

CHAPTER 3

Tapping Into Your Defining Qualities

We'd like to start our journey by sharing with you some of what we've learned about the qualities that help people succeed in different walks of life.

Caliper has been working with leaders at companies such as Avis, Caterpillar, FedEx, GMAC, Johnson & Johnson, and some of the fastest-growing smaller firms, helping them select the right people, manage individuals most effectively, develop productive teams, and improve overall corporate performance. Over the past four decades we've grown to include offices in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Our premise has always been that an individual's potential and motivation make all the difference.

People succeed when they are tapping into their strengths. And are making sure that their limitations don't trip them up.

This is particularly true when it comes to succeeding in leadership, management, sales, or customer service positions as well as in working on a team.

If we were assessing you for a position, among the questions we would consider are the following:

Do you have the ability to inspire people and the intuition to sense change that are required to lead others?

Do you have the decision-making skills, ability to command respect, and communication talent needed to manage people and projects?

Do you have the persuasive skills, ability to read others, and strength to bounce back from rejection needed to succeed in sales?

Do you have the desire to come through for others, the detail orientation, and the organizational skills required to succeed in a customer service and/or administrative position?

While some people can succeed because of their talents as craftspeople, questions still arise: Do you have the persistence, the attention to detail, and the ability to work with others to be a carpenter, electrician, or any other job requiring a specific craft?

These are the qualities that drive us. We all have different strengths. The idea is to discover them and make them our focus.

Of course there are dozens of other qualities that we measure to help identify an individual's strengths and potential. Then, of course, we also have to take into account the organization's culture, the personality attributes of a person's manager, and the dynamics of the team. When all is said and done, there are myriad combinations of those qualities; that is what makes us who we are and helps explain why we might be successful at one thing and absolutely wrong for another.

Perhaps this concept is demonstrated most dramatically in our work with professional sports teams. The Chicago White Sox and the Detroit Pistons are among the two dozen teams we advise on their draft choices.

Now, these teams don't need us to consider an athlete's speed or agility. They have scouts who can recognize that kind of talent a mile away.

But the coaches and managers of professional teams know that what really matters—after the talent has been established—is whether players have the will, the drive, the motivation to ratchet their talent up to the highest level. Can they handle the pressure? Are they really competitive? Are they team players? These are the qualities that distinguish the best players.

It's what Yogi Berra recognized when he said, "Winning is 90 percent mental; the other half is physical."

Ultimately, we've learned that we all succeed when we tap into our strongest qualities.

Then our *potential* can be realized.

Over the years we've found that when talent is essentially equal, such as in first-round draft picks in professional sports, the difference between the superstars and journeymen is the hunger, the desire, the drive to succeed on their own terms.

Just consider what an edge you'll have if you understand the qualities that drive *you*.

We assume you are a unique blend of several distinct qualities. But, if you start out by identifying the one that is your dominant, driving, defining quality, imagine how far ahead of the game you'll be.

With that in mind, we want to share with you 19 of the qualities we have found that distinguish people who succeed.

“There are some of us who are naturally reflective. And some of us just race from point A to point B, rarely looking back unless we've knocked something over.”

Of course, all of us possess various levels of several of the qualities we are about to explore with you. But some of the people we came across seemed to own a certain quality, as if it were their middle name.

In this section of the book we're going to tell you about quite a few distinct qualities. These qualities won't be new to you. But hopefully, in the telling of the stories of people who exemplify these qualities, you will see part of yourself: the part we call your defining quality.

Knowing your defining quality, calling it your own, and breathing life into it can go a long way toward making you successful.

Again, please keep in mind that the underlying message of these stories is that there is more than one way to succeed. Each of the people we've selected to exemplify one of these qualities also possesses several other driving motivations.

Here is a quick overview of the 19 qualities we will be telling you about through the stories of some of the incredible people we met:

Perseverance. There are people who, in the face of uncertainty or possible defeat, defy the odds and refuse to accept the idea that there is no way out. Through sheer perseverance, by refusing to cave in, they are able to alter what appears to be the inevitable.

Through the Holocaust, Samuel Pizar lost his father, his mother, and his sister and narrowly escaped death several times. In this vision of hell that eclipsed Dante's Inferno, Samuel would sometimes think he could not make it one step farther. He believes he "survived by drawing strength from the energy of despair," as he said. "Despair can either devastate you immediately or fill you with energy and determination to resist and overcome. When you touch bottom, as I have, and give a hefty kick with everything you've got, you can sometimes return to the surface, and even beyond it. Pain and suffering do not necessarily degrade or embitter you, they can also energize and empower you."

