

How to know when you're successful?

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(Word count of the article: 725)

Countless books have been written on the topic of success because people are intrigued by the prospect of finding its secret - the silver bullet. How much would you be willing to pay for this scarce piece of information? How much have you already invested in books, seminars and on-line courses till date? How successful are you because of that information or in spite of it today?

What I want to share with you in this article is the outside perspective of approaching big questions such as success; how to look at it from a rational point of view, without getting all caught up in detailed descriptions and emotional entanglements. This is also known as stepping back, painting the bigger picture or taking a helicopter view. By decreasing the level of detail I'll help you increase your scope and thereby your insight and understanding of the business at hand.

First you'll need to get clarity about the nature of your subject; why is it important and what does it mean to individual stakeholders? The noun "Success" is related to the verb "to Succeed". So, success is succeeding at whatever you set out to do. Because different people have different interests, they set out to do different things. However, we all seem to measure success in monetary equivalents because it makes comparison from period to period and between entities much easier. Beware that money is just a device for measuring your progress at realizing whatever it is you set out doing; money is a means to an end. By confusing means and ends, when you start chasing the money, you risk losing the purpose of your enterprise and with that your credibility and trust.

Next, in order to measure your level of success, you'll need to know the following two benchmarks or reference points:

- ❖ What do you want to achieve by when?
- ❖ What have you achieved up until now?

The significance of each reference point is determined by how S.M.A.R.T. you have expressed it; is it **S**imple, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, **T**imely. The variance between both benchmarks determines success or failure; success and failure are two sides of the same coin.

As an aside, variance can only stem from four distinct sources:

- NATURAL VARIATION
Seasonal effects. Timothy Fuller once said that management will have made a giant leap forward when they stop asking you to explain natural variation.
- OPERATIONAL BEHAVIOR
Effectiveness; the extent at which you deliver on your promises. Efficiency; the cost associated with delivering on your promises.
- STRATEGIC DIRECTION/POSITIONING
Planning, Execution and Control of the realization of your vision. Strategy is subject to change because your internal and external environments change over time.
- ALIGNMENT OF OPERATIONS WITH STRATEGY
Integrity; are you progressing in the direction of your vision?

Start with the end in mind!

You've heard this before and I'm telling you again. *If you don't know where you're going, any which way will take you there.* Think about the golf course; every time you walk up to the tee box you look at where you're going - the pin on the green. Just because you're not hitting a hole-in-one every time, you still address the ball and tee-off in the direction of the pin. You'd be foolish not to!

Here's your checklist for the business:

Do you have a strategic plan? Is it up to date? Has it been fully implemented? How effective are your day-to-day decisions? Are those decisions in line with that strategic plan? Are your efficiency efforts constructive or destructive of the strategic plan? How are you measuring performance? How recent, accurate and complete are your current performance measurements? Do you know the variance from your goal? Do you know the source of that variance?

Did you know that most of your successes AND failures can be traced back to a series of decisions that you took yesterday, the week before, a week or month ago, even last year? Therefore, it's critical that you know where you want to be in the future; know where you are today and figure out how to get from where you are to where you want to be; that's your strategic plan and you should use it as a benchmark for all your decisions. Keep your eye on the ball and hit it with all you've got! Good luck.