

So What Does Success Look Like to You?

We all see success differently. Our aspirations are influenced by our upbringing, our environment, our image of ourselves, and the people we live and work alongside. Success is not just about having more money, nor is it about simply feeling happy. It's deeper than that.

The Theory of Success

There's been a lot of research carried out to find out what makes us feel successful. Perhaps the best-known work was carried out by Abraham Maslow. He was a New York psychologist and academic who studied human behavior in the first half of the last century. He summarized his work in what he called a hierarchy of needs. What he said was simple: Without the basic needs covered, you won't have the time or inclination to worry about anything else. In order of importance, these are the things that made up his hierarchy of needs:

1. Food, water and warmth – This is all that matters when you're cold and hungry.
2. Personal safety – If you feel threatened, little else matters.
3. When fed and safe you begin to want to be with other people.
4. With other people, you want to feel needed and respected.
5. When respected, you want to realize dreams and ambitions.

In our modern society, the chances are you are already at steps four or five on that list. Success then is really about feeling that you belong, that you are getting noticed, and that what you are doing is good for both you and the people around you. It sounds simple, but of course the complexities of life make it quite difficult.



10 Types of Success

Here are ten types of success that are very different, but all important in their own way:

1. **Material success** – Money, cars, holidays, jewelry
2. **Emotional success** – Relationships, self-esteem, contentment

3. **Intellectual success** – Learning, understanding, challenging
4. **Spiritual success** – Sense of purpose, belonging, reason
5. **Physical success** – Health, fitness, vitality, appearance
6. **Commercial success** – Enterprise growth, profit, reputation
7. **Evangelical success** – Influencing others, promoting your ideals
8. **Environmental success** – Home, garden, saving the planet
9. **Time success** – Longevity, time management
10. **Collective success** – The product of effective teamwork



Deciding What Success Looks Like to You

Success looks different for every single one of us. There are no convenient common goals, although as you've seen, there are building blocks available, so you need not start from scratch. Here are ten headings you can use to define what success will look like for you.

10 Ways to Define Your Own Personal Success

1. **Money** – It's where most people start, but in reality, as long as you have enough money, more won't make you any happier.
2. **Love** – Arguably the most important aspect of success. You might love a partner, your children, pets, or even the view from your bedroom window. Without love, life can seem pretty empty.
3. **Health** – Freedom from pain or life-shortening illness is important. If you have poor health, you might define success differently. Many people in the final stages of terminal illness set and achieve goals.
4. **Comfort** – The human body works best when it's warm, fed, and rested. Creating a comfortable home where you feel safe is vital.
5. **Learning** – School and college teach you how to learn, but you should never stop when you leave. Learning is a great way to excite your imagination, stimulate enthusiasm, and develop new interests.
6. **Fun** – Too many were brought up to see life as a duty and not to be enjoyed. Planning time for fun is as important as anything else.
7. **Giving** – Bizarrely the old adage that it is 'better to give than to receive' is true. Make time to help others and enjoy their success, too.

8. **Medals** – While few of you will in reality be awarded with medals for achievement by the president, being recognized for what you do is important to us all. Sometimes simply saying thank-you is enough.
9. **Change** – Nothing stays the same nor should it. Plan to make changes in your life and measure every step of the journey. The shorter the steps, the faster you'll move.
10. **Things** – It's nice to buy things, but perhaps not wise to define your success purely by what you can afford. Some of the most meaningful purchases that will define your success could be as simple as a thank-you card from someone you've helped.

In some of the areas listed, you're probably already successful, or at least content. In fact if you're content, then you are successful. The things you want to change are those you feel are not working for you at the moment. Here you feel you could be more successful.



Working Out What You Want to Change

Your challenge right now is to question why you want the things and experiences you do. Ask yourself: What are the things you want to change and why? You need to be sure that your aspirations are truly yours and not conveniently borrowed from elsewhere. Adopting someone else's goals and succeeding in reaching them will not necessarily make you happy. Do not be tempted to compare the size of your goals with other people's. This is one of those situations where bigger does not mean better. It only means different.

