

Top 10 Traits for Sustainable Success

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I sat down the other day and looked over [all of the articles I've written for DC](#), dating back to 2007. One common thread running through the series has been the concept of creating sustainable success. This review prompted me to reflect on chiropractors I've coached in recent years; I realized that many of them had indeed experienced success in their careers, but too often they'd found that success difficult to sustain over time. These doctors contacted me when they'd grown weary of the roller-coaster highs and lows of practice and were anxious for a smoother ride and more consistent profitability.

The chiropractors who ultimately experience lasting success have, I've discovered, a number of traits in common, 10 of which I'll outline in this article. They don't all have all 10, by any means, but most possess a reasonable number from the list that they use to their advantage.

Before we get into the list, though, the concept of sustainable success deserves a few words. What does it mean to enjoy success that is truly sustainable? The answer to that question is unique to the individual, because success is a relative term. Your definition of success may be based on money, freedom, contribution, continual learning, healthy relationships, feeling appreciated or any number of other factors.

Sustainable success means achieving and maintaining whatever it is that's most important to you with relative ease and satisfaction, and without high drama or undue stress. It's the ability to stay vital and enjoy the challenge of responding to life's daily (and sometimes mundane) challenges, whether they are planned and wanted or uninvited and unwelcome. It's feeling that your life has meaning and purpose, and that you are engaged on a daily basis in a way that makes you feel alive.

A great deal of what's needed to achieve goals and experience lasting success is about *doing* - taking action, following through, checking tasks off the To-Do list, evaluating and refining your plans, and so on. But other significant factors in reaching goals are related to *being* - your attitude, outlook and essential character traits. With that in mind, I'd like to offer you encouragement to develop and leverage what I believe to be the 10 most important traits for sustainable success. Paying attention to the being side of the equation as much as the doing side, will help you achieve your most important goals with greater ease, less stress and more engagement. Here are the 10 traits for your consideration.

1. Emotional Intelligence

Everyone has heard the term [emotional intelligence \(EQ\)](#) by now, and yet many people still don't understand exactly what it means and why it's important. The business case for EQ is well-researched; the ability to perceive, use and regulate emotions is strongly associated with being a successful leader. According to Daniel Goleman (the "godfather" of EQ), the two overriding categories of EQ are (1) personal competence: self-awareness and self-management - how you understand and manage

yourself; and (2) social competence: social awareness and relationship management - how you behave with and influence others. Mastering the core capacities of EQ can help you manage your emotions, be more flexible, make better decisions, respond calmly to challenging situations, maintain optimism, and improve your resilience, motivation and self-confidence.

I think of this trait as being the most important of the 10 for success, because so many of the others are dependent upon having a well-developed EQ. You can grow your EQ by focusing on self-awareness and self-management. It takes time, but the return on investment is significant in terms of improved personal and professional relationships, and greater practice success.

2. Presence

We are a nation of proud multitaskers, and that's not necessarily a good thing. [A recent study out of Harvard](#) revealed that people are happier when they stay focused on one thing at a time. Other studies have shown that, as much as we'd like to think we are perfectly capable of juggling multiple tasks, our brains are really not designed to focus on two or more things simultaneously. But how often in recent weeks have you talked on the phone while checking e-mail, listened to a patient while letting your mind wander to a new piece of equipment you're thinking of buying, or glanced at your Blackberry during a staff meeting?

As a chiropractor, your ability to stay present is probably the single most important thing you can do to have a successful practice. By giving each individual - patient or staff member - your undivided attention, you automatically communicate more effectively. This, in turn, makes you better able to understand and influence others.

3. Resilience

This is the character trait that helps us cope with and grow from the inevitable ups and downs of practice and life. Everyone is innately resilient; it's the degree to which we are able to bounce back in the face of challenges and setbacks that varies from person to person. Some people crumble at the first sign of trouble, while others can seemingly walk through tragedy and turmoil again and again, and somehow pick themselves up and go on.

People who are highly resilient tend to be optimistic and have an expectation that they will be successful in what they set out to accomplish. They also have supportive relationships and contribute to others. They are good at setting boundaries (saying no when they mean no, for example), and feel confident in their ability to manage their lives and careers.

You can increase your own resilience by doing some very basic things. First, take good care of yourself physically and emotionally. Manage your stress and maintain a sane schedule. Work on increasing your confidence in areas that need a boost (see below for more on this), and try to find the humor and the silver lining in the curve balls life tosses your way.

4. Perseverance

Sustainable success often requires a high degree of focus and "stick-to-it-ness." Chiropractors who have successful periods that are short-lived get excited about a new marketing plan or business venture, but when something doesn't go their way, they toss the plan aside, saying, "It didn't work." It's not that "it" didn't work ... it's that *they* didn't work long enough and with enough tenacity to enjoy

the fruits of their labor. If you take the time to create a solid action plan, then honor that plan by sticking with it to the end, unless you can find a very good reason to deviate from it.

