

# Secrets of Success and Happiness



by Jack Brannigan

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**By Jack Brannigan**

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## Preface

One of the most common misconceptions about success is that it relates directly to money or happiness. While success can make one rich and/or bring happiness, it does not necessarily do either.

In this book, a clear definition of success is given: what it means and why it is so often misunderstood as a measure of wealth or happiness. Then, happiness is discussed philosophically before we talk further about success.

I must say right away that there are no secrets or shortcuts to success, but there are strategies and methods, which, if followed, will greatly increase the chances of success and a successful execution. These strategies are totally independent of what you do or what your goals are. You can employ them to carry out a successful project at work or to create a beautiful stroke on a tennis court.

One of the ancient introduced secrets of success by Aristotle is “thinking”. However, here we will assume that you are already

*thinking* since you've picked up this book to read. We will discuss that although thinking is a first and necessary step, it is by no means enough to guarantee a desired outcome.

## Success

Success, by definition, means achieving your objectives. Thus, a successful person must be an individual that accomplishes his objectives more often than he fails to do so. Success is largely defined by measures such as wealth, position or status. In addition, success is measured by one's capabilities. (It is trivial if a seven foot tall man makes a slam dunk, while it is an amazing achievement if he is only six feet tall.)

Usually the word success is used interchangeably with financial success. This is the main reason for the fallacy that a successful person must be rich. In many cases money may be only a by-product of success. For example, a painter who has achieved his goal of masterfully illustrating his vision on a canvas is successful regardless of anybody offering a \$1,000,000 for it.

The most common misconception about success is that people think that it will automatically bring happiness. Although any success will temporarily make you happy, it does not guarantee you overall happiness in life. There are many financially successful

businessmen who are very unhappy individuals, and there are millions of deprived people who are totally content and satisfied with their lives. This is because while success is about the achievements only, happiness is about how we feel about our achievements and how we got them.

## Happiness

Happiness means the general condition of success. This is one goal which all rational beings have in common, and it's desirability is self-evident. One does not need to justify the pursuit of this goal, which is more important to people than any other. Happiness is the final end.

So if happiness is the common state of success as claimed, why are there many successful people who are discontented individuals? The answer is simple: there is a huge difference between provisional satisfaction and lasting happiness. The joy of finally graduating from college may last longer than the pleasure of drinking a couple of beers, but it is far from making one eternally happy in life.

Although the journey to any goal may be very thrilling, true happiness in life comes when one truly wants and likes what one has or has achieved. Unless you are content by nature (as many simple people are), you must first know yourself in order to learn what you truly want. Once you know yourself, you either already have what you truthfully want in life or you don't. If you don't, you can set intermediate goals aligned with your ultimate



goal, so you can reach it. The strategies that you are about to read in the coming chapters will increase your chances of accomplishing your goals.

## Strategies for Success

Although the strategies you are about to read will increase your chances of becoming successful regardless of your talent level in any field, it would help greatly if you are doing something in which you have some talent. This would also guarantee that you will enjoy doing your task. Seldom do people hate doing things in which they are talented! Obviously there is not always the opportunity to do what one likes, but while you are earning a living, it does not hurt to constantly search for your dream job.

There is an important message here for those of you who are parents and are helping your young children to grow up and become successful and happy in their life. Try to find out very early in their lives what their talents are. Then help them to grow their gift so they can make a living out of it. The examples of parents who foolishly pushed their children towards careers that they, themselves, would have liked to have regardless of the children's interest and talent are plenty. There is a chance that you the reader are one of them.

## Goals

You have got to have a goal and a target because, if you don't have a target, it is hard to tell when you reach it. Furthermore, if there is no goal, what would you focus on to assure a superior execution?

However, just having a goal is not enough. Your goals must be smart. A smart goal is a goal that is achievable and which does not set you up for failure. An achievable goal is one that you are not sure you can achieve. This type of goal assures that you stretch your capabilities. An unachievable goal is one that you know you cannot achieve.

Moreover, a smart goal is aligned with your ultimate goal. Otherwise, your accomplishments become trivial once you realize they have not made any contribution towards the ultimate goal, which consequently hurts your confidence and makes you depressed.

