

PRODUCTIVITY

4 Mental Skills Super-Productive People Are Known to Master

Want to master peak performance and fulfill your potential? Put your biology to work for you. [🔗](#)

BY MARCEL SCHWANTES, FOUNDER AND CHIEF HUMAN OFFICER, LEADERSHIP FROM THE CORE @MARCELSCHWANTES



Getty Images

● What does it take to shatter our limitations, exceed our expectations, and turn our biggest dreams into our most recent achievements? There is no secret. According to peak performance expert and *New York Times* bestselling author, Steven Kotler, "all human beings are biologically designed to tackle incredibly large challenges. In fact, everything you

might consider 'peak performance' is quite simply getting your biology to work for you rather than against you."

This is also why Steven Kotler takes a "neuroscientific approach" to human performance. If you want more of a skill–say flow or motivation–neuroscience gives you the basic biological mechanism that helps you to operate in a reliable, repeatable manner.

The brilliant psychologist Abraham Maslow once explained it this way: "Whatever a person can be, they must be." Humans are hardwired to exceed their limitations and fulfill their potential.

In his new book, *The Art of Impossible: A Peak Performance Primer*, Kotler explores the key cognitive skills sets to master peak performance, which include:

1. Motivation

Technically, this refers to intrinsic motivation–skills such as curiosity, passion, purpose, autonomy, and mastery. It also refers to all the skills required to sustain motivation over the long haul: persistence, grit, resilience, the ability to delay gratification, the ability to overcome fear, and goal-setting.

2. Learning

Learning involves developing self-awareness. That is, being able to: understand and regulate your emotions, identify and cultivate your strengths, discern and train up your weaknesses, and control your thought patterns.

3. Creativity

This isn't one skill but a set of skills, because creativity is a process. The ability to produce novel ideas that are useful–the technical definition of creativity–actually requires a whole

subset of talents: information gathering, problem identification, idea generation, pattern recognition, decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, risk-taking, idea execution and such. So creativity is a stand-in term for all of these additional skills.

4. Flow

This word is defined as "an optimal state of consciousness where we feel our best and perform our best." More specifically, when we talk about flow, we are talking about a state of consciousness that significantly amplifies motivation, productivity, learning, creativity, empathy, collaboration, cooperation, communication, fulfillment, meaning, purpose, passion, and joy.

Kotler believes that we are capable of so much more than we know. All of us contain everything we need to tackle the so-called "impossible," and, according to Kotler, far more of us have the ability to actually achieve it.

Put differently, with very few exceptions, all the people Kotler studied in that period became exceptional human beings who accomplished exceptional things, but very few of them started out that way. As Kotler says, "Sure, you will occasionally meet someone who won the genetic lottery—a superstar naturally gifted athlete; a legitimate Einstein-ian genius—but this is so rare that it's almost not worth talking about."

Most extreme achievers start out just like you and me, but what ends up making them exceptional is the hyper-development and exceptionally devotion to and application of motivation, learning, creativity, and flow.

"Not going big is bad for you," Steven Kotler reveals. But if you can align, you'll be on the long road toward impossible—going further faster.

Inc. helps entrepreneurs change the world. Get the advice you need to start, grow, and lead your business today. [Subscribe here](#) for unlimited access.

JAN 20, 2021

Like this column? Sign up to [subscribe to email alerts](#) and you'll never miss a post.

The opinions expressed here by Inc.com columnists are their own, not those of Inc.com.

NEWSLETTER

Inc.

Inc. This Morning

A daily news digest curated for those interested in entrepreneurship