5. Adaptability

The pace of change we are experiencing today is unprecedented. Technological advances, in particular, are evolving faster than anyone would ever have thought. Twenty years ago, most of us didn't even use e-mail. Now we carry it, and even more advanced technology, around with us in our pockets and purses. The ability to adapt to change - to embrace it, in fact - is one of the most important traits necessary for success today. Hanging on to the past in an effort to stay comfortable will result in being left behind by your competitors who accept the challenges of change, rather than resist or resent having to constantly "keep up." Digging your heels in and refusing to acknowledge and adapt to changes in the health care system, the economic landscape and society in general will only lead to frustration and bitterness.

6. Optimism

Optimists tend to view positive events as being the result of their skill, hard work or good decision-making. They have setbacks just like everyone does from time to time, but they assume those setbacks are temporary and the exception, rather than the rule. Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to assume the worst. When something goes their way, they chalk it up to "good luck," and then wait for the other shoe to drop because surely, good fortune won't come their way again any time soon.

Every so often, some organization conducts a survey to determine how hopeful people are feeling, usually relative to the economic outlook. It's always interesting that people will state how worried and pessimistic they are about the future, and then turn right around and say that they themselves are doing just fine. I call this "unconscious collective pessimism." Certainly, many people have been impacted by the economic downturn that we're slowly coming out of, but as an educated professional, it's likely that you are better off than many of your friends, neighbors and family members. Even if your retirement plan or home value isn't what it once was, try to keep it in perspective.

You can [cultivate the habit of optimism](#) by observing your thoughts and catching yourself when you fall into negative thinking; focusing on what's right about the world and about your life; being grateful for the gifts and skills you possess; giving time and attention to what you actually have control over; surrounding yourself with people who are generally upbeat; and turning off the news when you've had your fill of stories about scary world events, the most recent foreclosure rates, and egomaniacal politicians.

7. Confidence

Like self-esteem, confidence isn't something you can simply declare yourself to have and then begin exhibiting it from that day forward. [Confidence is cultivated](#) over time as a result of having positive, successful experiences. You probably were not completely confident the first time you drove a car, loaded new software on to your computer or read an X-ray. But now that you've done those things successfully enough times, you have confidence in your ability.

Think of one area in your life in which you'd like to have more confidence. Maybe it's related to communicating more effectively with patients, giving feedback to your staff or doing your own investing. Next, think of one proactive step you can take within the next few days that would allow you

to experience a small success in your chosen area, and take that action. For example, if you want to become a competent investor, reading a book on personal finance might be a good first step, followed by taking a class or hiring a planner who will empower you to take charge of your finances. Keep experimenting by venturing into new territory until you can say with relative certainty that your confidence has increased. Sometimes it's two steps forward, one step back. Just trust the process and don't give in to setbacks along the way.

8. Creativity

In today's rapidly changing world, success requires creativity. This means, in part, a willingness to let go of what's not longer working and try new things. Creative thinkers invest in personal and professional development. They keep up with latest trends and technology, but incorporate them into their lives selectively, based on their own needs, interests and desires. They're willing to diversity their services and seek out opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and within their communities. Doctors who use creativity to sustain success have figured out the myriad of ways to work smarter, not harder, to achieve their goals.

9. Purpose and Meaning

Doctors who successfully weather the ups and downs of practice tend to be grounded in purpose and believe that their lives have meaning. They feel rewarded when they are contributing to the lives of others, and they value strong relationships - with patients, staff, family and friends.

10. Integrity

Successful people do not become that way at the expense of others. They are not manipulative, overly self-involved or untrustworthy. Instead, they are - at their very core - honest, caring, sincere and reliable. They walk their talk and they're the same person whether you meet them in their office, at a conference, at the supermarket or on the sidelines of their kid's soccer match. They treat patients, staff, friends, family and total strangers with the same degree of respect. They are comfortable in their own skin.

Next Steps

You may have noticed that many of these 10 traits are connected, play off of one another or are dependent upon one another. You certainly don't have to embody all 10 of the traits, but cultivating and leveraging a number of the ones on the list make it more likely that you'll take action toward achieving your goals with confidence.

Now that you know the traits that successful chiropractors often embody, which two or three resonate with you? Which ones, in your specific case, need attention? In which of the 10 areas are you already highly skilled, and how can you leverage those skills to your advantage? What would you add to this list that is unique to your situation, personality or interests? What sort of support do you need to move forward from here?

When you master the ability to embrace *doing* and *being* in equal measure, not only will you find that your [personal and professional goals](#) begin to come to fruition more easily, but you'll also enjoy greater success and satisfaction in your daily life.

