



## Approaches, Traits and Philosophies of Successful Traders and Active Investors

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So, you want to become a successful—or more successful—trader or active investor. The most logical path forward is to learn from those who've achieved consistent success before you and to steer clear of the errors and pitfalls that have led so many to fail. In this article, we will explore seven key areas that highlight the Approaches, Traits, and Philosophies of Successful Traders.

This article draws on insights from my 25+ years as a full-time trader and my role as an Investment Strategist and Active Investing (AI) Tool Developer with the American Association of Individual Investors (AAII). The material is based on research and teachings developed in collaboration with an MIT-based group of advanced traders—representing over 700 combined years of investment and trading experience. These insights form the foundation of two classes in AAI's **Essential Investing (EI) Course**, a 12+ hour, studio-grade curriculum designed to equip investors and traders with the knowledge, tools, and techniques to succeed.

The course is hosted within a professional learning management system (LMS). It features speakers like Ken Fisher, Fidelity investing legend Bruce Johnstone, Morningstar's Christine Benz, Louie Navallier and the National Association of Active Investment Managers. It includes interactive video classes, a host of additional learning resources, complimentary investing tools, fundamental-based stock scans, strategies, testing modules, a final exam, a certificate of completion and free AAI membership.

[< Watch a Video - Preview of the EI Course >](#)

[< Download a PDF - EI Course Features, Highlights and Curriculum >](#)

Thanks to a partnership with MetaStock, MetaStock users and guests can get a special discounted price on the course, with 60 days of no-obligation access. Information can be found on the MetaStock website at <https://www.metastock.com/products/training/#aaii>

In fact, you will find select video lessons from some of the EI Course classes included throughout this article to reinforce key concepts in a video education format.

Ready to dive in?

Let's explore seven core areas that define the approaches, traits and philosophies of consistently successful traders and active investors.

## **1. Successful Traders and Active Investors Master the Foundational Elements First.**

Traders and active investors focus on sound principles and elements and master them to become successful. Furthermore, they are always learning and looking for ways to refine their craft to gain that elusive but necessary edge to outperform the markets. That's likely why you're reading this article, and I can assure you that continuous learning is the right path.

However, to be a successful trader, you must first survive your first few months of the journey (a little more on that later). Once established, successful traders continuously evolve with the markets—refining their strategies, adapting their approaches, and staying open to emerging opportunities from market imbalances (think greed and fear) and new investments (think crypto).

Successful traders and active investors seek to exploit the advantages they have over large institutions, including greater agility, the ability to specialize in niche areas and freedom from the compliance constraints that burden larger players.

Successful traders and active investors approach their endeavor as a business with an intellectually grounded approach, and they always have a plan. They recognize that no single plan works for everyone. Instead, they develop a personalized plan tailored to their own intellectual, analytical and psychological strengths and weaknesses, as well as their financial goals and life circumstances.

Successful traders and active investors have the discipline to follow this plan by “planning the trade and then trading the plan.” They focus on risk first, expect the unexpected, and understand that trading is about probabilities, recognizing that no trade is foolproof and that they must accept some level of uncertainty to be successful.

Successful traders and active investors are secure in who they are and pragmatic in their approach. They realize that not every trade will be a winner, and they're quick to cut losses when the market turns against them. At the same time, they use smart money management strategies to scale out of winning positions—maximizing profits while resisting the urge for instant gratification.

Successful traders and active investors understand that markets are dynamic, interactive, and complex. Because of this, they embrace technology, integrate multiple techniques, and synergize approaches—always prioritizing unbiased, evidence-based, third-party-verified data and research whenever possible.

Lastly, successful traders are confident. They believe in their systems, their processes, and—most importantly—themselves. They know that other traders have been successful and that they can be too with consistent effort, discipline, and growth.

[<WATCH a Video - Class on Intellectual-based Investing Approaches>](#)

## **2. Successful Traders and Investors Realize That Knowledge Is Not Enough.**

Now, if you're feeling inclined to stop reading—don't. Simply memorizing a list of key traits isn't the same as truly understanding them.

