



WHAT DOES SUCCESS REALLY FEEL LIKE? ©
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“Success means attaining some measure of money, fame, power and self-fulfillment - and then looking the part.”
(Webster’s New World Dictionary of American language)

“Looks aren’t everything. Luxury is not everything. Money is not everything. Health is not everything. Success is not everything. Happiness is not everything. Even everything is not everything. There is more to life than everything.”
(Steve Turner)

There once lived a Middle Eastern king who had it all, plus a little bit more. He was the richest man in the world at the time. As a builder and developer he constructed one of the Seven Wonders of the World. His employees numbered into the hundreds of thousands, and his assets counted into the billions. He owned more rental property, married more women and controlled more banks than any man in his lifetime. He was easily the most intelligent man in town and most people considered him to be the most fun. What a guy!

But one afternoon things began to change. During a sober moment he gazed into his life and asked a courageous question. Is this what success really feels like? Like a four year old tugging at his daddy’s pants, the question pulled at his conscience. Finally, one day he decided he would answer the question for good. Because he was a king and extremely wealthy he could throw his entire life into pursuing the answer and that is exactly what he did. For 40 years Solomon selected one formula of success after another. You name it he tried it. And when he tried it, he tried it big...and he tried it long...and he tried it hard. No man has ever tested life like the wealthy king from the Middle East.

“Men lust, but they know not what for;
They wander, and lose track of the goal;
They fight and compete, but they forget the prize;
They chase power and glory,
But miss the meaning of life.”

Like Solomon, many people are in search of what real success really feels like. It is amazing. The places we search and the things we try are so very similar to the wealthy, powerful king who lived centuries before us. So what does real success really feel like? Here are some areas that people have turned for the answer to that aggravating question that so often eludes us.

Climbing Up the Ladder

For many people life is a rigorous ascent to the top. Step after step, rung after rung, they advance from one level of success to the next. But for many the view from the top feels like anything but real success. What is the reason? Many people spend their entire life climbing the ladder, only to find at the end of their lives their ladder has been leaning against the wrong building. What a despairing emotion to chase a rainbow that doesn't really exist. It vanishes once we finally get close enough to grab it. Solomon called this ... 'chasing the wind.'

At what cost have we climbed this ladder to success? Many people climbed to the position they always dreamed of having, the wealth they thought they wanted, only to find the price has been too high. How many hours were spent at an office or on the road trying to capture success? No time to spend in the beautiful home they were able to purchase with their financial success. Many an executive has looked back and realized they don't even know their families. Their children have grown up while they never even noticed. How many family functions were missed, how many days did they kiss their spouse and children goodbye in the morning while they were still in bed and return in the evenings after the family had returned to bed? The family suffers, all in the name of success. I'm reminded of a song from the 70s entitled, *Cat's in the Cradle*, by Harry Chapin. It says: A child arrived just the other day. He came to the world in the usual way. But there were planes to catch and bills to pay. He learned to walk while I was away. It goes on to say: When you coming home, Dad? I don't know when, but we'll get together then Son, we're gonna have a good time then.

At the end of the day, is success determined only by how far you've traveled up the ladder?

Making It to Retirement

I once read a story about a small community that had a gigantic oak tree in the middle of its town square. The tree was the pride of the townspeople. It had been there long before most of them were even born and would undoubtedly outlive all of them. Then one day storm winds cracked the tree in half and revealed a trunk filled with disease. A symbol of strength on the outside, the oak was weak and vulnerable on the inside. For years it had fooled its unknowing admirers.

Things don't always appear as they seem. Retirement is one such paradox. When thinking of retirement we see free-time, no pressures, and lots of golf or fishing. But, the reality of retirement can be loneliness, regret and emptiness. Take a stroll through a retirement home and do a success survey. It is a staggering education.

Joe Aldrich added this penetrating comment, "When I get to the end of my life and there is nothing but death to look forward to and life to look back upon, can I sit down and rehearse my life with a real sense of satisfaction and fulfillment?" Or in other words, have I experienced real success? . There is a Scottish proverb that says, "Be happy while you're living for you're a long time dead."

