




REDEFINING SUCCESS

Embracing individual definitions of
success and finding fulfillment beyond
traditional metrics.





We often find ourselves measuring our life against traditional markers of success – the impressive job title, the financial security, the external recognition. Yet, even with these achievements in hand, a sense of dissatisfaction lingers for many. What if society's definition of success doesn't align with what truly brings you fulfillment?

Why should you pursue goals that seem important because they are validated by peers, family, or society? Why should success be a one-size-fits-all thing?

Let's dismantle the old paradigms of success and take you through a series of sections that highlight not only personal and professional achievements but also the significant, often overlooked successes in community impact. From rethinking career goals to enhancing personal relationships and prioritizing mental health, we'll redefine what it means to truly succeed.

Breaking Down the Traditional Success

Myth

For a long time, success meant achieving certain traditional benchmarks.

The Price of Traditional Definitions

It's almost instinctual for many of us to link success to traditional markers like formal education, wealth, luxury, or fame. After all, we're part of societies that often judge or look down upon those who lack these symbols of achievement. In response, we strive to check off the boxes they've laid out for us—school, graduation, job, career promotions, marriage, parenthood, homeownership—in hopes of fitting into their specific definition of success.

When we fail to meet these expectations, we easily lose sight of ourselves. Some of us may spiral into depression, accepting harsh labels and viewing ourselves through a critical, unforgiving lens. This negativity can trap us in a bubble, obscuring the fact that we aren't all meant to follow the same path or conform to a uniform standard of success. Importantly, these societal benchmarks are not the sole measures of our lives.



This isn't to say those traditional achievements – the wealth, being married, the impressive credentials – are inherently bad. But achieving them doesn't guarantee that you would consider yourself successful. For many, external success can feel like a facade, leaving an emptiness that forces a choice: settle for the discontent or risk starting over to discover what truly matters. Explore the insightful articles **“Who thinks they are successful?”** and **“What is it like to quit your life and start again?”** for a deeper dive into these perspectives.

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I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.

Jim Carrey

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what if we told you there's another way to look at success?

Beyond the traditional definition, there is success that fills you up from the inside and radiates outward, rather than the other way around. This shift involves looking inward and asking ourselves what makes us truly happy. Is it the large audience, or is it the meaningful work that impacts lives? Maybe success is about creating something lasting and beneficial, not just something flashy and temporary.

Debunking The Traditional Benchmarks

Gone are the days when success was only measured by the zeroes in your bank account or the size of your office. Today, more and more people are defining success by how happy and content they feel. Isn't that something? Imagine measuring your life's worth by your smiles rather than your salary.

In a study by Dyke and Murphy that explored shifting priorities in defining success, they observed; 'the traditional measures of success may not be as important as they once were.' Instead, the study highlights that people increasingly regard **personal satisfaction** and **respect** as crucial to their personal definitions of success.

One participant from the study poignantly expressed their skepticism of traditional success metrics: '...I believe there are a lot of positions where outsiders could look at them and say, "Ah, you're a very successful individual," because of the label. But, if you don't like what you're doing and feel you're not making a contribution, I think it's really tough to look at yourself and say you're successful. For me, successful is overplayed. It is almost a fallacy. Maybe it's just my definition of success, but I find the word 'success' a bit offensive because it conjures up money, cars, all the stereotype stuff' (Dyke & Murphy, 2006).