Think of it this way: If I rattled off a few iconic movie lines—"I'm king of the world!" "Make my day!" "Stella!" "Adrian!" or "Rosebud"—you might recognize them or even quote them. But without the context behind the scenes or the emotional weight of the story, they're just empty lines with no influence and are soon forgotten. The same goes for trading and active investing.

Successful traders and active investors don't just know how, when and why to execute a technique—they've developed the intuition, instincts, and discipline to apply those techniques consistently under pressure. That kind of proficiency doesn't come from a checklist. It comes from deep understanding.

The reality is that there will always be bearish and bullish arguments for any trade or investment under consideration. In fact, one common technique that the best traders and active investors often apply is forcing themselves to see the counter side of the position. Think of it like playing chess against yourself!

This approach has numerous benefits, including forcing traders and investors to be aware of and manage individual position risk, keeping their position sizes relative and proportional, maintaining their desired level of risk across their entire portfolio, and being able to stay mentally flexible and objective.

With this technique, traders and active investors often force themselves to write down at least three reasons why they may be wrong and why the investment may go in the opposite direction. Consideration areas here are vast, but could include interest rate directions, stretched fundamental valuations, extreme market sentiment, high short interest levels, derivative expiration dates (maximum pain theory), pending litigation or regulatory risk, seasonal trends, and conflicting technical indicators and price patterns.

Now, for the trader or active investor who can't list three valid counterpoints, I would propose that they are either not trying or they are not yet equipped with the foundational elements (as referenced above) to execute with real money.

Of course, to effectively utilize this technique, the trader or investor must be able to weigh the conflicting observations to reach a reasonably effective conclusion so they can take action. This is where relevancy comes in. To effectively determine relevancy, one needs experience, leading us to the third area.

[<Watch a Video - Class on Investing is About Probabilities>](#)

### **3. Successful Traders and Investors Survive the Journey.**

The single biggest reason so many traders fail is simple: They don't survive their first trading experiences. They try to take shortcuts to success.

Although it may be unpopular—and to some, even trading blasphemy—the truth is this:

The most skilled traders and investors today... weren't when they started.

As with any demanding pursuit—such as medicine, law, engineering or athletics, trading mastery requires experience, and experience takes time. But to get time in the investing world, you must first survive. And survival in this game means one thing above all else: capital preservation.

In fact, the single biggest reason aspiring traders fail is simple: They lose their capital before they ever gain the experience needed to be successful. They never even get a real chance to begin. They enter the arena without the necessary skills or insights to navigate it. They try to sprint before they can even crawl, while other market participants are licking their chops and picking their pockets.

Don't become easy money in the markets. Accept the journey and respect the process!

New traders' or active investors' first priority should be to learn as much as possible, then begin paper trading until they can demonstrate consistent success over several months. When transitioning to real money, no more than 5% of total capital should be allocated to any single stock or highly correlated area—and leverage or margin should be strictly avoided.

When your paper results show consistent performance, begin live trading with ridiculously small amounts—\$50, \$100 or even less. Why? Because paper trading, while valuable, doesn't trigger the real-world emotions of fear, greed, hesitation, or doubt that often sabotage newer traders. The MetaStock platform makes this easy with a built-in simulation feature designed exactly for this purpose.

The bottom line is that diversification is paramount, risk is always the first consideration, and survival is the primary goal. Emotional discipline and trading instincts take time to develop. Easing into real-money trading is the only way to build them without blowing up your account.

[<Watch a Video - Class on Dealing with Unexpected Events and Risk>](#)

#### **4. Successful Traders and Investors Evolve With the Markets.**

After surviving, the single most important area that causes so many traders and active investors to underperform the markets is their failure to evolve and adjust with them.

The failure to evolve takes many forms—one being the reluctance to embrace newer, more efficient investment vehicles. In many cases, the advantages are clear, such as replacing traditional mutual funds with exchange-traded funds (ETFs). Another example is the failure to leverage tools like derivatives—particularly options—to generate additional income, hedge risk, or take advantage of more advanced, less conventional strategies.

