

Achieving at a High Level

Most people desire to perform at a high level, whether it be in health care, business, education, sports, church life or hobbies. It's part of human nature to want to excel at what we do.

John C. Maxwell, author and internationally recognized expert on leadership development, writes in his book *Attitude 101 – What Every Leader Needs to Know*:

“The greater the feat you desire to achieve, the greater the mental preparation required for overcoming obstacles and persevering over the long haul. If you want to take a stroll in your neighborhood, you can reasonably expect to have few, if any problems. But that’s not the case if you intend to climb Mount Everest.”

And he adds: “It takes time, effort, and the ability to overcome setbacks. You have to approach each day with reasonable expectations and not get your feelings hurt when everything doesn’t turn out perfectly.” As an example, he told this story:



Something that happened on baseball’s opening day in 1954 illustrates the point well. The Milwaukee Braves and the Cincinnati Reds played each other, and a rookie for each team made his major-league debut during that game.

The rookie who played for the Reds hit four doubles and helped his team win with a score of 9 to 8.

The rookie for the Braves went 0 for 5.

The Reds player was Jim Greengrass, a name you probably haven’t heard. The other guy, who didn’t get a hit, might be more familiar to you. His name was Hank Aaron, who played 21 seasons for the Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves in the National League and two seasons for the Milwaukee Brewers in the American League, from 1954 through 1976. Aaron held the Major League Baseball record for career home runs for 33 years, and he still holds several MLB offensive records. He hit 24 or more home runs every year from 1955 through 1973, and is one of only two players to hit 30 or more home runs in a season at least 15 times.

If Aaron’s expectations for that first game had been unrealistic, who knows? He might have given up on baseball.

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Surely he wasn't happy about his performance that day, but he didn't think of himself as a failure. He had worked too hard for too long. He wasn't about to give up easily.

Another way achievers keep themselves from personalizing failure, Maxwell said, is by focusing on their strengths.

"Bob Butera, former president of the New Jersey Devils hockey team, was asked what makes a winner. He answered, 'What distinguishes winners from losers is that winners concentrate at all times on what they can do, not on what they can't do. If a guy is a great shooter but not a great skater, we tell him to think only about the shot, the shot, the shot – never about some other guy outskating him. The idea is to remember your successes.'"

Maxwell believes that if weakness is a matter of character, it needs attention. "Focus on it until you shore it up. Otherwise, the best bet for failing forward is developing and maximizing your strengths."

When achievers fail, they see it as a momentary event, not a lifelong epidemic. It's not personal. If you want to succeed, don't let any single incident color your view of yourself.

– Beecher Hunter