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THE FORMATIVE YEARS



Savour your SUCCESS

By JOHN CLEMENTS



Success is not a commodity that can be bought off the shelf - not even in a modern hypermarket!

Yet our nostrils are constantly primed to detect "the sweet smell of success"; we home in on the particular mixture of tantalising fragrances that our noses tell us will lead to personal fulfilment. Typically, it is the heady aroma of material goods that gets us going: money, cars, holidays, electronic gadgets. We all know some folk, indeed, who learn to crave these things as much as they crave their next tasty meal, and they may spend a large part of their lives sniffing out the "ideal" recipe for success without questioning whether the ingredients at their disposal will ever sate their appetites.

Often, they do not.

So they crave more, and they acquire more, and they cook it all up in bigger and bigger pots using ever-greater quantities of artificial flavour-enhancers to ginger up their jaded palates. They work overtime, they buy faster cars, they holiday in increasingly exotic places, they fill their houses with digital this and compact that and beeping flashing liquid-crystal doo-dahs...

And still satisfaction eludes them.

How can this be?

In my experience - ten years as a self-development counsellor - all this questing after material goodies springs from false beliefs about sources of fulfilment. ⇒

Here's an illustration: Some years ago, in my youth, I heard a self-proclaimed authority announce confidently that if a person had not achieved success by the age of 35, they never would. My ears pricked up at this. Not only did I accept this statement as far as it went, but I further believed that success was measured solely by material wealth.

I have now, years later, found this to be untrue. The "authority" who originally uttered the statement was not, of course, telling a deliberate lie. He was simply unaware of all the facts.

There is, in truth, no age beyond which anyone can legitimately say of you: *"You'll never be successful now."*

Moreover, true success - contrary to the common myth - has little to do with the size of one's bank account.

This is not to dismiss success as an irrelevance. Quite the contrary: it is vital to our physical and mental health. Success draws the best out of us; and, in consequence, it fills us with normal, healthy, positive, life-enhancing attitudes. The result: a happy, well-adjusted, fulfilled lifestyle.

As lemon puts the tang into Dover sole, so success puts the zest into living. In another sense, it represents the "pay-off" for our efforts - an existential tonic. This explains why people who have never moved forward in life are often unhappy. They are suffering from an incentive-deficiency - a condition that eventually exacts a heavy price in the form of an undernourished personality. Conversely, regular achievement helps us blossom into powerful, interesting, forward-thinking people. I hope this article will provide the incentive you need in order to develop your unique personality and find the recipe for

living that will lead to your true fulfilment. Diane (not her real name) was an example of someone experiencing a severe bout of stagnation. Forced to leave school at sixteen and find a job, instead of going on to college as she would have wished, she settled for the only employment option available - as a junior office clerk in a small company. Work was hard to come by in those days. Nothing changes!

Diane was not, however, devoid of talent. She had a genuine ear for music, and was a remarkably gifted amateur pianist considering that her parents had never had the means to provide music lessons. Sadly, through circumstances beyond her control, this valuable talent remained unpolished. Her life consisted of filing, filing, filing. How she hated it! This was not the success she had dreamed of, and every day brought new frustrations when she thought of her potential lying dormant, undeveloped, unused.

Nor was her frustration exclusively an inner phenomenon. Her parents, her friends and her colleagues saw it reflected in her personality. She lacked enthusiasm and displayed little happiness at home.

Perhaps you know someone like her...?

Nothing is more saddening than a person who is standing still, or even slipping backwards. His or her life is like stagnant water; unhealthy and undesirable. It is also motionless - it has no outlet or source for refilling. When people are inactive, neither taking in nor giving out, they too become stagnant.

In stark contrast, a goal-orientated person is interesting, vital and liberating - because they are moving forward. We were created to go forward and find new forms

of self-liberation. It is not our destiny to merely walk a treadmill. And as for moving backwards - try it for a minute or two and see how tired and frustrated you get!