New asset class opportunities are another area where some (usually older) investors fail to recognize or refuse to evaluate their advantages even when they become blatantly obvious. The emergence of cryptocurrency is a prime example of this, where many younger traders and investors have excelled, while more established investors who learned in a different environment have failed to capitalize.

Another area from a broader perspective is with approaches and strategies. Here, many investors continue to apply the same investment approaches—such as fixed-income and dividend strategies—regardless of the interest rate environment. Alternatively, they will always favor specific sectors or a value or growth-oriented stock approach, irrespective of where we are in the current economic and business cycle.

It's as if, once traders or active investors find something that works, they assume it will continue working indefinitely. They fall into the trap of positive reinforcement—a classic case of operant conditioning—where early success reinforces the behavior, regardless of shifting market dynamics. What they often fail to acknowledge is that markets are constantly evolving, as are the best opportunities within them. The fact that our markets are continually evolving is a certainty. But for many traders and active investors, there is a reluctance to adjust, often resulting in underwhelming or subpar performance.

Unfortunately, this reality becomes most evident in the continued reliance on outdated investment tools and technical indicators. This is where the line is drawn between traders and active investors who merely survive and those who truly excel. The good news? Advanced platforms like MetaStock now offer modern solutions—bringing us to area number five.

[<Watch a Video - Class on Evolving with The Markets>](#)

## **5. Successful Traders and Investors Utilize Technology to Their Advantage**

A critical yet often overlooked flaw in modern investing is the near cult-like reliance on outdated, first-generation data types and trading tools—many of which were created over 50 years ago in an era when most market participants relied on pencil and paper.

To underscore the importance of evolving with the markets and leveraging technology, I strongly encourage you to watch this short video highlighting the distinct advantages of using Conviction (dollar volume) over standard volume as an intensity-based measure.

While traditional volume is widely used—mainly because it's freely available and directly reported by exchanges—its popularity stems more from accessibility than effectiveness. Dollar volume consistently outperforms traditional volume in backtested strategies and eliminates the intensity-based price distortions that can skew chart analysis. If you are a trader or active investor who utilizes technical analysis, don't skip this video lesson.

[< Watch a Video - Lesson on Volume vs Conviction \(Dollar Volume\) >](#)

Because this area is so critical, let's take a closer look at two of the widely promoted, readily available traditional volume-based indicators. We'll then compare them to a new generation of intensity-based tools that uses Conviction (dollar volume).

On Balance Volume (OBV) is one of the oldest technical indicators still in use. Developed by Joseph Granville in 1963, it was a spin-off of an even earlier concept—"continuous volume"—tracing back to 1946. That's nearly 80 years ago. For background, OBV attempts to measure buying and selling pressure by adding volume on up days and subtracting volume on down days, plotting the result as a cumulative line.

The problem? OBV completely ignores the magnitude of the price move. With OBV, the stock could literally rise 0.5% or 50%, and OBV will add the entire day's volume. Put another way, if a stock finished up one penny, it would add all the volume; if it finished down one penny (just a two-cent difference), OBV would then subtract all the volume.

Let's look at another example. Chaikin's Accumulation/Distribution (A/D) indicator, released in the early 1980s, suffers from a similar issue. With this indicator, a stock could close 30% lower than the previous day's close, but if the stock closed one penny higher than the day's open, Chaikin's A/D reads this as a bullish accumulation signal. Think about that: The stock lost essentially 30% of its value, and Chaikin's A/D would consider this price action bullish. You get the idea.

Now ask yourself: Are these truly the optimal ways to measure and track intensity? Of course not. Yet, many traders and active investors continue to rely on these indicators simply because they're free, and because the readily available, evidence-backed alternatives that professionals use are unknown to them. One such set of indicators is AAIL's Conviction Plus. AAIL's Conviction Plus includes three intensity-based indicators: Relative Conviction Momentum (RCM), Kinetic Conviction (KC) and Optimized Balance Conviction (OBC).