Goal-Oriented. If two people are climbing a mountain together, what is the most important thing they need to get to the summit? Teamwork? Cooperation? The right equipment? Training? Those are all needed, but the most important thing they need is the mountain. You need a clear goal.

From a psychological perspective, we've found that individuals who are goal-oriented have a combination of self-discipline, a strong sense of responsibility, assertiveness, and drive.

Rebecca Stephens, the first British woman to climb Mount Everest, can tell you that when a goal becomes your own, it can change your life. Once she decided to climb the highest mountain in the world, everything else in her life became crystal-clear. "It was the first time in my life," she said, "that I actually knew what I wanted to do. Before that I was drifting somewhat aimlessly. Not unhappily, mind you. But I was aware that I was a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. I hadn't really found my direction in life. With climbing to the summit of Mount Everest as her goal, her life came into focus. "I had never sought out anything with such conviction as I did

to climb Everest,” she said. “For me the battle was already half won, if not more. Because once you have a clearly defined objective, everything else becomes a lot easier.”

Self-Awareness. There are some of us who are naturally reflective. And some of us just race from point A to point B, rarely looking back unless we’ve knocked something over. When we’re not clear about what is motivating us, we can trip over ourselves and land in places we never intended. On the other hand, when we know what drives us, we can tap into our strengths and focus them in a clear direction.

The unfortunate truth is that most of us hide from a true examination of ourselves. We avoid asking the tough questions: Do I like this job? Why don’t I pursue something that is more fun? Those are tough questions. But only through asking them and finding the answers can we hope to succeed on our own terms.

Ben Vereen has figured this out. He is an extremely talented actor, singer, and dancer who has received the highest recognition for the parts he’s played on Broadway, on television, and in movies. But he is also very deep and reflective, as he shares with enormous candor how, after the loss of his child, he slowly, painfully figured out how to pick up the pieces of his life, which had been torn asunder.

Resilience. The way we handle rejection, defeat, or just the discouragement that life has a tendency to send our way has a lot to do with how we succeed. Individuals with a healthy self-esteem are able to brush themselves off after getting knocked down, and carry on with even more determination. This is a quality that psychologists call ego-strength, and it is exemplified by Muggsy Bogues who, at five feet, three inches, was the shortest professional basketball player of all time. In the section on resilience, Muggsy will tell you all about this quality when he describes the feeling he had when he was picked in the first round of the draft. He said, “All the folks saying, ‘He’s too small.’ They said it when I was in grammar school, then junior high, then high

school, then college, then the pros. And in one sense it was in and out. You know, in one ear and out the other. But it hurt. So in another sense it was just another measuring stick as far as proving them wrong. And then it gets to the point where it's even more important than just proving them wrong." There's a guy who knows where rejection belongs.

Willingness to Take a Risk. Without taking a risk, or a leap of faith, very little happens. Being willing to take a risk doesn't mean throwing caution to the wind, but it does require assessing a situation, weighing the alternatives, believing something is worth doing, and then stepping out where you may have never been before. That doesn't mean all of us have to go skydiving. Some of us are naturally more prone to taking risks. Part of it has to do with being comfortable exploring the unknown. People who are more cautious prefer things to stay as they know them. But nothing stays the same forever. There's no way to avoid risk, so you might as well take your risks on purpose. In all of our studies of successful people, the willingness to take risks is universal. The reason is that if people were not willing to take risks, going out into the unknown, they would never succeed on their own terms.

Senator Barbara Boxer risked a sure seat in the House of Representatives for a long shot at the Senate. She ended up in a fight for her political life. In winning, she learned much about herself and about how putting it all on the line can get you focused on what you need to do to succeed.

Thriving on Pressure. Most of us wish we could be cool under pressure. But thriving on pressure? That's quite another thing, a whole different psychology. It's not just being able to do well under the worst situations but knowing that for some reason the best in you comes out when everyone else is running for cover.

Roger Staubach, the Hall of Fame quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys from 1969 through 1979 who led his team to two Super Bowls victories, can tell you about thriving on

pressure. During his career Roger developed a reputation for finding a way to win when defeat was staring him in the face. He led his team to 14 comebacks in the final two minutes of the game.