For example, you might want to drive a sports car or learn to drive a bus. Both are equally admirable goals, but only if you really understand why they are so important to you. You need to work out what you really want to do.

Your answers to the following questions will help you understand quite clearly the direction in which you want to head. For one thing, you are introducing your own values because what is important to you may not be as vital to someone else in your situation. You will also be starting to identify the people around you whose support will make the whole process much easier.

10 Questions to Ask Yourself

1. What are the three things I most want to achieve?
2. Why are they so important to me?
3. Which do I want to deal with first and why?
4. When is it realistic for me to have achieved each of them?
5. Where must I start and what are the first, small steps I must take?
6. How can I measure my progress and keep on track?
7. Who else do I need to involve?
8. What can they gain by helping me?
9. How will I know I have achieved them, and how will I celebrate?
10. After I get there, what might I then want to do next?



Why We All Want Different Things

Each of us has our own outlook on life. That is what shapes our individual definitions of success and makes us all want different things. From time to time, we question our own values, ambitions, and prejudices. This is often prompted by exposure to somebody else's.

Advertising plays on this trait. If two beautiful people are enjoying life and portrayed on TV using product X, then you naturally assume that you will feel beautiful if you buy product X, too. It's how cars, coffee, cosmetics, and even carpets are marketed.

10 Ways to Recognize Why We All See Things Differently

1. **Parents** – Like it or not, our parents' outlook on life shapes our own. You might share their values and aspirations or rebel against them. Reflect on your parents' attitudes and how they may have shaped your own.
2. **Place** – Where you are in the world will have a vast influence on the way you see things. Imagine being raised in New York or the Nile delta. Has your childhood environment altered your vision?
3. **People** – Many high-achievers went to school with other high-achievers and so were encouraged to be more competitive. Who among your playground peers has achieved a lot? What can you learn from them?

4. **Passions** – You might love skiing or hate the cold. You might enjoy showing pedigree dogs or have been bitten by a dog and detest them. What early experiences have shaped your passions? Are you happy with this or do you want to challenge them?
5. **Posture** – If you walk tall, the world looks far bigger than if you slouch along looking just ahead of your feet. How you stand affects what you see.
6. **Prejudice** – Your own prejudices as well as those of the people around you will shape your thinking. If you have prejudices, you need to confront and challenge them. Get yourself in front of the situation you don't like and find out the reality behind your prejudice.
7. **Politics** – Your political standpoint will provide a ready-made menu of attitudes and views you can subscribe to, or challenge. Sometimes it's best to remain independent and make up your own mind. Look at party philosophies and compare them.
8. **Perception** – The way you see things may differ from how others view the same situation. You need to be understanding when perceptions vary and not try to impose your own view.
9. **Philosophy** – A word that embraces more than just religion. Your personal beliefs about life, death, and spirituality shape your outlook. There's no right or wrong philosophy. See how other people's philosophies change the way they view the world.
10. **Proximity** – Overcrowding makes a huge difference to our view of the world. You'll value other people more if there are less of them around you. Try spending time alone and then in a crowded place. You're still you, but you'll feel different in each situation. Ask yourself why?

Your cultural background also has a bearing on your outlook on life. This might create a conflict in your mind as you decide the balance between your heritage and your heart. Remember that you cannot turn your back on your past – it makes you who you are. Neither can you alienate those who raised and love you. This can be a challenge if they were raised in a different part of the world to where they are raising you. Try to notice how cultural perspectives and traditions differ from place to place. If your older relatives see the world differently to you, try to understand why. Developing an appreciation of their viewpoint may help you shape your own.



How Our Ambitions Change Over Time

For many of us, we start adult life with great ambition, but time and toil take their toll. We become worn down by everyday life and forget those ideals we perhaps nurtured as students. Revisiting those ideals can be a good starting point, although it's quite normal for life's experiences to introduce you to new goals as you grow older. However, reviewing your early aspirations is a great place to start!

