



# The Secrets of the “High-Potential” Personality

## A) Warm up

1. How big a role do you think that personality plays in career success?
2. What characteristics do you believe are the most important for achieving success?

## B) Adapted Text - The Secrets of the “High-Potential” Personality

Adapted from an article published in 2018 by BBC Worklife

### The Secrets of the “High-Potential” Personality

Are you curious, conscientious and competitive? Do you also have the more mysterious qualities of “high adjustment”, “ambiguity acceptance” and “risk approach”? If so, congratulations! According to Ian MacRae, psychologist and co-author of the book “High Potential”, these six **traits constitute** a “high potential” personality to take you far in life.

#### Conscientiousness

**Conscientious** people commit themselves to plans and make sure they follow them **to the letter**. They are good at overcoming their impulses and thinking about the wisdom of their decisions for the long-term. After IQ, conscientiousness is often considered one of the best predictors of life outcomes like educational success. At work, high conscientiousness is essential for good strategic planning, but in excess it may also come with its own **drawbacks**, potentially causing someone to be too **rigid** and inflexible.

#### Adjustment

Everyone faces anxiety, but people with high adjustment can cope with them more easily under pressure, without allowing it to negatively influence their behaviour and decision-making. Various studies have shown that **reframing** a stressful situation as a potential source of growth – rather than a threat to their well-being – can help people to reframe negative situations more quickly and more productively.

#### Ambiguity Acceptance

Are you the kind of person who would prefer tasks to be well-defined and predictable? Or do you **embrace** the unknown? People with a high tolerance for ambiguity can incorporate many more viewpoints before coming to a decision, leaving them more open to debate and discussion. Someone who can accept ambiguity will find it easier to react to changes and **multifaceted** problems such as an economic changes or the rise of a new technology.

Low ambiguity acceptance will not always be a **drawback**. In certain fields – such as the legal field – it can be better to take a more ordered approach. Knowing where you stand on this spectrum may prevent you from moving too far from your comfort zone.

**Curiosity**

Compared to our other mental traits, curiosity has been somewhat neglected by psychologists. However, recent research shows that an interest in new ideas **fosters** more creativity and flexibility in the procedures you use, helping you to learn more easily, increasing your overall job satisfaction and protecting you from burnout. In excess, however, curiosity can also lead you to have a “butterfly mind” – flying from project to project without completing any of them.

**Risk approach (or courage)**

Would you try to avoid an unpleasant confrontation, or face it head-on? Unsurprisingly, the capacity to deal with difficult situations is **critical** for management positions where you need to take action for the greater good, even when you are faced with competition.

**Competitiveness**

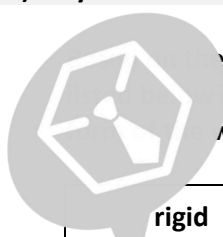
At its best, competitiveness can be a powerful motivation that leads you to **go the extra mile**; at its worst, it can lead teams to break down.

Together, these six traits consolidate the qualities that influence work performance. However, equally interesting are the traits that are not included: The extroversion-introversion scale seems to make little difference in job performance, although the contribution of introverts may go unnoticed in some work environments. Agreeableness – our capacity to get along with others – doesn't appear to predict professional success.

A link to the original article can be found below:

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20180508-the-secrets-of-the-high-potential-personality>

**C) Key Words from context**



In the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

rigid	to go the extra mile	drawbacks	to reframe
to constitute	multifaceted	conscientious	to the letter
to set your sights on	critical	traits	to relish something

1. To make a special effort to achieve something; to put in extra work:

\_\_\_\_\_

*“I always try to \_\_\_\_\_ for my clients.”*

2. To gain great enjoyment from something: \_\_\_\_\_

*"I would \_\_\_\_\_ the opportunity to grow with your company."*

3. To do something exactly as you have been instructed to do it:

\_\_\_\_\_

*"It was important carry out her instructions \_\_\_\_\_, because I didn't want to make any mistakes."*

4. to be inflexible, not changing or adapting: \_\_\_\_\_

*"My daily schedule is very \_\_\_\_\_, so it is not possible for me to rearrange meetings."*

5. Someone who is willing to do their work to the best of their ability; hard-working

\_\_\_\_\_

*"I am very \_\_\_\_\_ with all of my work tasks."*

6. To have an ambition to achieve or reach something: \_\_\_\_\_

*"We have \_\_\_\_\_ a 2% increase in profits in the next 12 months."*

7. Extremely important to the success of something: \_\_\_\_\_

*"It is \_\_\_\_\_ that we secure this deal."*

8. To change the way that you think about something or express something: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Whenever you make a mistake, it is a good idea to \_\_\_\_\_ the situation and think about the positive \_\_\_\_\_ that have come from it."*

