
5th Concept



Defining Success

Chapter 29

Defining Success

Let's transition from our focus on building happiness to discussions about building success. Everything in the happiness section will help you become successful. Creating and developing those habits will lead to success. If you know the difference between Pleasure and Happiness, you will not only be able to focus on what really makes you happy, you will be developing the discipline to practice the things that will bring you long term success rather than short term excitement. If you learn to take control of your life, you will be able to take ownership of your success and make it happen despite the many obstacles you will

encounter. If you build positive relationships, those relationships will catapult you into multiple opportunities for short term wins and long term success. Lastly, if you have a purpose in your life, you will recognize success with every step that gets you closer to that purpose. Which leads us into our next concept, how do we define success. How do we leverage our definition of success to clearly understand when we are successful and when we are off track?

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Lord Krishna

Many people know they want to be successful, but few have a good definition of what success is or what it looks like. As a result, their actions take them in many different directions, some towards success and many away from success. We want to define success so that every day we can choose actions that are making us successful and avoid actions that will disrupt our success. We want a guiding concept that keeps us on the path we have chosen.

On the other end of the spectrum, defining success helps you know when to pause and celebrate the milestones that confirm you are living successfully. Many people are successful everyday and don't realize it. Or they reach certain goals they have set and then quickly move on to the next goal without stopping to appreciate what they have done or accomplished. When we stop, review, and appreciate our success milestones, it builds our confidence and gives us proof that we can tackle the next big challenge. It helps us create our own success manual of what we did that works and what we did that didn't work.

Defining success so that we can recognize it, pause, and appreciate it, also helps us be happier. The most mentioned concept in the definitions of happiness we analyzed was Contentment, which also includes satisfaction and fulfillment. Recognizing success so we can pause and appreciate it, allows us to feel the contentment, satisfaction, and fulfillment we are searching for. It helps us be happier which helps us further build on our longer term success.

Bali worked for 12 years building his company. He risked his life savings, maxed out his credit cards, and unhappily let his wife raise his two little girls, since he was at work or traveling most of the time. He was dedicated to his employees and clients and their success. He was dedicated to building and selling his company to the right people. It

was a long and arduous process, but that day finally came. He completed the maze of requirements required to close the sale of his company and received tens of millions of dollars. He had enough money to retire, spend time with his daughters and reconcile with his wife. After a week and a half he came back to work looking for the next challenge. Within three weeks he was on the road again and had taken on another challenge in the new combined and larger organization.

Although he had enough money to live on for the rest of his life, he still negotiated hard for an unusually large salary and bonus, which he received. Bali had never defined success. He had never learned to live successfully. Even though he had reached a massive financial milestone that many would consider an indicator of success, he was still searching. Bali aimed at one goal and gave up everything to get there. He knew and even talked about how different his life would become once he reached that financial pinnacle. How when he was finally able to sell the company he would retire and spend time with his kids and reconcile with his wife. Building and selling the company had taken much longer than he had planned and he had said he was committed to making up that time. He had always wanted a different life, but he believed that life was not possible until he had reached his goal. He had always assumed there was a moment in time when he could declare himself a “success” and switch to the life he really wanted. What Bali never discovered is that there is not a pinnacle or end point. Life marches on. If you can't find success in what you are doing today, it will not miraculously materialize when you reach even your most coveted dream scenario. Bali never defined success. He kept assuming it was just over the horizon.

We should define success so we can live it daily and recognize and appreciate it when we hit the milestones that mark our progress. We also need to know what success includes for us so we don't succeed in one area, yet fail in other, possibly more important areas. Most importantly, if happiness includes feeling content, satisfied, and fulfilled, we need to define success so we can be content in our accomplishments so we can feel happier which will help us become more successful.

Definition Builds Perseverance

“If you know where you are going (definition of self) you will try harder when you fail. If you fail at something that is not in your “definition of self” you don’t try harder.” Brunstein, Joachim, Gollwitzer

Brunstein and his associates did studies that showed people who had committed to a direction, “I am a Technology person”, or “I am a doctor” will keep going even after they fail. If a person who was clear they were a technology person failed on a technology related paper, they would re-double their efforts. Those people who were not as clear would just blow it off and chalk it up to bad luck. This is relevant to defining success, because once you have defined it; you will choose actions to fulfill that definition that you would not have chosen without the definition. Your choices and actions will be directed towards fulfilling success.

Write It Down

Defining success in your head doesn’t work because you unconsciously change your definition to fit your current circumstances rather than creating and maintaining a vision of future possibilities. It has to be in writing on paper. You can always change it by re-writing it, but you have to write it down to make it real. It forces your sub-conscious to commit to it, as if it was a foregone conclusion.

Writing your definition of success on paper activates several physical and neural processes that will bring you much closer to actualizing your success. The first process is created by using your fingers to write. The process of moving your hands and fingers across the page creates spatial relationships in your brain that signify importance. Writing also requires you to activate your working memory and use up more of your brain’s resources for the task than would be used by just thinking about it. By writing it down, you are telling your brain that this is something that is important to remember and to focus on it.