When he made those unbelievable last-minute passes with the clock ticking and the fans on edge, it may have looked like luck was with him. But luck doesn't come out of thin air. The harder Roger worked, the luckier he became. He always demanded of himself just a little more. That inner taskmaster, getting to practice early, staying later, working on his game in the off-season, prepared him to recognize and take advantage of the pressure, mistakes, and opportunities that can come out of nowhere and change the results of an important game.

Optimism. Being a fighter with a positive attitude is often central to succeeding on your own terms. It's not that your attitude alone can change things. But it can take you a long way. Optimism starts with the belief that there will always be another opportunity.

When Janet Lasley was diagnosed with terminal cancer, this mother of two young children and owner of a construction company said, "This is not *freaking* going to happen to me. I'm not going down this way!" In the years since, she has undergone six surgeries and six rounds of chemotherapy and is scanned regularly to monitor two tumors that refuse to disappear completely. Sometimes, several times a day, she thinks, "If this were my last day on earth, how would I want to spend it?" And she comes up with some creative ways to spend those days. Ultimately, it's her incredible optimism that gets her through as she fights valiantly, knowing that in the blink of an eye everything could change.

Empathy. The ability to understand others is a quality that is sorely undervalued. Empathy, as we described in *How to Hire & Develop Your Next Top Performer*, is the ability to sense the reactions of another person, to place oneself in the other person's shoes. Then you can understand where that person is coming from. When we are able to do that, we can make real connections

that lead to important relationships. This is vital to succeeding in leadership, management, sales, and virtually any professional or personal relationship.

Someone who gets it is Claude Grunitzky, who, as the son of an ambassador, grew up shuttling between the small African country of Togo, Washington, DC, Paris, and London. He speaks six languages, carries two passports, and is never on one continent for more than a week or two. Those foreign experiences shaped his transcultural philosophy and formed the creative energy behind *Trace* magazine and his advertising company, True. Claude's entire approach is to break down barriers between cultures, languages, editorial, advertising, and all forms of communication, so that we are dealing with each other in a voice that transcends all the babble. "The most important thing I learned was to question everything I was being taught," he said, particularly when the history lessons in the United States, France, England, and Togo contradicted one another.

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Competitiveness. That burning inner need to beat an opponent with every move—that's competitiveness. Whether it is stealing a basketball from an opponent in the final seconds of a game or hitting a home run with the bases loaded or winning an impossible business deal, competitiveness is that inner burning need to win.

Geoffrey Bodine, honored as one of NASCAR's 50 greatest drivers, narrowly escaped a fiery nine-vehicle wreck in Daytona when his truck hit the wall at about 185 miles per hour and cartwheeled down the track in flames. The top of his vehicle was sheared off, the engine rolled down the straight away, pieces flew into the stands, and the truck's metal disintegrated until almost all that was left was a roll cage before it was hit again. On a video replay of the accident, even in slow motion, you can't count how many times the vehicle flipped over. The announcer assumed that Geoffrey was no longer with us. Two months after the accident Geoffrey was back

behind the wheel. Why? His first explanation was, “I’m competitive.” When pushed for a more definitive explanation, he added, “I didn’t want to be replaced.”

Patience. It takes enormous internal strength to wait for something that is worthwhile. There are always reasons to change the dial, do something else, to go on to the next adventure. But some things are worth holding out for. That, however, takes incredible fortitude, particularly when those around you are losing their heads.

Just ask Daisy Meyers, whose family made history in 1957 by being the first people of color to move into Levittown, Pennsylvania. The Ku Klux Klan burned crosses, blasted racist music, picketed her house, threw rocks through her windows, and threatened her children for months even though the state police were sent in to protect them. She says the major quality that kept her and her family going through that ordeal was patience. “I’d wait for the night to become daylight, because they were only brave when it was dark. Then we’d wait to see if they’d be there again the next night. Throughout it, we just had to be patient. Just believe that everything would work out, sit tight, believe and have a little patience,” she explained.

Persuasiveness. There are some people who just need to bring others around to their point of view. The world is out of kilter if people are not agreeing with them, nodding their heads in agreement or approval. Ego-drive, as Herb describes it, is a specific need some people have that makes them feel good about themselves when they are persuading others. They want to hear the word *yes*. It could be “Yes, I’ll buy your product” or “Yes, I’ll go out with you” or “Yes, I’ll vote for your candidate.” Hearing the *yes*, seeing the heads nod in agreement—that’s what drives someone who is persuasive. It’s a need that cannot go unfulfilled.

