

1. Winners focus on themselves in class (their own abilities and on what they can control) instead of comparing themselves to other students who may be more capable.

Consider an analogy: An achiever working out in a gym wouldn't let the most muscular guy or the most ripped girl impact his own levels of motivation. Why? Because it's understood that everyone's at the gym to maximize their own varying potential.

You've got skinny people, overweight people, those with big upper bodies but small calves, etc. They're all there working hard to improve themselves.

The exact mindset should carry over to the classroom. It's also a place where everyone's at different levels of development so no one should be concerned with anything other than their own efforts and potential. What's the point since we all possess different strengths and weaknesses?

2. Winners in school view mistakes in a positive light—unlike most of us, they actually value them.

You've probably seen examples of this play out in class. Students serious about learning and growing, may on occasion, ask questions that seem obvious to others or, at times, give answers that are way off target. But they refuse to change their ways, recognizing that gaining knowledge in the end is more important than any goof-up along the way.

Then there are those individuals you know who don't say much of anything in class. They are hesitant to speak up, partly because they are afraid of being wrong. And due to this fear of sounding stupid, they choose to take on a powerless role of bystander.

I wish these students would start seeing things through different lenses; they need to recognize that in learning and living, mistakes are normal—not to mention necessary. Mistakes are something to learn from, not something to beat yourself up over.

3. Winning students understand that taking risks has always been a requirement for one of life's ultimate pursuits: discovering the greatness within.

A big risk can range anywhere from raising your hand in class to going after the lead role in a play; it depends completely on the individual. When you do follow through in the face of fear and uncertainty, you do automatically grow and evolve as a person.

I told my students that they were on the right path if, from time to time, they were being criticized—even laughed at; if they were unsure and nervous; and if they were floundering through new experiences. Consequently, their motto developed into, "Let's try it. What's the worst thing that could happen?"

Middle/High school offers each of you a fresh start (new building, new teachers, new classes), so make taking positive risks there a new part of your approach, a new part of you.

4. Winners search for a bright side in school and life situations.

If they fail a test, for example, or if they don't do as well as they're used to, they don't give up and stop trying. They respond by saying, "Okay, this is a wake-up call. I've got to get more serious about taking notes, asking questions, studying in advance..." Simply put, they make a point of turning negatives into positives.

5. Winners learn from others.

Try this experiment in class. The next few times a teacher calls on another student, pay close attention to how you react. Do you tune in or tune out to the ensuing exchange? Does it have anything to do with the judgments you have of the other person? For example, “He just likes to hear himself talk” or “She thinks she knows it all.”

I can tell you from experience that many young people choose to tune out. They haven’t recognized yet how much there is to learn from others’ viewpoints and questions—even of classmates they may not like.

Whatever your career is, you have to be open to learning from others—bosses, co-workers, customers, and competitors—in order to stay on and get ahead. Winners understand this and tune in to every exchange in class.

6. Winning students know to search out the good in all their teachers.

When you focus on a teacher’s positive qualities, you become a more receptive and higher-achieving student, and class becomes more enjoyable for everyone. It works the same way in life. When you focus on the positive qualities of your parents, your home becomes a more positive, peaceful place. And when you focus on the positive qualities of your friends, you become more loyal and fun to hang out with.

I’ll stop here to say that if some of you are starting to worry about not matching all or even any of the winner’s descriptions, don’t worry too much. Why? Because you’re still young, and when you’re young as a Spanish proverb explains, habits and attitudes are like cobwebs. They can be broken with a simple swipe of the hand, just a small amount of effort. But as you get older, habits and attitudes become more like steel cables, meaning no matter how hard you try, you’re not likely to break ’em.

7. Winners understand that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra. So they make a habit of going the extra mile—even when they don’t feel like it.

Doing something despite the fact you don’t want to defines self-discipline—the trait every successful person on the planet possesses.

8. Winners get started on a report or project the same day it’s assigned.

I know it sounds unnatural, but I’m talking about simply jotting some initial ideas down or locating some books or websites that will later help you.

Another way winners stay mentally on top of things and maintain a sense of forward progress is by studying for tests in advance. Yeah, this one took me a while to learn, too. But as any of you who do this know, each successive time you look at the material, it becomes more familiar and understandable—thanks in large part to the power of the subconscious mind (which works even while we’re sleeping). It’s by far the most effective, least stressful way to study.

9. Winning students read every day.

This above all other factors empowers them to improve in every subject area and to achieve to their potential. So it doesn’t matter if it’s a magazine, sports page, novel, or comic book, for an hour, half hour or 15 minutes, they just read!

10. Winners know that other students' feelings matter.

So they smile at those peers who rarely get smiled at, sit next to that person nobody sits next to, and compliment the kids nobody seems to compliment. By reaching out, they discover that both the giver and receiver experience what I refer to as true power—the kind that can change the entire course of a day...or of a life.

11. Winners understand the concept of false power.

I am constantly telling students who are treated badly by others that they're not the ones with the problem; those with a need to stick their nose in the air when they walk by, insult, and bully are. There is something about themselves that they don't like, something about their own lives with which they are not happy and feel powerless to change.

Maybe they feel stupid in class or their parents fight all the time. Maybe someone picks on them or they're just jealous of you because you're happier, smarter, better looking—the possibilities are endless. The point is that they're attempting to feel power over you—the empty kind that doesn't last—because they feel no power or control over changing their problems.

Winners understand, then, that the act of treating others badly says a lot more about the flaws of the perpetrator than the person who happens to be on the receiving end.

12. Winning students understand what personal responsibility translates to in school.

When things aren't going well, they don't blame the teacher, or whine to their parents about the subject matter being too boring. Instead, they think to themselves the thoughts we should all think when faced with unwelcome circumstances: **I** am responsible. What can **I** do differently to change this?

The big pay-off for embracing the twelve winner's ways is that your future will start taking care of itself. You'll actually be able to look forward to it minus the feelings of anxiety and doubt every young person experiences. You will have internalized the strong habits that enable us to answer life's future challenges. You can trust in that.