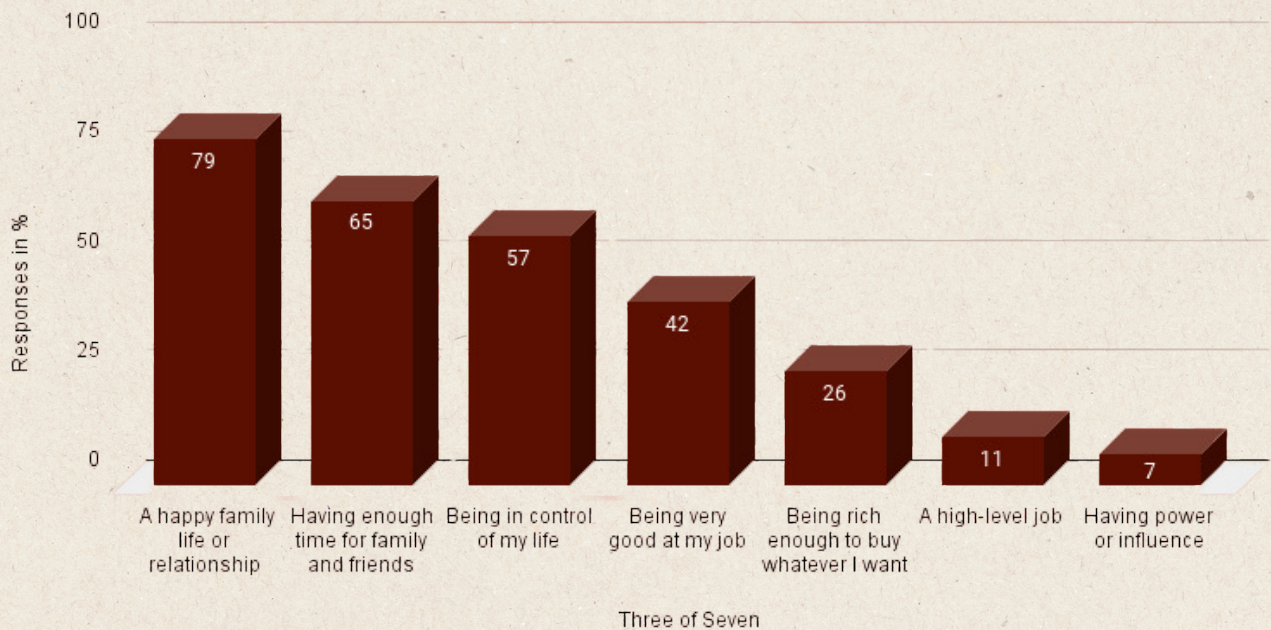
The Shift: A New Perspective on Success

“ Success is “the progressive realization of a worthy ideal, or goal”

Earl Nightingale

We are particularly fond of Graham Cochrane's eloquent explanation of Earl Nightingale's definition of success.

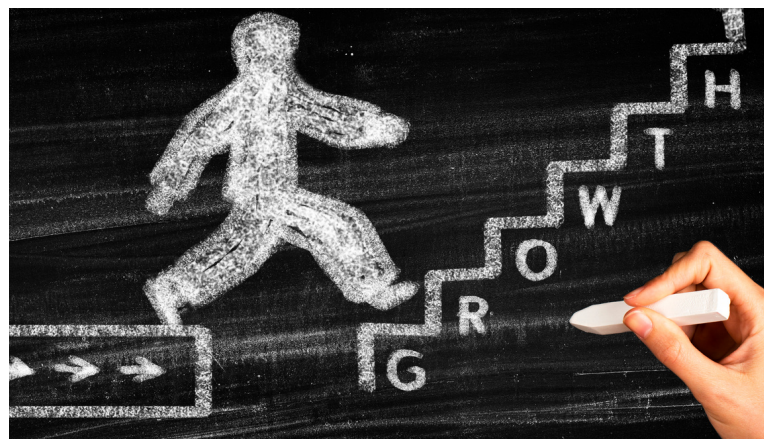
Choose Three of Seven Things that Would Make You feel Personally Successful.



Statistics adapted from Kagan, J. (1993). 'Success: Not what it used to be.' Working Woman, pp. 55–62, as cited in Dyke, L. S., & Murphy, S. A. (2006). 'How we define success: A qualitative study of what matters most to women and men.' Sex Roles, 55(5), 357-371.



He articulates that success isn't merely about achieving a goal but rather witnessing steady progress toward it. This implies that you are already successful if you have established a goal and are actively working towards it. Whether your aim is to lose 20kg in three months, to be more present in your child's life to foster a loving environment, or to start up your own salon at the age of 45, it's the progression towards these goals that defines success.



Furthermore, it's essential to identify a 'worthy' goal to work toward, and this goal doesn't necessarily need to be entirely attainable by us. Cochrane cites Martin Luther King Jr. as an example, who had the noble aspiration to witness a society where all Americans are treated equally, irrespective of their race or gender. He is no longer alive and his worthy goal has not been fully achieved in American but there are people still championing the shared goal. Similarly, if you're passionate about politics and hold values of fairness and justice, your goal could be to see a functional Nigeria that ensures the welfare of its citizens. In your current capacity, by serving people with fairness and justice—even before assuming any significant political office—you embody the essence of success.

Here is a task for you. Go on Youtube and search 'How do you define being successful?' and tell us what you observe. You could also read a couple of scholarly articles on peoples definition of success too help you with this task.

You might immediately realize that true definition of success often comes from achievements that resonate with one's personal values and goals, not just those recognized by society. And that also includes ones personal happiness and satisfaction.

Therefore, your main task as someone who desires to be successful becomes to find out what your values are and what are your goals. Ask yourself this;



“What do I want to become or achieve that would truly make me happy and satisfied?”