It is important that you stick with your goals and do not alter them after encountering the first obstacle. Yet, it is wise to be ready to change your goal once you realize a blunder or because of a change in environment. If the goal is changed

repeatedly, you have to reevaluate your ability of setting up smart goals. Furthermore if the ever changing goals have been set for others as well, you will soon lose respect and credibility.

## ***Focus***

In order to carry out your tasks efficiently you must be able to focus and concentrate on your task. Distraction will reduce your efficiency and will result in mistakes which may cause a total collapse of the mission. If possible, write your goal in large font and post it on the wall where you can be reminded of it frequently. Keep your eye on the target.

If you are distracted, stop what you are doing and take care of the source of the distraction first. This is easier said than done, but, in many cases, it actually is not that hard to do. The source of distraction might be as simple as tiredness, so take a break, rest, and get back to work with a rejuvenated energy.

## *Prepare*

If there was only one secret to success, preparation would be the one. It will set you in the best position to execute the task with the least difficulty. The more prepared you are, the easier the task becomes. Two students who just finished an exam have a totally different opinion about the exam: one thinks it was very difficult and the other thinks the exact opposite. The difference is that one was prepared while the other wasn't.

If you are a pro tennis player and planning to play in the French Open it is a good idea to play some clay court tournaments before the major event in Paris. You might claim that Andre Agassi used to come to Paris and get to the final without attending a single clay tournament prior to Paris. Well, he can manage that having enormous talent. In addition, even he prepared for the French Open, perhaps not immediately before the tournament, but years before that, by hitting roughly 4000 tennis balls a day since he was about 3 years old.

It is an excellent initiative to learn about effective management skills, if you want to become a successful manager. Even born leaders such as Lee Iacocca would have not been able to save the Chrysler corporation

from bankruptcy if he wasn't prepared for the task through the years of learning, hard work, and experience he gained from working with the Ford motor company.

A valuable message for the reader is to remind the children in their family that the tasks they are carrying out now, which seem so exhausting and demanding, are only preparing them for the greater tasks in the future. And, if they are not prepared when the time comes, they'll be very regretful. It must be clarified for them that we only reap what we sow.

### *Timing*

You have probably heard the saying "timing is everything". Timing perhaps is not everything, but it is a vital ingredient to success. This is true even for a simple task such as cooking. In tennis if your timing is off, you may hit the ball too early or late, both of which result in a fault or mediocre shot. In business, you may sell or buy a stock at the wrong time and lose millions of dollars because of it.

The only method of obtaining good timing is through repetition or experience.

Again, Mr. Agassi is a good example. According to many pro tennis players, he hits the ball cleaner and returns the serve better than anybody in the history of the game. Probably no one has hit as many balls and returned as many serves as a kid as Andre did either. By repetition and experience, timing will become a sixth sense to you.

### **Attitude**

The attitude of a successful person is the *can do* attitude. When a problematic project is given to a successful person, she takes up the task and finds ways to overcome the difficulties. In contrast, the unsuccessful person's response to a similar project is a series of excuses and discussions about the barriers which will stop him from a successful execution with the conclusion that he should not take up the task.

Of course the *can do* attitude is the attitude of a confident person, and confidence is the result of many successful accomplishments. There seems to be a paradox here: one needs confidence to be successful, but one has to be successful first to gain confidence. For this reason, one needs to start with smaller tasks that have a

higher chance of success to build up confidence. Then one can then take on more complicated projects. There are bad managers who hand over difficult tasks to inexperienced employees who are not prepared for the job. This may destroy the employees' confidence for good and kill otherwise successful careers.

Another hidden message to those of you who are parents: if you want to have successful children, build up their confidence. More importantly, do not destroy their confidence with negative comments such as, you are just dumb!

### ***Risk Taking***

You probably have heard the advertisement for an investment company that says, "the greatest risk is not taking one". Although this is just a sales pitch, it is very much true. Here we talk about a calculated risk, which is much different than the risk of gambling.

In an ever faster changing market, many leaders have to make decisions with less information because, by the time they will have all the information to make their



decision, the market has already changed. The less information one has to make a decision, the more risk one will have to take. The more risk taken, the greater the reward or the penalty. Thus, if you cannot afford to lose your investment, it is wise to take less risk, because the steady growth will ensure your financial success.