Stacking Up the Toys

The playwright said it right "Money may be the husk of many things, but it's not the kernel. It brings you food, but not the appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintances, but not friends; servants but not faithfulness; days of fun, but not peace and happiness." Stockpiling stuff doesn't bring real success. It does provide a lot of rights and privileges, but it doesn't equal success.

What is at the root of our desire for these expensive toys? If our neighbor has a nice car we must have a better one. If a family member is making more money than we are we don't consider ourselves as successful. We strive to increase our income so we can buy more stuff. Having money and nice things does not make you a wealthy person. True wealth comes in how you spend the money you have and the way in which you live your life. A person who gets into the mindset that money brings happiness soon finds themselves on a carousel going round and round and they can't jump off. As they make money and spend money they always need more. It is no different than a drug addict who feels good while getting high but when the high is over they are desperate for more. Look at the Enron guys, they made great wealth but it was never enough. With all of the wealth they were able to accumulate and the nice things they were able to buy there was no true happiness in the end. It has been said that success is not so much what we have as it is what we are.

In our ride around the 'stuff carousel' we often we switch our price tags. We start with conventional everyday toys then shift to novelty rare ... more expensive toys. But regardless of the shine of the toy or the price of the toy it can not offer deep lasting fulfillment. Every toy loses its shine and ultimately becomes rusty.

“The boy who was poor as dirt,
Looked at the man with all the toys,
He whispered down deep,
What's making you weep,
All that stuff should bring endless joys.”

Gaining Others Approval

To look the part is the sum of success for some people. A well circulated mail-order catalogue recently advertised a certain “Power Symbol” to guarantee the feel of success. It was a European style yachting bracelet. The advertisement read, “This design is just like the one seen at Milan's most expensive men's jeweler ...Authentic steel sail cable is bound with lustrous 14K gold, a combination that expresses strength and your appreciation for the finer things of life...wear it on board or in the boardroom. And see the difference this subtle display of power can make. All this for a cool '\$4999.” Books and seminars are plentiful with tips to tailor one's appearance in order to achieve the taste of approval and success.

I will never forget the scene a friend once replayed to me. It was a monkey dressed up in a red suit sitting at a piano, smoking a cigar. Curiously a man near by asked, “What would make a monkey perform with such behavior?” Another man quickly responded, “Bananas!” The zookeeper had trained the monkey to respond and adjust his behavior for a few bananas. In our culture the approval of other people can become the banana that causes many to perform, often in a zoo-like behavior.

Constantly striving for the approval of others means that you are primarily living to do the things others want you to do rather than satisfying the goals for your own life. Most people who feel a constant need for approval have a fear of rejection, abandonment, and disapproval to the point that they give up their own dreams and goals to please those around them.

Motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar once said, “Success is not measured by what you do compared to what others do, it is measured by what you do with the ability God gave you.”

Living Wild and Dangerous

Different things pull different people to the edge. The smell of risk and the adventure for some creates the aroma of success. On April 9, 1626, Francis Bacon climbed Highgate Hill in London, having decided on a scientific experiment. Here, he ate a goose stuffed with snow to see whether the ice had halted the natural decay of the flesh. He reportedly died of typhoid.

Not too long ago I saw a television program called Thrill Seekers in which individuals participated in activities from Indy-style racing to skydiving. There are many tour companies that will take you on a thrill seekers vacation. What prompts these participants to engage in activities that can be very dangerous if not life threatening? Once a thrill seeker has experienced the high they get from accomplishing a dangerous endeavor, is it enough? Not generally, most thrill seekers continue to push the envelope.

There is a fine line that can be crossed from the thrill of having fun to becoming self-destructive. Many people find traveling, sports, and this type of activities to be enough of a thrill while others go over the edge with dangerous activities, crime, gambling, and drugs as their outlet for obtaining this thrill seeking high. Thrill seekers have a central nervous system that enjoys being charged and feeds on danger.

But is that the real feel of success...a thrill?