One person who exemplifies persuasiveness is David Oreck. The guy’s all over late-night television in his infomercials, carrying his light-as-a-feather vacuum cleaner under his arm. David is the founder and instantly recognizable spokesperson for the New Orleans-based vacuum

manufacturing company that bears his name. Having the best product is crucial, he said, but what will distinguish you in today's marketplace is marketing and sales. "We've all heard that if you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. But that isn't true. The world first has to get the message. You have to be willing to sell your ideas—usually to people who haven't the faintest idea that they need them. Never underestimate the power of ideas," he added. "Ideas have started religions and nations."

Confidence. If there were a psychological recipe for confidence, it would read something like this: Take one part self-assurance. Mix with an equal part of trust in those you surround yourself with. Shake. Do not stir.

Jeffrey Lurie, chairman and chief executive officer of the Philadelphia Eagles, read a front-page article in *The Wall Street Journal* saying that he was making the mistake of his life by purchasing the team. The fans were upset. (That's a nice way of describing how Philadelphia fans can get. At one point the Eagles' stadium even had its own judge, courtroom, and overnight jail.) They were upset because they were sure he had bought the team just to move it to Los Angeles. Then, when he and his coach, Andy Reid, chose Donovan McNabb to be the quarterback, the mayor of Philadelphia even introduced a resolution in City Council to have the Eagles draft another player instead of Donovan McNabb. Fans called radio stations and the Eagles' switchboard to express similar feelings. Undaunted, Jeffrey carried on and in a few short years replaced the beleaguered stadium the team used to play in with a world-class facility and got the team to the Super Bowl. Jeffrey exudes a confidence that comes from believing in himself *and* in the people with whom he surrounds himself.

Passion. It is impossible to succeed without loving what you do. Really succeeding means pouring your heart and soul into what you're doing. When you start with passion, all the people around you know they're in the presence of someone who is not just talented but has the potential

for greatness. The last time João Carlos Martins played a Bach concert at Carnegie Hall, *The New York Times* said there were fireworks in all directions. His passion for interpreting Bach was rushing through his entire body, his head shooting back, his hands flying off the keyboard, his audience in rapture. They even put 500 seats on the stage.

“I played as I never played in my life,” he said. “Any time I go to the stage, I have to perform as if it were the last concert of my life. I have to play with all my passion. It’s the only way I know how.” At that time João Carlos was just regaining the use of his right hand which had been seriously injured in an accident. He has since recorded a CD called *For the Left Hand Only*.

Integrity. One of the qualities that have to do with our very essence is being honest and true to ourselves. Interestingly, the word *integrity* also means “the state of being complete.” We often find out about our integrity when it is tested.

When Connie Jackson was heading up a health-care clinic in Chicago, she became disillusioned with politicians who were unwilling to fight wealthy health care interest groups and help people who were really in need. And she saw no sign of it changing. “I was getting sick and burned out,” she explained. She needed to find a new way to make a difference. After a lot of soul-searching, she found herself in London, at the helm of St. Bartholomew’s, where she is working on health policy in a country that puts more emphasis on health care for the needy.

Trust. Trust is the bedrock of any successful relationship, whether it’s professional or personal. When you know that you can rely on the people you surround yourself with, a world of possibilities opens up. That is not to say that to be trusting is to be naive. Sometimes relationships start with trust. Sometimes it has to be developed. But it can never be missing from a solid relationship. We trust others when we know we can depend on them—and they can depend on us.

Gordon Gund, the former owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers and owner of Gund Investment Corporation, has to trust the people and organizations he invests in whether they’re in

sports, business, or health research. Trust has also had a lot to do with Gordon's personal relationships since losing his sight. When he's walking with someone, he has to know that person will watch out for him, let him know when a step or curb is coming up. "I remember when I first became blind, one of the basic things I had to come to terms with was the importance of trust—on a very deep level. And, in my case, that also means being willing to accept help from other people, which isn't easy when you're used to being independent. But it's a very important thing for all of us. And you learn that it can also mean a great deal to the people who are helping you. Whether you have a disability or not, the truth is that the most amazing friendships often get to be even stronger when we help each other. And that takes real trust."

Having Fun. It is impossible to succeed at something if you are not enjoying what you are doing. Some of us have gotten to take that enjoyment to an entirely new level.

Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah, born with the name Angelo Chianese, is a singing telegram artist who, as he describes it, "had quite a checkered past when it comes to my career; a real history of going from one thing to another, trying to find out what the heck works and what feels right." Before he started entertaining people at parties, he'd taught foreign languages, been an editor, and tried carpentry. Then one hot summer day, while sweating away as a roofer, he said, "it occurred to me that I was really, really miserable." He started climbing down the ladder, and when he got to the bottom, he said to his boss, "I'm giving notice. I won't be doing this much longer. I'm going to start my own company. I'm going to do singing telegrams." His boss asked, "Full-time? For a living?" And he said, "Wherever it goes. I know I can do this. I'm going to call it Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah Singing Telegram Company because that's my favorite song." Then he signed her up as his first client.

Being Open. We've found that people who can keep growing are open in two distinct ways. They are open to new experiences. And they are open to learning more about themselves. It turns out

that being open themselves is how they open new doors. Libby Sartain is that kind of open. She's at the helm of human resources for Yahoo!, where she has made an incredible difference, though she may actually be better known for her 13 years at Southwest Airlines. "For me, leaving Southwest was like getting a divorce," she said. "It was horribly wrenching." When she decided to leave, she opened herself up to a whole new world of possibilities. Her openness helped her realize some very important things about herself and her options. Most important, she learned what was important to her.

Creativity. How do you think the world was created? The answer has a lot to do with who you are and what you believe. Creativity has to do with understanding our environment and transcending it. We have believed for a long time that there are two types of people in this world: those who create and those who criticize.

Creative people make things happen. And one of the most creative minds on this planet belongs to Michael Graves, who was hailed by *The New York Times* as "truly the most original voice American architecture has produced in some time." Michael said, "We are continually developing our curious minds, looking, analyzing, reflecting, then coming up with something different, something new. There is always that interest in continuing on to the next thing because there is always something new out there to learn."

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Courage. Knowing the right thing to do is one thing; doing the right thing takes courage. Courage, it turns out, invariably involves fear. We often think of courageous people as being totally fearless. But courage really means overcoming fear. And doing what needs to be done. Courage can come through in many ways. It might be the courage to change jobs or get out of a

negative relationship or start a business. Then again, there are people on this planet like Congressman John Lewis, who take courage to a whole new level.

In the early 1960s, John Lewis was at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement as a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He was beaten countless times and jailed 40 times. He said, “I’d been told over and over by my parents not to get in trouble. And here I was, getting in real trouble. But it was a good trouble. It was necessary trouble.”

He was one of the planners and keynote speakers of the March on Washington in August 1963, the occasion of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s celebrated “I Have a Dream” speech. Then he led one of the most dramatic protests of the era. On March 7, 1965—a day that would become known as “Bloody Sunday”—he led over 600 marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. At the crest of the bridge, they were met by Alabama state troopers who charged the demonstrators, beating them with nightsticks. That evening, ABC news aired footage of people weeping, bleeding, and vomiting from the tear gas. Sheriff Jim Clark’s voice could be heard clearly in the background, yelling, “Get those goddamned niggers.” Men and horses were running right over fallen people. And viewers saw John, lying on the ground, struggling to get back on his feet. Then they saw him collapse, unconscious, his skull fractured.

A week after Bloody Sunday, President Johnson appeared before a joint session of Congress to insist on the passage of the Voting Rights Act, which enforced the voting rights of all Americans. Two decades later John ran for Congress and won. “You need to have the courage to stand up for issues that you will not compromise on. You need to have the courage to get in the way. To disturb the order of things. You have to say something and do something when you see things are wrong.”

We hope this quick overview of 19 defining qualities will inspire you and also help you consider which quality or combination of qualities speaks to you.

Perhaps you are most drawn to courage or having fun or trusting others or knowing yourself. Maybe the quality that resonates with you most is self-discipline, integrity, or passion. Or are you more goal-oriented, persuasive, or competitive? Do you feel more optimistic, empathic, or confident? Are you patient? Or do you have a stronger need to get things done immediately? Is your strength reading others and tuning in to their needs? Are you able to handle rejection and bounce back with a stronger sense of purpose?

There is no right or wrong answer. There is only your answer.

Certainly, as we said before, your strengths could include a combination of these qualities.

In the following chapters, we will discuss these qualities in more depth and share with you some of the incredible stories we've discovered about people who have succeeded on their own terms by playing to their strengths.