A study by Karin Harman James at Indiana University using an

MRI to monitor neural activity of children, who had written letters of the alphabet, showed a significant jump in their brain activity when they were shown those letters again. Basically the act of writing down your definition of success will activate more areas of the brain during recall than are activated just thinking about a definition you didn't write down.

The other process taking place in your brain is you are visualizing or mentally practicing your success. As you consider, evaluate, organize, and finally write your definition of success, your brain is cycling through what it looks and feels like to reach that success. Since your brain is unable to distinguish between what you mentally rehearse and what happens in reality, it believes you are successful. In the future it will lean towards choices that support that memory of being successful because it wants to reconcile what you do with who it thinks you are.

As a side note, the studies show that the process of writing is actually more effective than typing, because forming the letters is a more involved process than hitting the keys on the keyboard.

Another process spurred by the act of writing, is the mental evaluation and organization required to move your thoughts from images in your brain to forming letters into words and words into sentences that can be read from the paper. It requires your brain to spend more time processing and organizing the information when you have to convert it to something in writing. Writing activates the RAS (reticular activating system) which is your brain's way of clearing traffic to reduce distractions because what you are writing is really important. The brain is sending a signal that we should pay attention now and in the future. As a result, your awareness will be increased and you will be more open to and notice cues in your environment related to fulfilling your definition of success.

Your written definition of success will become your touchstone, which you can refer back to it each time a new opportunity or a tough decision comes up. My definition of success is "helping others become successful and happy." Every time I am unsure what to do, I can refer back to that definition and ask myself, will this action help them become successful and happy? It is especially helpful when I am emotionally charged up. I would love to give someone a piece of my mind, but I refer back to "Is this going to help them be successful and

happy.” It gives me a reason to re-think and re-word my responses and provide more helpful and supportive feedback. It also helps me feel confident in the decisions I am making. If I know what I am doing is helping people be successful and happy, then it calms my doubts and fears and gives me the courage to move on, even when the next step seems impossible or filled with risk.

A written definition of success also helps you set your priorities. Refer to it as you start your busy day. You should do the activities that support your definition of success first. A point could be made that you should only do activities that support your definition of success. That is definitely something you can aspire to.

Your written definition of success will help you navigate the obstacles you encounter. Immediately after you have defined success you will face roadblocks to achieving it. It could be old habits, expectations of peers, bosses, or close relations, a lack of confidence, or a lack of resources and know how. These challenges will knock you off track and send your mind wandering down unproductive paths. Referring back to your written definition of success will help you push through these obstacles and create new ways to be successful.

Once you have your written definition of success, be sure to share it. Research by Dr. Gail Mathews from the Dominican University of California shows that sharing your goals with friends and meeting with them weekly, significantly improves your chances of achieving those goals. The same is true for success. Sharing your definition of success with your friends and having regular conversations about your progress and challenges will increase your opportunities, and their opportunities, to be successful.

Lastly, your written definition of success provides you an evaluation tool at the end of each day. Take a few minutes at the end of the day to read it and contemplate your progress. You can take a few minutes to feel good about the small steps you took to fulfill your success and brainstorm new methods for dealing with the challenges that knocked you off course.

Concepts Found in Success Definitions

As we discussed in chapter one, we collected over 240 definitions of success from various sources. Based on the key words used in each definition we categorized the definitions into one or more representative concepts.

1. The top concept mentioned was Contentment which includes satisfaction and fulfillment.
2. The second most mentioned concept was Others which includes building positive relationships and creating a better world.
3. The third most mentioned concept was Achievement which includes reaching your goals.
4. The fourth most mentioned concept was Happiness.

Happiness or concepts related to happiness were mentioned 68% of the time in the definitions of success.

The concept of wealth which includes financial stability was only mentioned 6% of the time.

Concept	Success Rank	Happiness Rank
Contentment (Contentment, Satisfaction, and Fulfillment)	1st (tied)	1st
Others (building positive relationships & creating a better world)	1st (tied)	2nd
Achievement (and accomplishing goals)	3rd	4th
Happiness	4th	NA
Be the best you can be	5th	Not Mentioned
Other	6th	6th
Do things I am passionate about	7th	5th
Wealth (and financial stability)	8th	Not Mentioned

When we take time to define success or happiness; contentment, satisfaction, and fulfillment come up a lot. This is often contrary to our actions, where we are constantly chasing the next opportunity or attempting to juggle as many activities as possible. It is part of the over the horizon syndrome where we believe if we can just get past this next hill we will be content, satisfied, and fulfilled. Writing our definition of success will help us recognize if we are looking for Contentment so we can pause and appreciate it in our daily successes rather than waiting for that one pinnacle moment.

We all want to matter and make a difference in the world so we often include Others in our definitions of success. The concept of Others includes building positive relationships with friends and family, contributing to the community, and helping make the world a better place. Others gives us something to aim for that is bigger than ourselves.