These conviction-based indicators utilize dollar volume, account for overnight gapping, accurately identify important relative intensity readings through dynamically weighted standard deviation bands, and, more importantly, proportionally scale the magnitude of the relative intensity, eliminating the "all or nothing" bias of legacy indicators. Information on accessing the Conviction Plus Series of indicators within the MetaStock platform can be found at: [metastock.com](http://metastock.com)

In support of Conviction Theory, we draw on the wisdom of pioneering computer scientist Grace Hopper, who famously stated, "One accurate measurement is worth a thousand expert opinions." With that in mind, consider the backtested results of the Kinetic Conviction Profit Factor strategy—built entirely on Conviction Theory and its proprietary indicators.

This comprehensive study evaluated every stock in the S&P 500 over a 10-year period. The strategy—available through the MetaStock platform—delivered hit rates exceeding 80%, profit factors above 3.5, and an exceptionally smooth and consistent Realized Equity Curve (see images below).

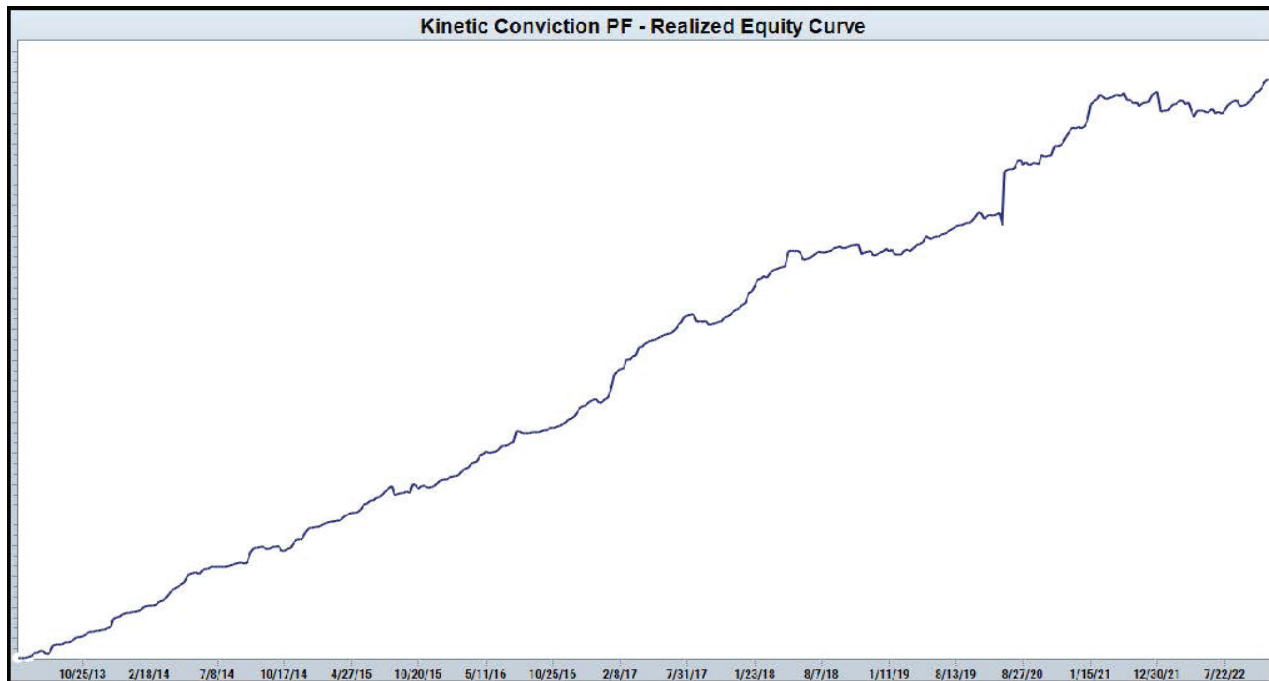
## Kinetic Conviction PF Performance

Category	Value
Number of Trades	410
Hit Rate - % Profitable	<b>81.7%</b>
Profit Factor	<b>3.73</b>
K-Ratio	.5693
Average Trade \$ Return	\$137.37
Average Trade % Return	2.78%
Average Trade Length (days)	26.5
Maximum Consecutive Wins	20
Maximum Consecutive Losses	2