Try making a list of the things you wanted to change about the world at age 18. Now highlight those you still feel are worthwhile. Ask yourself why some are no longer important to you. Is it because you've learned more about them or simply that your focus has changed?

You will also be able to add to the list those things that concern you now, that did not bother you at 18. Think about these points, too. If possible, discuss this with someone you trust who can question you. This will help you to understand.

It's important that you appreciate how you change over time. This is because just as you have changed your views and priorities so far, they will inevitably continue to change as you grow older.

Writing Down Your Plan

It's now time for you to start writing down your life plan. You'll probably want to write this on your own, but sharing it with someone close to you can also be a good idea. You might want to write it down on paper or simply create a document on your PC that you can edit. How you do it is not important. All that matters is that you do it!

Ideally you will list your goals in some kind of priority. Some will be long-term ambitions, for example to own your home. Others might be more immediate, such as increasing your income. As you can see, the two examples are linked and that's no coincidence. You will often find that by sorting out the short-term goals, you contribute toward achieving the bigger challenges.

Making It Achievable

Don't get too hung up about writing a detailed plan. Even jotting down some immediate goals and sticking them to the refrigerator door is better than not writing anything down at all. What's important is making a start!

Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day, and the same is true of your future. Don't make the mistake of trying to do everything at once. Here are ten tips to help you make it achievable.

10 Ways to Make It Achievable

1. **Short steps** – You don't climb a ladder in one step and self-improvement is just the same. Break every change you want to make into short steps, and take them one at a time.
2. **Write it down** – The act of committing your plans to paper makes them firmer in your mind.
3. **Have heroes** – Study the lives of people who have succeeded at what you want to do. Understand how they did it and recognize that they often struggled for years before achieving fame and fortune.
4. **Pace yourself** – You need to aim high, but make sure you leave enough time for the journey. Most people give up because they're trying to run too fast. You need endurance, not speed!

5. **Be realistic** – You might fantasize about visiting the moon, but getting to the Grand Canyon is easier. Then again, you might actually have the skills, youth, and energy to train as an astronaut!
6. **Get a mentor** – Family, friend, or someone at work. Find someone willing to listen and offer encouragement and support.
7. **Mark milestones** – Mark each milestone along the way with a small reward. It's important to recognize and celebrate each significant achievement.
8. **Look over your shoulder** – It's all too easy to focus on where you're heading, but equally important not to forget just how far you've come already. Pause occasionally and reflect on what you've done so far.
9. **Benchmark** – This is a big word, but it sounds good when you use it. All it means is find someone heading in the same direction and measure your progress against theirs.
10. **Think positive** – Keep telling yourself it's possible and it will be. Let doubts grow in your mind and it'll all seem too much.

Dealing with Doubt

If you start anything new, you inevitably become self-conscious as you're doing it. Others may not notice anything out of the ordinary, but you might feel particularly vulnerable and exposed. It's like having a new hairstyle and going to work for the first time. It feels as if everyone is looking at you.

As you make your life plan journey, there will probably be times when you wish you'd not started out at all. Doubt can really hamper any venture, particularly one as personal as this.

To help you counter self-doubt, here are some practical ways to deal with it.

10 Things to Do When You Begin to Have Doubts

1. **Look back** – Pause and see where you've just moved from. Did you like it there? Reassure yourself that doubt is better than retreat!
2. **Ask a friend** – Have someone whose feedback you can trust to be open and honest. Ask them when you have a doubt and see how much is real and how much is imagination.
3. **Make two lists** – Jot down the pros and cons of what you're doing. One column can expand on your doubt, the other the gain you're looking for. Use this exercise to compare the opportunity with the doubt.