We have the innate capacity - in fact the driving need - to grow, to develop, to mature. And as we propel ourselves confidently forward, our personalities take on a vibrant new sparkle, attracting popularity and success without even trying.

Progress, then, is basic to all life - essential to every human being's wholeness and happiness. And the alternative .



"Success draws the best out of us; and, in consequence, it fills us with normal, healthy, positive, life-enhancing attitudes. The result: a happy, well-adjusted, fulfilled lifestyle."

. . . well, we know what happens to a person who continually fails. They become easily discouraged and permanently disaffected, constantly taking the defeatist attitude of "Why try? I can't win anyway." They are prone to become suspicious, often

blaming others and external circumstances for their own failures. Consequently, they are hard to live with, because they have never found their "niche" in life. It is not uncommon for people like this to complain of

headaches and nervousness or other symptoms of emotional disturbance. They are life's "wet blankets" - pitied at best, and often ostracised for the depressing effect they have on their family, friends and colleagues.

Little wonder, then, that psychiatrists and psychologists generally agree that a measure of success is a basic ingredient in any healthy recipe for fulfilment and popularity.

We all know a few people who have "found the right mix" - and we always want to be in their company because they simply make us feel better! We admire them because they are interesting, optimistic and inspirational, with numerous friends and seemingly endless dinner invitations. As a

are worried. They wish she were more like her elder sister, who was always ready to help round the house, did her homework on time, and eventually went to university and earned a first-class degree. However rather than walk straight into a career - as she had the option to do - she had preferred instead to further her personal development by working with The Save The Children Fund in Ethiopia. At any time she now chooses, she may change direction and find a career, in the certain knowledge that her inner self has been nourished in such a profound way as to be able to handle any eventuality that life may bring.

So it goes with life generally. As we experience some measure of success, our personalities

And one might even say that too much success too quickly is counter-productive, for overnight stardom or instant wealth can cause "burn-out". One needs time to accustom oneself to each new phase of improvement - to learn the value of the benefits it brings and to avoid its possible pitfalls.

Taking success for granted may reverse the process, and invite disaster!

The Chinese have a proverb:

"The longest journey starts with a single step."

Self-evident as this statement is, we take for granted the truth at its core. Thus we are turning into an "I can't be bothered" society. But what is it we can't be bothered with? Our own well-being? Our own peace of mind? The health of the society we live in? What strange folk we are! **To write off the possibility of success because of an occasional failure is senseless; to baulk before every hurdle because we once fell over a log verges on the phobic.** Action builds on action; success builds on success. "*Nothing comes of nothing*", says Shakespeare. A failed attempt is a foundation-stone laid for the future. When the majority of our tries are successes, we can easily handle a few bumps and bruises along the way.

Ah, but when the failures outweigh the successes - discouragement reigns! And discouragement left to fester breeds further trouble. How do you stop it festering? Sweep it away with another attempt!

No single attempt is guaranteed to succeed, but a single failure is guaranteed to remain a failure unless you initiate further action!

This advice remains true in nearly all circumstances, no matter what our age, our background or our financial state. Employers recognise this, as do teachers and parents - and anyone else who has been in the position of having to motivate others to overcome apathy and complete the job in hand!

I once read in a professional journal a case study of a student who was **==**



result, they always face tomorrow with confidence and panache. For people who are achieving genuine success like this, circumstances are not a threat: so skillfully have they overcome obstacles in the past that they naturally show no anxiety about encountering them in the future. Is it any wonder, then, that such people are easier, more pleasant and more uplifting to associate with than those who perpetually paint themselves in the drab colours of failure?

Let's consider, by way of illustration, two parents whose child is a dreamer. The little dear daydreams at school, she slops around the house in a bored and purposeless manner, and she exhibits all the symptoms of a meaningless existence. Naturally, her parents

improve, and we become lively, enriched, interesting individuals, better able to get along with others on a social level and more willing to support others in their struggles. Philanthropists are, as a rule, exactly this kind of individual: they use the material wealth their success generates to help others rise above the minor irritations of daily life and generate their own form of success - which in turn they will use to help others, and so on.