Building Up Your Body

The emphasis on the physical body has never been higher. Some people spend hours every day trying to bulk it up. Other people spend hours every day trying to trim it down. Low fat and no fat, savage tan and shapely curves, that's what life is all about. Well maybe that is a part of it?

The fact that the American people have generally become much more health conscious is not a bad thing. Yes, it is a very good thing for the "Little Debbie" generation to give way to the "Apples and Oranges" generation. No doubt, it is important that we eat healthy and have some type of daily exercise to maintain good health and live longer. The problem is when people become obsessed with their looks as if looking good to other people will make them into someone they are not. It is when this idea of looking good and feeling young becomes an obsession that it also becomes a danger.

Many people have the belief that looking good and feeling young will build their sustained self-confidence. Having self-esteem means honoring what is truly you. When we become obsessed with looking like the pictures on the magazine covers we can lose the satisfaction with who we are. By no means is looking good and feeling good a bad thing, but for many the means and the end have become confused.

Lining up the Trophies

"Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, his guide, led the first successful assault against the intrepid Everest. Week after week they inched up the face of the world's tallest temptation. Herculean odds faced them. Avalanches threatened to claim their lives. Deep crevasses resisted negotiation. High winds howled their haunting warnings. Extreme steepness defied their ingenuities. Thin air sapped their strength.

As they ascended they continued to build new camps. Each of the seven succeeding camps grew smaller as more and more of the expedition team retreated from the severe strain of the immobile, inflexible pinnacle.

In his autobiography, Edmond Hillary described the exhilaration of becoming the first to arrive at Everest's apex. At 11:45 A.M. on May 28, 1953, Hillary and Norgay stood on top of the world.

But here's the interesting point, fifteen minutes after they arrived, the raw fury of naked nature forced them to begin their descent. As Hillary recorded in his diary, unless they began the retreat back down the precipice to their base camp immediately, nightfall would overtake them, and they would perish in the elements. All of that effort to stand for fifteen minutes on the top of the world.

The only problem with trophies is that they gather dust, and the only problem with records is that they usually get broken. As a bumper sticker philosopher observed, "I was winning the rat race and then along came faster rats." It reminded me of the interview question and response years ago to then superstar Dallas Cowboy, Duane Thomas after winning the Super Bowl. A reporter asked, "Mr. Thomas, how does it feel to win the ultimate game?" Rather shrewdly he rebutted, "If this was the ultimate game why will they play another one next year?"

Filling Up the Calendar

Years ago a book emerged titled *Going Nowhere Fast*. The author described our lives as one frantic treadmill after the next. In one section he says, "In increasing numbers, people are beginning to ask an important question: I think I am doing all the right things, so why do I still feel so tense, exhausted, and empty?" He goes on to add, "It is because we've clamped our success to the treadmill. Treadmills are false goals that lead to dead ends. They are prescribed by society's new and seductive values, fueled by a fear of imperfection and sustained by myopia, an inattention to other options. Treadmills feed on anxiety and create even more. At first treadmills reduce our anguish because we have made a good choice for our lives. But they end up creating more frustration the more we fuel them."

Driven by our calendars, seldom do you see anyone without a PDA of some sort these days. We can no longer get away from our work and the constant ringing of the telephone because we carry it with us at all times. Families are so overcome by the kid's activities that there is no time for rest or just enjoying family time.

For some time now society has beat into us that time is money. There is no time for leisure; we must be multi-tasking to get it all done. Being constantly on the go does not come without a price. There are physical and emotional consequences to be paid for being on this never ending treadmill. Over fifty percent of illness is thought to be stress related. Many individuals are not eating, exercising, or sleeping in the manner that is necessary to maintain good health.

Busyness for some reason is an addiction. As Fritz Ridenour says, "Beware! The fast lane has no speed bumps."

Ruth rode on my motor bike
Directly in back of me:
I hit a bump at sixty-five
And rode on ruth-lessly."