4. **Push ahead even harder** – Imagine the worst has happened. Carry on regardless, but with even more vigor.
5. **Check those heroes** – Did those whose success you admire face doubts at times? Of course they did. Research their story and see how they countered doubt.
6. **Doubt can be good** – Acknowledge doubt for what it is. It shows you've abandoned your comfort zone. Use doubt as a measure of success, not a warning of impending disaster.
7. **Take a reality check** – Doubts are how we feel our way forward. They help us make those tiny adjustments along the way that keep us on track. If you encounter doubt, then maybe you're at a fork in the road.
8. **Dig in** – If you're in a competitive situation, your rival might also be having doubts. Dig in and push on. Let the other person falter and fall back.
9. **Take shorter steps** – Doubt can be a sign of overambition. Not in terms of the eventual goal, but the length of the steps you are taking. Change takes time so be willing to slow down if it's feeling tough.
10. **Keep a picture** – Some of the most successful people had a picture that captured their vision and long-term dream. If you can have a picture, perhaps as a screen background or on your table at home, it will help you through those spells of doubt.

We All Have to Start Somewhere

One thing you have to remember is that when it comes to opportunities and success, we all pretty much start from the same place. Many people from all walks of life who are currently “household names” started out with a vision and a plan. They are no different to you. They have hopes and fears. They wear holes in their socks and need to shop for the weekend.

Happiness

One way most of us measure success is by the degree of happiness that success gives us. For example, if you want to learn to swim, then being able to swim will probably make you happy. You will have anticipated the joy of adding to your vacation enjoyment by running down the white sandy beach and swimming out into the crystal clear waters of a deserted cove. When the day comes and you can actually bring this dream to life, you will inevitably feel happy.

There is a spin side to happiness. That is the fact that we very quickly become accustomed to whatever is new in our life and, within a few months, take it for granted. So taking our example of learning to swim, after you’ve had a couple of vacations and fallen into the routine of going to the pool once a week, what started as a dream becomes a chore.

Each small step you take toward your goals will make you happy. But don’t expect that happiness to last forever. That’s why making lots of small changes rather than a few large ones can be more pleasurable as well as easier to do.

Working on your happiness is a great way to set the scene for success. If your mood is good, making those small but essential changes will seem possible. If you're unhappy and glum, motivating yourself will be more difficult. Here are 10 ways to help develop your happiness.

10 Things That Make Everyone Happy

1. **Wake refreshed** – Ironically, to be happy when you're awake, you need to make sure you spend enough time in bed. Make sure you get enough sleep.
2. **Find love** – Few people would enjoy years alone on a desert island; in fact, most would keep themselves busy by trying to escape. Having someone who loves you can boost your happiness.
3. **Keep fit** – The human body, especially the brain, functions best when you are physically fit. You don't need to join a gym though, just stay active and exercise in whatever way appeals to you most.
4. **Have goals** – Setting even the most basic targets will enable you to focus on achieving them. Have lots of small goals and celebrate reaching each one.
5. **Build a nest** – Have you seen how pets build a nest? It's where they can feel safe, warm, and protected. Your retreat may be your house, your bedroom, or even the bathroom. Have somewhere you can unwind.
6. **Pace yourself** – Sometimes it's all too easy to take on too much, and soon you find yourself spinning too many plates. I'm not advocating laziness, but you do need to avoid becoming overloaded.

7. **Plan treats** – If no one treats you, you should learn to treat yourself. Make each treat a reward for some particular achievement. Big and small treats are equally important, so start today!
8. **Give presents** – Making others happy is one of the best ways to be happy yourself. Be a generous friend, and life will repay you with interest.
9. **Be tolerant** – Others will always try to pass their anxieties on to you. Unless you love them dearly, simply offer sympathy but try hard not to become infected with their sadness.
10. **Play** – We forget to play when we stop being children. Play, especially with your life partner, lets you forget any troubles and laugh.

Happiness and success are different. But you want your success to make you happy. This chapter has introduced you to success and suggested how you might choose to define what success means to you. It has also encouraged you to look at the factors that have influenced your life so far. These provide the context for your personal development.

Next it would be good to set some realistic priorities and work out how to find the time to make things happen.

