivot.

*This article originally appeared on The Daily Muse and is reprinted with permission.*