But we should not despair if great prizes do not fall into our lap straight away. Each small success is the launching pad for greater accomplishments.



referred to an educational psychologist because he either had a serious learning difficulty or was just lazy - the teacher couldn't decide which. The psychologist carried out various psychometric tests, and soon diagnosed the student's problem: he was simply not ready for the level of work being done by his classmates. His only stumbling-block, then, was discouragement; and he felt this not only at school but also at home.

The psychologist consulted with the teacher and made several recommendations for encouraging the student. Mainly, they involved setting work within his ability-range. Several weeks later the teacher was able to report two remarkable improvements in the student - one in his work, the other in his attitude.

This student thrived on encouragement. He had a basic psychological need to experience success and achievement. The moment this need was met, he became happier, more pleasant, more purposeful. Suddenly, and perhaps for the first time in his life, he was the author of regular achievements. Almost instantly, he was no longer a problem student. Why? Because he had a new self-concept. No longer was he a failure in his own eyes. He had discovered a new role in life: he was entitled to call himself A Success!

But educational achievement and personal growth are not the whole story. Family life is important too - for it is the cradle in which each new generation is nurtured. Let's look at two different families, who both chose a traditional (Victorian!) lifestyle, and see how the attitudes within them affected the well-being of their members.

These two families lived on the same street, the fathers had similar jobs, and both mothers were dedicated home-makers with young children at school. But here the similarity ended. If you had known them personally (and perhaps you even did!), you would have per-

ceived a major disparity between the two. One father, Alexander, felt contented and fulfilled in his home and career. The other father, Tom, didn't. Each man's view of life was heavily influenced by his spouse.

Alexander's partner took every opportunity to encourage him and give him recognition. "*Our Daddy is the best in the world*", she would tell their children. "*We love him, don't we!*" Then, turning to her spouse, she would admiringly say, "*Darling, you really are wonderful. Life with you is great!*"

Tom's spouse, by contrast, seemed to take him for granted. Love him? Yes, undoubtedly; but she would persist in pointing out to him the things they needed but didn't have. Worse, she failed to give the daily recognition that helps keep a person happy and healthy - the feeling of being, to some degree and in meaningful ways, successful.

After a number of years the two women had left permanent imprints on their partners - one of success, the other of defeat.

In plain fact, recognition and status are important - and not only in marriage relationships, but in all aspects of life. Men are, in general, rather less good at expressing appreciation to their partners and colleagues; but both sexes have an equal and constant need for encouragement and recognition.

Children and adults alike want, and deserve, to feel that they are successful, and are noticed as such. At home, at school, in the office, at work - maybe even in the pub or wine-bar - wherever we interact

and communicate, the search for success becomes a vital component of the social mechanism. And the best way to help our children, our friends and our relatives feel that they are successful is by ensuring they receive our continuing, genuine and spontaneous encouragement and support.

So we have a responsibility to encourage others. Yes. But more than that, we have the joy of doing so. Every time we let someone know that we have confidence in them, we give them a vital "boost" towards that all-important feeling of success - the by-products of which are good physical and mental health on their part, and greater happiness on ours.

Success, then, is not measured by some mythical philosophical yardstick, nor by material wealth alone. Rather, it manifests itself in the recognition we receive from our friends, and the positive emotional tribute we give them in return.

Persevere after failure; build on small successes; communicate your appreciation to others whom you value. It's simple, common-sense advice, but I've seen it work time after time. Applied with sufficient determination, it can actually transform lives.

Why not give it a try? You can't lose anything - and you might just find yourself reaping an unprecedented harvest of improved relationships and genuine emotional fulfilment!

- John Clements

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