It seems that all successful people like and do things that involve risk. But they do not like the risk itself, and they try to reduce it, if they can.

### ***Hard Work***

We talked about doing something that one has talent for. Obviously, the less talent one has for the job they do, the harder one has to work to get the results they desire.

Successful people often enjoy their job so much that it does not seem like work, never mind hard work. On the negative side, when these people retire, they quickly deteriorate because they lack the stimulus of their work. While they were so fully and constantly occupied with their work and career, they never developed any type of hobby to fall back to in retirement.

The important thing is to understand the difference between filling time and time management and to know that being busy is not the same as working. It is key to work on the important and not necessarily the urgent.

### *Luck*

What has luck to do with it!? A lot, many would say. It certainly seems that successful people have always been in the right place at the right time. However, the following argument may give you a different perspective on this subject:

In the game of backgammon, luck plays a major role in the outcome of the game. You may play the game one night and not roll even one useful pair of dice; the next night you could call your preferred numbers and they would appear. However, if you play this game long enough, the laws of statistics dictate that you will get as many good dice as the next guy. So, if your friend has an overall winning percentage over you, it is simply because he is a better player, in other words, he has taken the most advantage of his good dice.

Because successful people have done the most with the opportunities in their lives, they just seem luckier. Often their luck has been recorded, and one can go back and look at it and say, “Yes there it is. This guy is successful because he was lucky at that time. So that’s why I’m not successful.” Of course, since many have not done much with their opportunities or luck, it seems like they never had any.

In fact, even the successful people consider themselves luckier than others. This has helped them even more to become successful because it increases their confidence. For the same reason, the unsuccessful people, simply by assuming their unluckiness, inflict a negative attitude on themselves and damage their confidence and performance.

### ***Ruthlessness***

A Samurai warrior advises “if your opponent’s rhythm is disorganized or if he has fallen into evasive or retreating attitudes, you must crush him straightaway with no concern for his presence and without allowing him space for breath. It is essential to crush

him all at once. The primary thing is not to let him recover his position even a little.”

Today’s athletes refer to ruthlessness as the ability of finishing somebody off. Although ruthlessness may be accepted in a sports arena, in other professional environments it has a bad odor because it is almost impossible to determine how much is necessary and how much is excessive. Nevertheless, sometimes it is essential to be ruthless to achieve your objectives. Jack Welsh, known also as neutron Jack, fired one third of GE employees when he became the president of the company in order to improve the company’s performance. And he succeeded greatly.

## ***Failures***

Regardless how prepared we are, how hard we work, and how talented and confident we are, we are going to fail some times. The important thing is not to be afraid of failure. After all, it is better to do something and fail than to not have done anything at all. Thus, it is critically important that we change our attitude towards failure.

One must look at failure as great opportunity for learning. The following story demonstrates exactly what is meant here: A promising junior executive of IBM was involved in a loss of over \$10 million in a business transaction. It was a disaster. When his boss called the nervous executive into his office, the young man blurted out, "I guess you want my resignation?" His boss said, "You can't be serious. We've just spent \$10 million educating you!"

## Final Words

It is extremely important that you realize that things do not just happen to your advantage by themselves; most of the time, you must make them happen. Play the game of life with the attitude of *playing to win* and not with the attitude of *playing not to lose*. The following table summarizes the differences between these two attitudes and the results of having such attitudes:

	Playing Not to lose	Playing to Win
<b>Value</b>	Survival	Progress
<b>Main goal</b>	Security	Prosperity
<b>Behavior Model</b>	Avoid being wrong, being rejected, and failing	Reaching your ultimate capacity, the best you can do
<b>Reactions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Self-protection and self-promotion</li><li>2. Staying inside your comfort zone</li><li>3. Irrational thinking</li><li>4. A closed mind</li><li>5. Blame others</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Base truth on objective reality</li><li>2. Make decisions rationally</li><li>3. Outside comfort zone</li><li>4. Can't fail</li><li>5. Take accountability</li></ol>
<b>Results</b>	Being right Being in control Being accepted Comfort Convenience	Success Growth Fun Joy Understanding

Finally, as you travel down the road of life, remember that success is a journey and not a destination, that the key to an enjoyable life is *balance* in everything you do. Always keep an eye on your long-term goals, and, most importantly, be confident in your abilities.

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