2-16-2012

How Do You Define Success?

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Success:

What exactly is success? Many of the books, blogs and other for-profit resources available on success would have us believe that success is making it big in terms of money, power and fame. If you happen to have an executive title or big paycheck, you must be successful, right? This type of success is largely associated with external motivation and gratification.

What is the cost of getting “to the top” or “making it big?” Sometimes, we forget to consider the tradeoffs associated with perceived success, or we only hear about the positive elements of money, fame and status. Rarely do we get a glimpse of a person’s entire life—the whole perspective.
People have many different aspects of life that come together to form their life experience. Success comes in many different ways and in many different forms. Cultures and nations around the world define success differently, and it is important for individuals to define their own version of success to live their best lives.

While I was growing up in rural Nebraska, USA, my extended family thought getting married and having lots of children was a sure sign of success. When spending time in remote villages throughout Northern Nigeria, I found that feeding a village and selling enough produce to send children to school was success. While in Costa Rica, our group toured two different campuses of Earth University, spent time in the urban area of San Jose and in the rural Costa Rica exploring the relationships between agriculture, natural resources and education. Our University group had just finished one of the highlights of the trip. We visited a rural farm family in the tropical rainforest. This family had just gotten electricity after installing a methane digester, and they were excited to show us their progress—their success!

The house itself was what many of us living in rural Nebraska would consider a machine shed that needed work. Picture a worn wood frame covered with rusty pieces of corrugated tin on top of a dirt floor that turned to mud when it rained. Wooden planks were used for a partial floor in the tiny living area where two parents were raising three children and taking care of an elderly parent. Walls consisted mostly of blankets and curtains.
We talked with the woman of the house. She was a wife and mother as well as a leader in the agricultural community. She and her husband were building a very diverse farming operation, which was growing more successful each year. She was a tiny woman with big beautiful brown eyes, glowing skin and a gorgeous smile. Her young son clung to her while we were standing in their kitchen.

With the help of a professor from Earth University, she told us all about the advances they had made in their farming operation. It was a great story. She turned on her stove and a huge flame came shooting out of one of the burners. The look on her face said it all—the thrill of success!! A great tribute to the hard work her family had invested into their farming operation. It was a wonderful sight. I didn’t have the guts to ask for a picture but wish I had. What a great moment.

Rarely do we examine success in terms of personal fulfillment, happiness or joy. Sometimes, we lose sight of the little things that make our day great or have gifts we take for granted.

Maybe your success is being a stay-at-home Mom. Perhaps you are a janitor or manager or a small business owner. Or, you might be the President of a large corporation. Whatever the case, it is important to live successfully on your terms and in your own time. Are you happy? Are you fulfilled? Do you love life?
Failure:

My Grandma and I both graduated from West Point Jr.-Sr. High in West Point, NE, USA. We attended our class reunions together in 2000. It was her 70th reunion and my 10th. She was sad because only a handful of her classmates were left. It was hard to see the sadness on her face. I think she knew it was the last time she would ever attend her class reunion. I was disappointed because my classmates were so serious. To be honest, all I wanted to do was catch up with everyone and talk about the “Glory Days.”

Things had certainly changed for both of our graduating classes over the years. We had gotten jobs, lost jobs and grown businesses. We had moved, gotten married, divorced and widowed. We had all lost loved ones. We had all faced both tragedy and triumph; we had all experienced successes and failures.

The one thing we have in common is this:
Life was going by quickly!

My Grandma used to tell me that time would go by faster as I got older. As usual, she was right. Life passes by quickly, and we all need to embrace each and every day. Do you ever find yourself watching the clock or hoping the day goes by quickly? Remember, time is something we never get back. Wishing for a day to end is the same as hoping your life goes by even faster than it already does!
How can you make your life count? Rediscover your passion and head in the direction of your dreams. I am convinced that society is missing out on vast amounts of human potential because so many of us never really “go for it” and pursue our true passions. Instead, we cling to what we know because it makes us feel safe and secure.

The most precious resource we all have is time, and we must use it wisely. We cannot get back today or yesterday, so pursuing our dreams cannot wait. Pursuing dreams takes confidence and the ability to take risks. When you pursue your dreams, there will be times of self-doubt; there will be times when you second guess yourself, and there will be times when you think you just cannot do it anymore. In order to make your dreams a reality, you must believe in yourself and in your dream.

Believe in yourself to the point that you are willing to take risks and to fail. Be willing to fail until you succeed. After all, learning from our mistakes is one of the best ways to move our dreams forward.

**What is Risk?**

What does it take to achieve success? What about avoiding failure? Interestingly enough, both success and failure hinge on taking risks. Does the thought of taking risks or failing seem too scary? Then, you may have to change your mind about risk and failure, especially if you want to achieve your definition of success.
Consider the following questions: Is it really a risk to pursue your dream? Or, is it more of a risk to never pursue a dream and regret it later in life? What is failure? Is pursuing your dreams failure? Or, do you truly fail if you never tap into your human potential and share your unique talents and dreams with the rest of the world?

Anything you do requires a certain amount of risk. For example, what risks are involved in having a job vs. starting a business? Staying in a job your dislike may seem safe. All it takes is one round of layoffs to eliminate your “safe” job and your paycheck. Starting a business may seem very risky. Of course there is an element of risk in starting a business; however, it may be more secure to control your own future than to let other people employ you. There is risk in everything we do: driving down the street, having a baby, getting married—all of these life events and adventures require us to take risks.

Thomas Edison, one of the most prolific inventors in history, viewed failure as a learning tool and as a success. Edison held over 1,000 patents and founded 14 companies. Each time he pursued an invention he failed. However, he viewed his failures as a way not to do something. Each failure was a learning experience that advanced his idea. We can each redefine failure by remembering one of Edison’s most famous quotes, "If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."
Go out there and astound yourself! Time is going to move forward. What we decide to do with our time is up to us, so make every minute count!!

*Life is short...live it to the fullest!*