

## **Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance** ■ Atul Gawande

### **Suggestions for becoming a positive deviant**

Five suggestions for how one might make a worthy difference, or in other words a positive deviant.

1. **Ask an unscripted questions** – ours is a job of learning from strangers, why not learn something about them. Try to see if you can keep the conversation going for more than two sentences. Listen. Make note of what you learned. By doing this you will remember the people you see, instead of letting them all blur together. Sometimes you discover the unexpected.
2. **Don't complain** – resist it, It's boring, it doesn't solve anything and it will get you down. You don't have to be sunny about everything. Just be prepared with something else to discuss: an idea you read about, an interesting problem you came across,
3. **Count something** – one should be a scientist in this world. The only requirement is that what you count should be interesting to you. If you count something interesting you will learn something interesting.
4. **Write something** – just write. What you write need not achieve perfection. It need only add some small observation about your world. It need only add some small observation about your world. You should never underestimate the effect of your contribution, however modest. Never underestimate the power of the act of writing. Writing lets you step back and think through a problem. By offering your reflections to an audience, even a small one, you make yourself part of a larger world.
5. **Change** – people respond to new ideas in one of three ways: a few become early adopters, most become late adopters, and some remain pessimistic skeptics who never stop resisting. Look for the opportunity to change. I am not saying you should embrace every new trend that comes along. But be willing to recognize the inadequacies in what you do and seek out solutions.

So find something new to try, something to change. Count how often you succeed and how often you fail. Write about it. Ask people what they think. See if you can keep the conversation going.

### **Keys to success**

1. **Diligence** – the necessity of giving sufficient attention to detail to avoid error and prevail against obstacles. We always hope for the easy fix: the one simple change that will erase a problem in a stroke. But few things in life work this way. Instead success requires making a hundred small steps go right – one after the other, no slipups, no goofs, everyone pitching in. We are use to thinking of medicine a solitary intellectual task. But making medicine go right is less often making a difficult diagnosis than making sure everyone washes their hands.
2. **Do right** – just when you begin to feel confident that you know what you are doing a failure knocks you down. The hardest part is to know what you have the power over and what you don't. It is not about the doctor it is about the patient. The good doctors did not always get the answers right. Sometimes they still push too long or not long enough. But at least they stopped to wonder, to reconsider the path they were on. They asked colleagues for another perspective. They set aside their egos. In the face of uncertainty, wisdom is to err on the side of pushing, to not give up. But you have to be ready to recognize when pushing is only ego, only weakness. You have to be ready to recognize when the pushing can turn to harm.
3. **Ingenuity** – thinking anew. It is not a matter of superior intelligence, but of character. The willingness to recognize failure. To not paper over the cracks and change. It arises from the deliberate, even obsessive, reflection on failure and a constant searching for new solutions. To fix something we need to do two things: measure ourselves, and be more open about what we are doing. We need to compare performances; people need total access to information. Great doctors think hard about their patients, they push them and do not hesitate to improvise. Even doctors with great knowledge and technical skills can have mediocre results. More nebulous factors like aggressiveness, diligences and ingenuity can matter enormously. If we are general curious about how the best achieve their results we need to spread their ideas. What the best may have above all is the capacity to learn and change- and to do so faster than most.