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### Kinetic Conviction Profit Factor Strategy - Performance Summary



### Kinetic Conviction Profit Factor Strategy - Realized Equity Curve

[< Watch a Video - Lesson on Conviction Strategy Performance >](#)

[< Download a PDF - Kinetic Conviction Profit Factor performance report >](#)

## 6. Successful Traders and Investors Synergize Investment Approaches

Evolving with the markets, adapting to current market conditions, and leveraging technology are certainly three ways to enhance investing and trading efficiency. In my opinion, a fourth—and often overlooked—method is to synergize tactics, approaches, and strategies.

The table below shows the third-party verified performance results from a 10-year study covering every stock in the S&P 500 index, comparing three common indicators: Relative Strength Index (RSI), Stochastics, and Bollinger Bands. The bottom row in each table highlights the performance differentials between these traditional indicators and a third-generation tool that synergizes multiple measurements—Rondeau's Reversion (R-Reversion).

The bottom rows in each table display the performance differentials between the classic applications of each indicator and R-Reversion, which synergizes and proportionally integrates various measurements. Green highlights indicate outperformance.

Without going into excessive detail, R-Reversion utilizes volatility like Bollinger Bands, but with an important distinction: It separates upward volatility from downward volatility, creating two asymmetrical boundaries. This design prevents expanding (penalizing) the lower accumulation boundary during high-magnitude upward moves, allowing the indicator to stay aligned with, and even encourage, entries in the direction of the prevailing trend. The same relationship advantages exist with high-magnitude downward moves, further lowering the accumulation boundary, urging caution, while encouraging profit-taking on the non-affected upper distribution boundary.

As expected, R-Reversion measures and calculates intensity using Conviction (dollar volume) and weights higher-intensity moves more heavily. This proportional approach expands boundaries outward during strong moves and contracts them on moves with lower relative intensity.

From a technical perspective, this approach is logical—it encourages signals in line with the prevailing trend and supports the long-standing theory that higher-intensity moves carry greater significance.

From a historical, quantitative standpoint, the results are striking: **a minimum of +22% non-compounded efficiency gain** over each of the classic indicators tested.

From a synergizing perspective, the message is clear—combining multiple measurements and readings can significantly enhance results. Instead of relying on simplified volatility and baseline volume readings in isolation, we adapted to modern market conditions, applied advanced technology, and developed a single, superior buy/sell signal generator.



Strategy	Total Return	Avg Trade \$ Return	Avg Trade % Return	Hr Rate	Profit Factor	K-Ratio	Win/Loss	Max Consect Winners	Max Consect Losers	Average Runup	Average Drawdown	Tot Return/Max Draw	Entry Efficiency	Exit Efficiency	Ave Trade Length (ref)	Total Trades (ref)	Average Return Per Day	Theoretical Annual Return \$'s	Theoretical Annual Return %
Bollinger Bands	\$ 362,620	\$ 25.98	2.64%	71.2%	2.07	0.5241	0.8400	65	24	\$ 70.52	\$ 84.35	2.321	50.9%	80.4%	57.83 days	13969	\$ 0.457	\$ 166.63	16.66%
R-Reversion +	\$ 388,999	\$ 64.16	6.77%	76.5%	3.36	0.6606	1.0300	114	17	\$ 115.83	\$ 124.32	0.272	54.0%	83.7%	123 days	6063	\$ 0.550	\$ 200.90	20.09%
Benefit Difference	\$ 26,379	\$ 38.18	4.13%	5.3%	1.29	0.1365	0.1900	49	7	\$ 45.31	\$ (39.97)	-2.049	3.1%	3.4%	65 days	-7906	\$ 0.094	\$ 34.272	3.43%
% Assessment	7.27%	146.96%	156.44%	7.39%	62.32%	26.04%	22.62%	75.38%	29.17%	9.57 % Ratio	-88.28%	6.05%	4.18%	112.69%	-56.60%	20.57%	20.57%	20.57%	

