



Degrees of Self-Help

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Think that you're a success? You may need to think again – or, more to the point, you may need to stop thinking altogether and start doing – that's how to become a real success. Real success does not involve hard work, it does not involve compromising one's work life balance and it does not involve wanting for anything. The problem is that people deem themselves to be successful based on the norms of society – and the word "norm" simply means that enough lunatics got together and agreed that this is the way things should be. Don't forget, psychological research stretching back over seventy years proves that normal people's minds control them, not the other way around – these are the lunatics that I'm referring to – and there's a 96% chance that you're one of them!

The fact is that, over the last fourteen years, the vast majority of the clients with whom I have worked were already successful before we ever met. But they were "normal successful", judging themselves against such pathetic norms that they almost had closed their minds to the possibility that there is a level of abnormal success out there that anyone can attain – and it's different from normal so-called success. Normal success is comparative and competitive – we judge our success against others' achievements, material goods and lifestyles. We compare this year's sales and profit to last year's – when, if we just opened our minds a little, we would see the absurdity of planning next year on what we manage to achieve this year. Yes, business planning is a classic example of the manner in which we shut down our expectations and then reward ourselves for living down to them. After all, what sane person would use the normal levels of business this year as a benchmark against which to visualize next year's. That's why long-standing businesses are often overwhelmed by a new entry into the market, one who hasn't succumbed to the "conventional wisdom" (by the way, there's no such thing!) of the marketplace. That's why, for example, the Swiss watch making industry has never recovered from the development of quartz timepieces – for, when offered this new technology in the nineteen seventies, the Swiss response was that they couldn't take that on board – "a watch isn't a watch unless it has all the moving pieces" – the rest is history.

When we consider ourselves successful through the normal lens of self-evaluation, we may be fooling ourselves – because we're comparing ourselves to the crazies – you know, people who work crazy hours, ride roughshod over their fellow human beings, make lunatic decisions, screw up the world economy, clap themselves on the back, pay themselves obscene bonuses and, in the process,

lose a little of their soul. But that's enough about bankers!!! Allow me quote Niall Fitzgerald from an interview in Ireland's leading newspaper, The Irish Times. Here's a man who left Ireland in the 1970s and who went on to become Chairman and Chief Executive of Unilever and Chairman of Reuters. Fitzgerald is quoted as saying that the development of his business career, had he stayed in Ireland, would have been restricted unless "I was prepared to compromise my own principles". That's the kind of normal success I'm talking about.

But principles come in all shapes and sizes – for example, what comes first, working crazy hours to make more money, or family life? What's more important, an organization's bottom line or the people who make the money? The key question was well put two thousand years ago "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What price "success"?

Let me propose a different perspective on success that suggests that real success simply happens when one is extra-ordinarily good at what one does for a "living", that they get a great kick out of doing it and, because they're so good, they get really well remunerated – that they have a wonderful time with the people who are most special to them in their lives – that they also spend lots of time and energy doing the things that really turn them on and that, in the whole process, they enable those whose lives they touch be the better for knowing them.

This perspective on success encompasses financial freedom, work life balance, personal effectiveness and ambition and what's come to be called "giving something back" (of course, in that regard, charity always begins at home). There are many of my clients who don't subscribe to this perspective – they actually live it and it confirms to them that "you have to work hard to be a success" is a myth – hard work, like beauty, is in the mind of the beholder. For those who are truly successful what normal people see as hard work is a labour of love. The macho myth that you have to walk through people to be a success is also exploded – I've been privileged to work with senior management teams who deeply care for each other – to the extent that would put many normal family "caring" relationships to shame. These people grow each other and, in turn, grow themselves. These people don't take themselves too seriously, have great fun doing what they're doing and don't give a damn about what normal people think of them – why should they bother? Why should you?

Which leads my nicely back full circle. Why conform to crazy norms? Why fall into the normal mould of "successful" living? Why jump aboard the normal express train to stress, infidelity and moral stupor? Why even care about what these so-called ordinary people think of you? Because, if you want to be extraordinarily successful, you're going to have to start being extra – ordinary.