We've gone on to ask a few friends and colleagues what their definition of success is and here is what they have to say

What is your individual definitions of success

"I guess for me it means finding what I love to do and growing in that area vs. maybe external expectations of what I should be doing. Also finding out what's important to me in whatever it is I'm doing. For example, in my field, there's a tendency to equate the number of publications with success. I've long decided that it isn't a metric for me." - **Dr. Susan. Bohn, Germany**

"To embrace my personal definition of success means knowing that I achieved or on the road to fulfil my younger selves dreams and aspirations. It's knowing that I can look back at my hardships and realise they were challenges to make me the person I am today and not what society expects me to believe I am. It also means appreciating the awareness that I've gained in understanding that life isn't about meeting people's criteria but living with discernment, placing faith, God, and living in acceptance" - **Joy. Ottawa, Canada**

"I believe to embrace individual definitions of success is to arrive at a point of comfort and knowing that one is genuinely happy with the decisions they made to get to that point and they have little to no regrets and are willing to take those steps again if necessary." - **Amaka. London, UK**

"For me, success is relative. As we progress in life and with the change in times, success will mean different things to different people. For some women, they equate marital status as the pinnacle of success in life and for others they know that marriage does not bring about fulfilment. In Africa, the typical African family believed very strongly that one could only be successful if they chose from the following professions: medicine, law and engineering. Art was looked down on and never considered something one could be successful in. Today, however, we see lawyers, engineers and medical doctors becoming content creators and making more money from their social media content than they do as lawyers, doctors etc. So, success for me is what gives me joy, fulfilment, meets my basic needs and pays me very well to support the quality lifestyle that I want to enjoy." - **Joy. Abuja, Nigeria.**

“It simply means to accept and protect one’s interpretation and understanding of what success means to them without giving in to the pressure to fit into the society’s own. Success should mean, being focused and flourishing in the path(s) an individual believes to be their field, calling, purpose or destiny. Success should not be defined by money, fame or how acceptable what you do is, but by whether or not you were able to fulfil the purpose for which you were made. Someone destined to be a teacher or a lecturer who through that passion is changing the lives of young people positively, is a success as compared to someone who becomes a teacher or lecturer for the salary or prestige it comes with.” - **Bosede. Gaborone, Botswana.**



The Power of Personal Fulfillment.

Okay, we've acknowledged that the traditional idea of success might not be all it's cracked up to be. So, where do we go from here? It's time to tap into what truly makes YOU feel fulfilled

Defining Your Own Success

Success isn't a one-size-fits-all outfit; it's a tailor-made suit that fits your unique shape and size. Begin by acknowledging that what success looks like for one person may be entirely different for another. Personal success is about understanding and embracing your individuality — your strengths, passions, and life circumstances.

Explore Your Values

Values are our guiding stars, and when success align with them, they feel authentic. The key to defining your success is knowing what truly matters to you.

Which values resonate most deeply with you? Integrity, creativity, connection, knowledge? When you align your goals with your values, success becomes a more authentic and fulfilling journey, not just a destination.

Set Personal Goals

Think about what you want to achieve in different areas of your life. Instead of lofty, vague objectives, set specific, meaningful goals. Want to learn a new language? Aim to have a basic conversation within six months. Wishing to improve your health? Set a goal to hike a challenging trail. Make sure these goals excite you and bring a sense of purpose.

Embracing the Evolving Definition

Our priorities naturally shift over time. The success we envisioned at 25 may not be right at 40. Normalize re-evaluating goals and definitions throughout life.

If an opportunity doesn't spark a feeling of "Hell yes!" then it's okay to say no, even if it seems like conventional success. This reinforces aligning with passion, not just external expectations.

Progress, Not Perfection

Success is often found in progress rather than perfection. Celebrate the small steps you take each day towards your goals. Progress can be learning from a mistake, improving a skill, or simply not giving up when things get tough.

Seek Fulfillment, Not Just Achievement



Redefine success as a state of fulfillment rather than a list of achievements. It's about the joy and satisfaction you get from doing the things that are important to you. Success is when you go to bed at night feeling content with how you've spent your day.

Share Your Success By Creating Meaningful relationships

What if we told you that one of the strongest predictors of success could be the health of your relationships? Yes, the people you surround yourself with and the connections you cultivate can significantly define your success.

Research indicates that supportive relationships are a key factor in long-term success and resilience. Having a network of supportive family and friends can enhance personal satisfaction far more than superficial accolades.

Sometimes, sharing your success by mentoring, giving back to the community, or simply being a kind person can amplify your sense of achievement and purpose.



In closing, take a moment to pause and reflect. Think about the goals that set your soul alight, the progress that fuels your spirit, and the relationships that warm your heart. Can you redefine success in terms that are not just meaningful but also authentic to you?

Remember, the world is filled with stories of people who abandoned the conventional path to carve their own. The power to redefine what success means to you is already within you. So, take some time to reflect:

- What sparks a sense of true joy and purpose?
- What kind of legacy do you want to leave behind?
- If judgment and expectations were removed, what would you dare to pursue?

Your definition of success may not look like anyone else's, and that's the beauty of it! Embrace this as your journey, and celebrate every step forward as a triumph on your own terms.

References

Cochrane, G. (2018, May 8). The best definition of success I've ever heard [Video]. YouTube.

Dyke, L. S., & Murphy, S. A. (2006). How we define success: A qualitative study of what matters most to women and men. *Sex roles*, 55(5), 357-371