Strategy	Total Return	Avg Trade \$ Return	Avg Trade % Return	Hr Rate	Profit Factor	K-Ratio	Win/Loss	Max Consect Winners	Max Consect Losers	Average Runup	Average Drawdown	Tot Return/Max Draw	Entry Efficiency	Exit Efficiency	Ave Trade Length (ref)	Total Trades (ref)	Average Return Per Day	Theoretical Annual Return \$'s	Theoretical Annual Return %
Stochastics	\$ 303,200	\$ 13.84	1.46%	66.3%	1.66	0.4511	0.8400	38	20	\$ 66.95	\$ 63.12	2.278	57.1%	57.9%	35.63 days	21605	\$ 0.410	\$ 149.56	14.96%
R-Reversion +	\$ 388,999	\$ 64.16	6.77%	76.5%	3.36	0.6606	1.0300	114	17	\$ 115.83	\$ 124.32	0.272	54.0%	83.7%	123 days	6063	\$ 0.550	\$ 200.90	20.09%
Benefit Difference	\$ 85,799	\$ 50.32	5.31%	10.2%	1.70	0.2095	0.1900	76	3	\$ 48.88	\$ (61.20)	-2.006	-3.1%	25.9%	87 days	-15542	\$ 0.141	\$ 51.333	5.13%
% Assessment	28.30%	363.58%	363.70%	15.38%	102.41%	46.44%	22.62%	200.00%	15.00%	-12.9 % Ratio	-88.06%	-5.48%	44.67%	245.21%	-71.94%	34.32%	34.32%	34.32%	

Strategy	Total Return	Avg Trade \$ Return	Avg Trade % Return	Hr Rate	Profit Factor	K-Ratio	Win/Loss	Max Consect Winners	Max Consect Losers	Average Runup	Average Drawdown	Tot Return/Max Draw	Entry Efficiency	Exit Efficiency	Ave Trade Length (ref)	Total Trades (ref)	Average Return Per Day	Theoretical Annual Return \$'s	Theoretical Annual Return %
RSI	\$ 298,305	\$ 65.68	6.93%	75.8%	3.23	0.5348	1.0300	126	15	\$ 125.48	\$ 121.71	2.278	54.8%	77.9%	152 days	4566	\$ 0.456	\$ 166.41	16.64%
R-Reversion +	\$ 388,999	\$ 64.16	6.77%	76.5%	3.36	0.6606	1.0300	114	17	\$ 115.83	\$ 124.32	0.272	54.0%	83.7%	123 days	6063	\$ 0.550	\$ 200.90	20.09%
Benefit Difference	\$ 90,694	\$ (1.52)	-0.16%	0.7%	0.13	0.1258	0.0000	-12	(2)	\$ (9.65)	\$ (2.61)	-2.006	-0.9%	5.8%	-29 days	1497	\$ 0.094	\$ 34.487	3.45%
% Assessment	30.40%	-2.31%	-2.31%	0.90%	4.02%	23.52%	0.00%	-9.52%	-13.33%	-9.93 % Ratio	-88.06%	-1.55%	7.42%	-19.08%	32.79%	20.72%	20.72%	20.72%	

## Rondeau's Reversion / classic indicator comparison table

[<Download a PDF - Rondeau's Reversion / classic indicator comparison performance report>](#)

## 7. Successful Traders and Active Investors Believe They Will Be Successful

Our last area, although obviously simple, is the most important and, paradoxically, one of the most difficult elements to maintain as a trader and active investor: The need to believe that they can and will be successful.

Let's start with its importance: If a trader or active investor doesn't believe they can succeed, they're unlikely even to begin—and if they do, they'll probably fall short of putting in the effort required for success. Without action, every other skill, strategy, and insight becomes irrelevant.

No belief = no effort = no chance at success.

Unfortunately, there are many reasons why people come to believe they can't be successful traders or active investors. While some of these beliefs stem from personal setbacks, many are planted and reinforced by the self-serving interests of others.

