

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS **by Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.**

Many people believe that success results from possessing a natural born talent. I hear people moan, “If I had been born with the looks of Tara Banks, I’d be successful, too!” or “If I had Uncle Ray’s ability to play by ear, I’d be in a top band today.” Natural talent never hurt anyone, but it is a mere drop in the bucket when it comes to why some people succeed and others do not. Let’s consider what really brings about success in life?

Our society has an unspoken definition of success that tends to focus on external appearances. Yet, clearly success is a personal matter and resides in the eye of the beholder. For instance, one person might dream of becoming an Olympic star and could care less about financial security. Another person might want to become a medical researcher who discovers a cure for a troubling disease. For these individuals, success might come through physical prowess or through cognitive excellence. But, whether the individual “feels” successful will depend on several key factors:

- 1) Do they place value on their success?
- 2) Does their success feel deserved (i.e. did it come too easily)?
- 3) Does their success give them an internal sense of accomplishment?
- 4) Has their achievement helped provide meaning in their lives (i.e. provide a sense of personal satisfaction)?

Many people tell me that they appear successful to the outside world, but inside, they don’t derive any pleasure or satisfaction from their success. Sometimes, the fact that others believe they are successful provides an initial positive feeling. However, that feeling of personal satisfaction quickly dies if it cannot be internalized or owned.

This oftentimes results when a person has tried to succeed at what other people value instead of going after their heart’s desire. A client of mine was encouraged by well-meaning parents to go into the health care field. She had achieved a degree as a pharmacist at a reputable research facility, had an excellent salary, but was unhappy. She had always wanted to be a professional dancer. Her family had discouraged her from this dream for fear she wouldn’t make a good enough living. Hence, her success felt empty, despite outward appearances to the contrary. Since she had failed to follow her own dream and talent, she couldn’t own her success and indeed, knew inside she had failed herself in order to please others.

So far, you’ve begun to understand that success is not as obvious as one might think. Let’s also dispel another myth about success. I don’t believe most people’s success is determined by being born with an innate ability or aptitude. There are many people who have natural God given talents and squander them. Why? They lack a key ingredient for success. They lack motivation or a true commitment.

Without a commitment to one’s dream, purpose, or goal, many people’s skills are wasted. We never even discover what we’re capable of doing unless we truly push ourselves. It takes a genuine belief in what we are doing and an unwavering commitment to obtain a

feeling of personal success. Too often, people give up for many reasons: it is too difficult, they are lazy, they lack a belief in themselves or their abilities, etc. Yet, all of these excuses can be addressed when an individual decides to commit. A commitment comes with a conscious decision to value one's life. Sometimes faith in a higher power plays a role in helping people take this important step. Once a true commitment to succeed has been made, a sense of internal motivation causes changes to occur: difficulties become a challenge to overcome; laziness evaporates under the focus of following one's dream; and a disbelief in oneself transforms through small, consistent steps forward toward a positive sense of self-worth.

Einstein referred to genius as part inspiration, but primarily perspiration. Perspiration, of course, refers to a tireless commitment to keep trying until one succeeds. Dr. Charles Garfield, author of Peak Performance, says that the single biggest predictor of success is "preference." By preference, Garfield is referring to the fact that people who do what they really prefer have the best chances of doing well in life.

Psychologist and author, Dr. Wayne Dyer, offers advice in his book, The Sky is the Limit, to "follow your bliss." In short, he believes that if people concentrate on what really turns them on, they'll do better in their lives. All of these individuals also believed that a positive, optimistic attitude toward life helped to motivate and inspire people in a way that eventually increased their likelihood of feeling personally successful.

Success requires that you become fully committed to doing those things that you do best ---what I call your "signature strengths." Avoid the trap of following someone else's dream for you. And once you've identified what you love to do, go after it with a vengeance. We've all heard the truism, "Quitters never win, and winners never quit." I encourage you to commit TODAY to whatever you feel passionate about. After all, an empty success is no success at all. Regardless of our profession or job, if we feel successful at it, we will feel happy and worthwhile.

© Copyright, 2005, Ginger Blume, Ph.D.