Making Lots of Friends

And then of course are those of us whose life seems to revolve around people. Those are the people who graduated Summa Cum Laud from Dale Carnegie's course on Making Friends. To know and be known, that is the oxygen of life. Does just knowing someone make them a friend? There are friends and acquaintances and most of us have many acquaintances and very few friends. Friendships take time to cultivate. A friend is someone you can depend on being with you through the trials of life. A friend will give you good sound advice; an acquaintance will generally tell you what they think you want to hear. A person may think they have many friends in their work place but you won't find a true friend gathered around the water cooler gossiping about you behind your back. A good friend may be critical of you in your presence but never behind your back.

Friendship has been defined as a relationship which involves mutual knowledge, esteem, and affection. Building up a rolodex of important names and numbers who know you and will call you by name in public isn't success.

Juggling All The Balls

Life is fast and complicated. Spinning all the plates and juggling all the balls...now that is the feel of success. But as one wise sage quietly murmured, "A string of excited, fugitive, miscellaneous pleasures is not happiness." What happens when the plates begin to fall off and break or the balls drop and get lost? "Life is a crowded superhighway with bewildering cloverleaf exits on which a man is liable to find himself speeding back in the direction he came."

Practical time management skills are essential to be a success in all aspects of your life; business, home, and social. Too many people have way too many things pulling at them at the same time. Many people are running around in a flurry of activity but accomplishing very little.

Most successful people have experienced this feeling of overload at one time or another. Once you have proven to be capable of doing a job and doing it well you will find that you are asked to take on more and more responsibility. People turn to people whom they can trust to be responsible, do the job, and do it right. While it is wonderful that people feel you are a capable and responsible person it also can become very stressful when you allow yourself to get too many irons in the fire.

It is important that you set priority goals for yourself and be willing to say no when someone approaches you with a project outside of those goals that will put additional stress on you. No is such a little word but one that many people struggle to say. You can experience such freedom in learning to say no to people. Being able to say no to something only takes a moment when saying yes could tie up your time for weeks or months. You do not need to make excuses or feel guilty, simply say I don't feel this is right for me at this time and while I appreciate the offer I'm going to have to say no.

Josh Billings once said, "Consider the postage stamp; its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing until it gets there."

Unleashing Your Passion

Unstrapping the harness and running free, with no moral restraints, now that's what life is all about. At least the television and movies say that. "Lust is the ape that gibbers in our loins. Tame him as we will by day, he rages all the wilder in our dreams by night. Just when we think we're safe from him, he raises up his ugly head and smirks, and there is no river in the world flows cold and strong enough to strike him down. Almighty God, why dost thou deck men out with such a loathsome toy?" Consequently, many people wave a white flag of surrender and join the party. And what a party it is...until the weekend is over.

Then we must deal with the consequences of our behavior. We live in a world that recognizes the effect of our actions on ourselves and the others around us. Thus, we must learn to have restraint in our actions now so as not to injure ourselves or the world around us in the long term. The art of being able to control our actions and our thoughts in order to live among our peers is referred to as morality.

So..... what does success really feel like?

King Solomon searched. We all search. After frantically chasing one empty caricature of success after another Solomon finally relaxed on a sun soaked rock one afternoon and said.

"The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned."

For the wise king of Israel success was not an accomplishment on the outside but rather a discovery on the inside. Success wasn't measured against the performance or the accumulation of someone else, but rather it was coming to grips with oneself. Success is coming to terms with the concepts or my origin, my identity, my purpose, and my eternity.

In the early 1930's, an American newspaper journalist was asked the key to his success. His reply to a freshman reporter was, "Young man, the secret of my success is that at an early age I discovered I wasn't God." That is undoubtedly half of the equation, but only half. Realizing that I am NOT God doesn't automatically connect me TO the God who is there and waiting, as Francis Schaffer liked to say.

Blasé Pascal, the French philosopher of the seventeenth century addressed the other half of finding success when he said, "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created (material) thing, but only by God the creator." St. Augustine continues, "God had made us for himself and our hearts are restless until we rest in Him." Jesus brought it down to the bottom line when he said, "I came that you might have life (success) and life more abundantly (real success)." Have you ever investigated that invitation? Now that is what real success feels like.

"A false success is full of promise until you get it, and then it is a last-year's nest from which the birds have flown."
Henry Ward Beecher