



What Separates High Performers from the Rest?

Description

I am so grateful to those of you who tell me personally when we see each other that you enjoy this column, or write a note saying so. A few weeks back at a CivicCon event in Pensacola, Rhette Anderson shared that he likes the weekly column. He also said, “I don’t know how you do it each week.” My response was, “I am surprised also!”

Some years ago, when the *Pensacola News Journal* ran the first column, I wondered how long I would be able to write one each week. I have never missed a column. I’m not saying it won’t happen, but so far, so good. It seems that every time I think, *I have nothing to write about this week*, something happens or someone provides material for a column. Often it is an email from someone or a conversation with an individual or a group. I am fortunate that through my work with communities and healthcare providers, subjects come up that I feel will be of interest to you, the reader. The goal of the column is to help people, organizations, and communities achieve a good quality of life.

This column is about something that has come to my attention: The best organizations and communities, and thus the best people, are in a constant search for better ways to do things. My experience is that those who achieve high performance are always seeking to learn and be better.

This month I will be in Stillwater, Oklahoma; Lafayette, Louisiana; and Palatka, Florida. Each community—like all communities—has many good attributes as well as areas that they want to see improved. Each has reached out to find new ways to get better.

Also this month I have been or will be presenting to healthcare providers in Evansville, Indiana; Lafayette, Louisiana; Ridgewood, New Jersey; and Rochester, Minnesota. Why? Because even though they are among the best in the country, they want to get better.

This got me thinking back over my decades of work and asking myself, *What are some items that separate the “A” players from the rest?* It also brought back a chapter from a book I wrote in 2013 called *A Culture of High Performance*. In it, I described some characteristics of high, middle, and low performers. Not every position needs to be filled by a high performer for an organization to be great. However, the more high performers there are in the organization, the better the organization’s performance will be—and the more other high performers will want to work there and be developed

due to the presence of high-performing role models.

Here are some things to think about if you are assessing your own performance or that of others.

1. **When was the last time you reached out to benchmark and learn from others? How often do you do this?** There is a direct correlation between the drive to always seek better ways and high performance. As you may know, I admire physicians. The best ones are always searching for better ways. This week I spoke to someone whose spouse has been diagnosed with lung cancer. The oncologist shared that he was placing the spouse in a large study. This way doctors throughout the world will be aware of the case, both to learn from it and to provide treatment suggestions based on their experience. This is a great example of looking for better ways.

I was speaking with a CEO about a leader they were frustrated with. The position was one that needed a high performer. No one likes to let someone go. Yet despite lots of encouragement, the person in the role had not been looking to others in similar roles for new ideas and methods. This lack of seeking out better practices was a key factor in the CEO's deciding to part ways with the person. If you are a high performer, you are seeking out other people and learning from them. Are you?

2. **High performers rarely say the words, "We are already doing that."** I was talking with someone recently who went on a benchmarking trip with several community members to another city. He noticed what I have also noticed: People who don't get much from benchmarking tend to use the phrase "we are already doing that." Remember, places chosen to benchmark are chosen due to their performance. So when someone says, "We are already doing that," it often tends to be a self-protective or defensive response. It may be true; however, how are the results? Ninety-nine percent of the time, when a person says, "We are already doing that," their own results are less than the organization that is being benchmarked.

When I was president of a hospital, we were benchmarking an organization, and I heard this phrase from some of the attendees. My comment was, "We may think we are doing that, but looking at their results compared to ours, they must be doing it better than us." "We are already doing that" is the first cousin of "we tried it, and it did not work." Ask yourself what you've learned since you tried it. The timing may be better now, as well as the experience you've gained.

3. **High performers are proactive.** It is great to be responsive, and being responsive is needed at times. Yet the highest performers are very responsive and *also* proactive. They see what is coming and prepare for it. For example, the high performer knows the life span of a piece of equipment and has the replacement ready. Don't confuse being responsive with being proactive—they aren't the same thing.

Life is like going up a down escalator at times; if you stand still, you go backwards. People, organizations, and communities are either getting better or getting worse. If you have not done so in the last 90 days, reach out to someone and see what you can learn to make yourself, your company, and, at times, the community even better.

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