



DORIT ILANI-LANGDON

High achiever helping others reach goals

By Walt Murray
Staff Writer

Dorit Ilani-Langdon was a high achiever from the start.

By the time she was 22, she'd taught at the best private school in Jerusalem, where she grew up. She'd taught high school, free school, adult school. She'd taught mentally gifted children and mentally retarded children. She'd worked with juvenile delinquents at a psychiatric institute. She'd taught Hebrew to Moroccan immigrants. She'd done social work.

She also had the ability to observe herself to see what made her tick.

"I got more interested in the process by which I would accomplish my high achievement than in the achievement itself," she said.

"I found that when I could visualize perfectly what I wanted to achieve, I would achieve it. When I couldn't, I wouldn't."

When she came to study at UC Irvine seven years ago, she began a pilgrimage of self-discovery through California's growth movement.

"Given my personal experience, I knew there was a way to accomplish more. I knew it in my blood. You know when you know?"

Instead of just dabbling in weekend workshops, she immersed herself completely in what she was doing, whether it was meditation or Roling or goal-setting seminars.

Today, at age 30, as a psychology teacher at Irvine and an adult workshop leader, Ms. Ilani-Langdon is using what she learned to help others achieve more highly.

What makes people achieve? It's not high IQ or the right family background or just plain luck, although all those help, she said.

"High achievers have certain characteristics and skills that allow them to handle what other people can't handle. They may not be psychologists, but they know intuitively how the mind works."

Rather than focusing on outer activities toward achievement, Ms. Ilani-Langdon tries to help students and clients make inner changes first. She believes that if you change the way you see yourself and talk to yourself, you'll increase your ability to achieve.

"A teen-ager who was Miss America said she wasn't surprised that she won because she'd been practicing ever since she was five. She always pictured what it would be like to walk down the aisle among the judges wearing that big 'Miss America' stripe."

Miss America was practicing a form of visualization, although she didn't put it that way.

"A high achiever has the vision years before he accomplishes it. And then of course it takes the effort and time to accomplish the vision. It takes a one-pointed mind focused on what you want to accomplish."

You visualize what you want to achieve — with as much sound, color and emotion as possible — as often as possible during the day. You may concentrate on the individual steps toward what you want to accomplish. You're not trying to do something magic, but rather to motivate yourself, pre-dispose yourself to success.

"You have to practice," Ms. Ilani-Langdon says. "It's like going to the gym and working out every day."

She has other advice for would-be high achievers:

- High achievers are as interested in experiencing the inner feeling of success as they are the actual success.

When you keep reinforcing that feeling, it becomes part of your self-image. "People who have more money, make more. People who have less, make less."

If you don't have a history of big successes, start by recalling your small ones, like cooking a successful dinner. Take small risks that will give you the feeling of success as often as you can.

- Handle your fears by training yourself not to identify totally with them.

"Suppose I have to give a lecture in the social science hall. I'm walking down the corridor and I have the thought: 'I'm scared.' I'm perspiring and my throat is quivering. But if I identify totally with 'I'm scared,' I have no option to experience anything else. If I learn to disidentify with it and say: 'I'm having scary thoughts,' it can't take over.

Seeing your way to achievement

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"I can take the fear with me and still do whatever task I need to do. I'll notice I have fear and yet keep doing the job. Most people who experience fear — it will make them stop doing whatever they want to do."

If you've practiced a lot, on the way to the lecture hall you can visualize yourself successfully delivering the lecture, or put your attention on paintings on the wall, friends who pass by, anything but your fear.

- High achievers have broader limits of what they think they can or can't do.

"People have a 'comfort zone' in which they function. If they find themselves too far outside that zone, they do anything they can to get back to where they're comfortable.

"If you make \$15,000, and you get a \$100,000 job offer, you may not take it because it's not like you to make \$100,000."

But it's within the self-image of high achievers to learn what they need in order to accomplish even more. Low achievers don't have that kind of positive self-image.

- High achievers have effective ways of handling failures.

"They learn from them and bounce higher or they just see them as part of the game."

But the mediocre person will see failure as a self-fulfilling prophecy: "See, I knew I couldn't do better than that."

- High achievers don't lie to themselves. They are able to assess their weaknesses and faults and strengths.

Low achievers have a lot of investment in hiding their faults. They don't admit their faults to themselves or others — so the faults persist. If someone has an investment in covering up faults, he'll cover up more and more, and finally be unable to assess himself.

- High achievers are generally fairly happy and satisfied on their way to achieving their goals.

If you're not satisfied with every step along the way, you're not going to be happy even if you reach your final goal, because there's always another goal to be achieved just beyond.

- High achievers usually work in areas they like.

"Often people don't accomplish highly because they're doing what their parents wanted them to do or seeking high status or whatever. They don't have a natural devotion to their work. But for people who naturally do what's right for them, self-discipline is not discipline, it's natural."

- High achievers can gauge how big a risk to take.

Some people fail because they take on too much. Sometimes without being consciously aware of it, they try a huge leap forward so they can prove to themselves: "See, it's not like me to succeed," or to justify their low-achieving lifestyles.

Others will take steps that are too small to be satisfying and say: "See, it doesn't work."

- High achievers don't leave a trail of incompletes behind them.

Sometimes the incompletes can be cluttered apartments or offices. "You have file drawers with papers from 10 years ago or letters you're behind writing for a year. All those kinds of things suck energy out of you."

To be a high achiever, you have to be good at setting priorities. If your house is cluttered, your mind may be cluttered. When you start cleaning things out, you can see more clearly what's important in your life.

The incompletes can also be in relationships. You may be obsessed with thinking about the time you broke with someone. Until you resolve emotional incompletes, they drain your energy.

"You may have to forgive others. You may also need to forgive yourself. A lot of people dwell on failures. 'What a nerd I was.' Forgiving yourself creates space so you can go on to new things."

- High achievers learn from other high achievers. Often the best way to learn something is find someone who mastered it and learn from him.