9. A characteristic of a person: \_\_\_\_\_

*"The candidate has some really positive \_\_\_\_\_, which I believe could be valuable to the team."*

10. Something that has many different aspects and features: \_\_\_\_\_

*"\_\_\_\_\_ have put together a \_\_\_\_\_ strategy."*

*"\_\_\_\_\_ of a whole: \_\_\_\_\_"*

*"\_\_\_\_\_ there are many important aspects which \_\_\_\_\_ a successful team."*

12. Features which make something less acceptable; disadvantages:

\_\_\_\_\_

*"Aside from the advantages and growth opportunities, there are also many \_\_\_\_\_ to working in a multinational company."*

**D) Comprehension**

Can you answer the questions below about the text?

1. In paragraph 3, why is it not so simple as to say that these traits are good traits?

---

---

---

2. What are some of the main positives and drawbacks of being a conscientious person?

---

---

---

3. According to certain bodies of research, what can we do when we feel stressed?

---

---

4. Based on the article, how would you define the term 'ambiguity acceptance'?

---

---

---

5. What advantages can we gain from having high 'ambiguity acceptance'?

---

---

---

6. In what field might high 'ambiguity acceptance' be more of a hinderance?

---

---

---

7. What difference does the author mention between curiosity and the other characteristics listed?

---

---

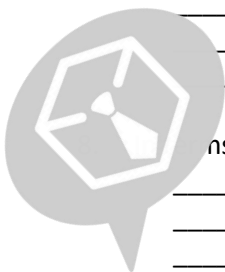
---

...ns of job performance, is it better to be an extrovert or an introvert, and why?

---

---

---



**E) Key Words in a New Context**

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

rigid	to go the extra mile	drawbacks	to reframe
to constitute	multifaceted	to the letter	trait
to set your sights on	critical	to relish something	

**Can I train myself to become conscientious?**

Since the beginning of time, one thing has always been crystal clear in the world of work. Some colleagues are far more conscientious than others. There is always one colleague in the team who is willing to \_\_\_\_\_, to stay later in the office than required and complete all of their tasks more efficiently than anyone else. Indeed, such colleagues are \_\_\_\_\_ to the success of any project, but they can be seen as an annoyance or even a threat in the eyes of others, especially rivals who \_\_\_\_\_ a promotion.

Conscientiousness is a personality \_\_\_\_\_ that has been studied extensively in the field of psychology, but is it something that is purely genetic, or can it be developed over time?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is extensive evidence to suggest that conscientiousness is at least partially determined by genetics. Studies carried out on twins have shown that identical twins are extremely similar in their levels of conscientiousness. Furthermore, research has found that those who have a strong prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain involved in decision-making and planning, demonstrate a high level of conscientiousness. Not only that, but they seem to \_\_\_\_\_ completing complex tasks. It could be said that this enjoyment is partly responsible for a conscientious person's ability to carry out instructions \_\_\_\_\_ and with extreme accuracy.

However, research has shown that it is not necessarily genetics alone that determine our level of conscientiousness. The issue is evidently more \_\_\_\_\_ than it first appears. Parenting style can also influence our levels of conscientiousness. For example, children who grow up in households that emphasize responsibility, organization, and punctuality \_\_\_\_\_ a strong foundation for conscientiousness in the future.

But what if we weren't brought up in such households? Well, luckily, our brains are not so \_\_\_\_\_. The brain is capable of changing and adapting consistently in response to new experiences and behaviors. If we consistently engage in conscientious activity, such as being organized and responsible, we can gradually \_\_\_\_\_ our own mindset to become more conscientious. Studies have found that interventions such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and feedback can all be effective in increasing conscientiousness. For example, setting specific, achievable goals and monitoring our progress towards them can help us develop the discipline and focus needed to be more conscientious.

## Answers to Exercises

### C) Key Words from Context

1. To make a special effort to achieve something; to put in extra work: **to go the extra mile**

*"I always try to **go the extra mile** for my clients."*

2. To gain great enjoyment from something: **to relish**

*"I would **relish** the opportunity to grow with your company."*

**Collocations:**

- to relish the opportunity to

- to relish the challenge of +ing: "I would really relish the challenge of building a new team from scratch."