Often, this starts at an individual level with friends and family, or even social media connections. These circles are filled with cautionary tales from people who "tried" trading or investing and failed. In my experience, such attempts are often half-hearted or fueled by excessive risk-taking driven by get-rich-quick expectations. When those unrealistic plans collapsed, the ego's natural defense was to conclude that success simply wasn't possible. The result? A chorus of familiar refrains: "*Nobody can beat the market.*" "*It's rigged.*" "*Trading is just gambling.*"

Then there's the financial industry itself. Many institutions benefit when individual traders or investors feel confused, overwhelmed, or incapable. Why? Because these feelings keep individuals dependent on their products, advice, and management services. To sustain that dependency, they use jargon-heavy language, exaggerate complexity, and present certain strategies as off-limits or "too advanced" for the average investor.

At the same time, they highlight their limited advantages while ignoring the very real benefits that individual traders and investors enjoy. These include:

- Ability to implement personalized tax optimization strategies
- Ability to set individualized profit targets and risk levels
- Ability to enhance positions with various options and hedging strategies
- Access to a broader range of investment types
- Fewer government and institutional regulatory constraints and hurdles
- Greater portfolio flexibility
- Lower costs and management fees
- Lower slippage cost and increased execution efficiency

Lastly, from a broader, systemic perspective, there's the possibility—perhaps even the uncomfortable reality—that the financial system prefers individuals not to move money frequently. Institutions need counterparties on the other side of their trades to profit, and the entire structure benefits when capital stays put, helping reduce volatility and stabilize global market systems.

This viewpoint was evident during the tragic events of 9/11, when some voices urged a "patriotic stance" by not selling or taking action when the markets reopened—despite clear signs that many large institutions were doing exactly that.

The Great Recession of 2007–2009 was an even more striking example. Media outlets, agencies, and even some institutions tasked with protecting investors appeared aligned in ways that ultimately worked against smaller retail buy-and-hold investors. The prevailing mantras—"stay the course," "slow and steady," and "don't get emotional"—were repeated throughout the entire gut-wrenching 18-month, 57% decline in the S&P 500.

States, countries, businesses, financial institutions, and large investors all successfully move capital in response to changing market conditions. So why wouldn't you? It's no different than timing interest rates to refinance a mortgage or acting on other high-probability financial relationships—it's both logical and practical.

The bottom line is this: No one cares about your financial success more than you. Many individuals

have built—and will continue to build—wealth through trading and active investing. Success is absolutely possible, but only if you believe it is and commit to taking action.

As Henry Ford famously said, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t—you’re right.” Fortunately, he didn’t believe the doubters—otherwise, we might all still be walking to our vacation spots to enjoy the rewards of our successful trading and active investing efforts.

The choice is yours—believe, act, and make it happen!

[< Watch a Video - Lesson on Believe Your Way to Investing Success >](#)

## **Key Takeaways: Approaches, Traits and Philosophies of Successful Traders and Investors**

- **Master the Basics:** Start with foundational principles, sound strategies, risk management, and a plan tailored to your unique strengths and goals.
- **Go Beyond Knowledge:** Develop practical experience, intuition, and mental discipline; success lies in application under pressure.
- **Prioritize Capital Preservation:** Survive your early journey by managing risk, practicing with paper trades, and starting small with real money.
- **Adapt or Fall Behind:** Markets are constantly changing and evolving—so must your strategies, tools, and asset preferences. Stay flexible and current.
- **Embrace Technology:** Leverage technology and utilize modern investing tools along with evidence-based systems and strategies.
- **Synergize Approaches:** Integrate multiple approaches, techniques, tactics, and strategies for higher probability and consistent performance.
- **Believe in Your Potential:** Confidence and belief are prerequisites to success. Don’t let hearsay, outdated narratives or industry noise discourage you.

## **Important Disclosure**

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Prior to buying or selling an option, investors must read a copy of the Characteristics & Risks of Standardized Options, also known as the options disclosure document (ODD). It explains the characteristics and risks of exchange traded options. Copies of this document may be obtained from your broker or from any exchange on which options are traded.