The concept of Achievement which includes achieving or accomplishing goals was the third most mentioned concept in the definitions of success. It was also mentioned often when we examined the definitions of happiness. Achievement is part of success and provides something objective and measurable we can identify. We are also happier if we are achieving.

The concept of acquiring wealth or financial stability was a distant

8th for the definitions of success, only being mentioned 6% of the time, and it was not mentioned at all in the definitions of happiness. This is contrary to what we would expect based on observations of people's actions and what is emphasized in the media. It often appears that acquiring wealth is the number one reason and often only reason for success. It turns out that wealth is just a means to an end. Many of us pursue wealth because we believe that it will bring us contentment, satisfaction, and fulfillment which are often our ultimate goal. What we find is that contentment results from the daily process of pursuing our dreams rather than being something we experience at a single point in time somewhere in the future.

Definition of Success - Examples

"Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming." John Wooden
"Success is being content, happy and satisfied with who you are, and continuously striving and challenging yourself to be the best person you can be."

"Success is knowing at the end of each day that I did my best and I made a positive impact on those around me."

"To me, having a successful life is being able to do things independently for myself and not always have someone there to do things for me. It's achieving my goals on my own terms and at my own pace." High school student with mobility impairment

"My definition of success is achieving true self-fulfillment so that I can feel happiness and peace of mind about my past, present and future situation."

"Success is personal satisfaction of giving all of your effort and ability no matter the task or outcome"

"My definition of success is to encourage growth and passion in all of my pursuits, relationships and myself."

"A feeling of peace of mind and genuine happiness based on having lived up to one's potential." Bob Burg

"For me, success is about making a positive contribution to the world and sharing my best self."

"Success is making the best of the opportunities that are presented to us in order to do good things for ourselves and for those around us."

"Success? That's an easy one. BE HAPPY!" High school student with a learning disability

Make It Your Own

We have provided a lot of guidance and thoughts around definitions of success. But the most important rule about your definition of success is that there are no rules. It is your definition and it needs to be something you own and are comfortable with. It is something you can change, adjust, and adapt until you have a phrase or sentence that you can aspire to and that fits your dreams and life situation. We provided guidelines to help you understand what your definition of success might look like and how to create it, but they are only guidelines. It is your definition of success and it can be anything you want it to be.

Write a definition that sticks with you. You need something you can remember and contemplate each day. Our strongest motivations come from within. Our definition of success should reflect our internal beliefs and dreams rather than the expectations of others. It doesn't work if you don't own it. If you are doing it because it is what you should do or what is expected of you, then you will at some point become disenchanted and will not reach your full potential.

Your definition of success should probably be applicable to your whole life, not just your work life. Think of what makes you feel successful as a person, not just in your career.

Your definition of success should be about things you can control vs. things you can't control. For example, winning the lottery is probably not a good definition of success.

4. What do people say about you when you are successful?

5. What contributions are you making to other people lives when you are successful?

Take a few moments to imagine yourself as successful. Sit back, close your eyes and really immerse yourself in what success feels like. What are those feelings? Where do they come from? How are you interacting with the people around you? What have you done or accomplished everyday to get here? What happened today that made it a successful day?

6. Write your definition of success. Make it something you can evaluate your actions against daily for a long period of time. Note: If you can achieve it in 3 months, it is a goal, not a definition for success.

Write something in the box. Don't try to get it perfect or make sure it fits certain parameters. Just write something down so you have a place to start. Use this definition until you can craft a better one.

Refine and Adjust

It is important you feel comfortable, determined, and hopefully a little excited about your definition of success. Often though, people feel a little unsure. “Is it what I really want?”, “Is it realistic?”, and “Is it bold enough?” The solution is to live with it for a while and continue to test and refine. Write your definition of success down on a piece of paper, an index card, or as a daily reminder on your electronic calendar. Read it every day and challenge its fit for you. Below are some ideas to help you test and refine.

1. Think of how you will feel at the end of each day. Think of what you will want to have accomplished at the end of each day. Who will you want to have been each day? Will living your definition success support that?
2. Meet with your friends and family. Ask them to give you their definitions of success. Share your ideas about your definition of success and get their input. You don't have to change it to make them happy, but they may provide insight that helps you understand how you really feel.
3. Who do you know that is successful? What can you learn from them? What do you think is working for them? How do you think they are defining success?

Every day, see what you can do to work towards fulfilling your definition of success. Success doesn't come from innate skill or ability. It comes from hard work done every day and some scientists say that means doing it every day for as long as 10 years. So how do you stay focused so that every day brings you one step closer to achieving your goals? How do you enjoy today and feel successful today? Having and knowing your definition of success, course corrects you every morning. You start out the morning and end the day knowing what you should be doing to be successful. It is a journey where you take one more step each day. So instead of waiting to reach that one pinnacle moment in your life you can call success, you can take satisfaction each day that you are moving towards and even implementing your definition of success. You are successful each day. You can feel good about your accomplishments on a daily basis, knowing you are doing the things that fit your definition of success. By stringing a lot of moments of

success into days and eventually years of success, you will live a successful life.

*"The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark."
Michelangelo*