3. To do something exactly as you have been instructed to do it: **to the letter**

*"It was important carry out her instructions **to the letter**, because I didn't want to make any mistakes."*

4. to be inflexible, not changing or adapting: **rigid**

*"My daily schedule is very **rigid** so it is not possible for me to rearrange meetings."*

5. Someone who is willing to do their work to the best of their ability; hard-working: **conscientious**

*"I am very **conscientious** with all of my work tasks."*

6. to have a strong ambition to achieve or reach something: **to set your sights on**

*"We **set our sights on** a 2% increase in profits in the next 12 months."*

7. extremely important to the success of something: **critical**

*"It is **critical** that we secure this deal."*

8. To change the way that you think about something or express something: **to reframe**

*"Whenever you make a mistake, it is a good idea to **reframe** the situation and think about the positives that have come from it."*

9. A characteristic of a person: **trait**

*“The candidate has some really positive **traits**, which I believe could be valuable to the team.”*

10. Something that has many different aspects and features: **multifaceted**

*“We have put together a **multifaceted** strategy.”*

11. To be part of a whole: **to constitute**

*“There are many important aspects which **constitute** a successful team.”*

12. Features which make something less acceptable; disadvantages: **drawbacks**

*“Aside from the advantages and growth opportunities, there are also many **drawbacks** to working in a multinational company.”*

#### D) Comprehension

- In paragraph 3, why is it not so simple as to say that these traits are good traits?  
**Because at the extremes there are drawbacks to these traits, and they can become a hinderance. Also, it depends on what kind of job position you have as to how important each trait is.**
- What are some of the main positives and drawbacks of being a conscientious person?  
**Conscientious people commit to plans and make sure they follow them. They are good at overcoming their impulses and making long-term decisions rather than chasing short-term pleasure. It can also bring educational success and can make you a good strategic planner. The drawbacks are that you can become too rigid if you are very conscientious.**
- According to certain bodies of research, what can we do when we feel stress?  
**We can look at this as a source of growth rather than a threat to our wellbeing.**
- Based on the article, how would you define the term ‘ambiguity acceptance’?  
**Ambiguity acceptance is being comfortable in situations which are unknown and ill-defined.**
- What advantages can we gain from having high ‘ambiguity acceptance’?  
**We can be more open to different viewpoints when making a decision. We can also react to changes and cope more easily with complex problems.**
- In what field might high ‘ambiguity acceptance’ be more of a hinderance?  
**It could be more of a hinderance in the field of regulation, because you need to take a more ordered approach in this field.**
- What difference does the author mention between curiosity and the other characteristics listed?  
**Curiosity is often neglected by psychologists as a factor which could determine success.**

8. In terms of job performance, is it better to be an extrovert or an introvert, and why?  
**They are both as good as each other. However, introverts' hard work is more likely to go unnoticed, so potentially someone might be at a slight advantage if they are an extrovert.**

## E) Key Words in a New Context

### Can I train myself to become conscientious?

Since the beginning of time, one thing has always been crystal clear in the world of work. Some colleagues are far more conscientious than others. There is always the colleague in the team who is willing to **go the extra mile**, to stay later in the office than required and complete all of their tasks more efficiently than anyone else. Indeed, some colleagues are **critical** to the success of any project, but they can be seen as an annoyance or even a threat in the eyes of others, especially rivals who **are setting their sights on** a promotion.

Conscientiousness is a personality **trait** that has been studied extensively in the field of psychology, but is it something that is purely genetic or can it be developed over time?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is extensive evidence to suggest that conscientiousness is at least partially determined by genetics. Studies carried out on twins have shown that identical twins are extremely similar in their levels of conscientiousness. Furthermore, research has found that those who have a strong prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain involved in decision-making and planning, demonstrate a high level of conscientiousness. Not only that, but they seem to **relish** completing complex tasks. It could be said that this enjoyment is partly responsible for a conscientious person's ability to carry out instructions **to the letter** and with extreme accuracy.

However, research has shown that it is not necessarily genetics alone that determine our levels of conscientiousness. The issue is evidently more **multifaceted** than it first appears. Parents can also influence our levels of conscientiousness. For example, children who grow up in households that emphasize responsibility, organization, and punctuality are laying a strong foundation for conscientiousness in the future.

What if we weren't brought up in such households? Well, luckily, our brains are not so **rigid**. The brain is capable of changing and adapting consistently in response to new experiences and behaviors. If we consistently engage in conscientious activity, such as being organized and responsible, we can gradually **reframe** our own mindset to become more conscientious. Studies have found that interventions such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and feedback can all be effective in increasing conscientiousness. For example, setting specific, achievable goals and monitoring our progress towards them can help us develop the discipline and focus needed to be more conscientious.