February 2013

**Success That Lasts: Excerpts**

Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson

Harvard Business Review, February 2004

*Single-minded ambition is a great way to achieve some goals-but is that really success? New research reveals surprisingly practical ways to find professional and personal fulfillment.*

*People who tell you that happiness, achievement, and significance will come automatically if you simply do the work you love are misguided.*

People need a comprehensive framework for thinking about success. Pursuing success is like shooting at a series of moving targets. Every time you hit one, five more pop up from a different direction. Standards and examples of “making it” constantly shift, while a fast-paced world of technological and social change constantly poses new obstacles to overcome. During the past decade, traditional career paths suddenly became pointless. In the face of such instability, many people assume success requires a winner-take-all approach. They believe success depends on putting all of your energy into achieving one goal. No matter how noble, one goal can’t satisfy all of a person’s needs and desires.

Most successful people have a greater understanding of how success is really about and the versatility to make good on their ideals. This article will introduce a practical framework to help you see success son these same terms.

**What Is Enduring Success?**

Each person must understand and develop his or her own unique definition of success over time; there are no perfect models to follow.

As part of the research design, posited five common characteristics of individuals who by most standards had achieved enduring success:

* High achievement
* Multiple goals
* The ability to experience pleasure
* The ability to create positive relationships
* A value on accomplishments than endure

Data:

* More than 60 interviews with successful professionals
* Surveyed 90 top executives attending HBS management programs
* Informally observed high achievers
* More than a dozen model-resting sessions with 50 – 100 executives in each
* Reviewed the problems that the general population has reported about success

**The Complexity of Success**

Success requires more than a heart-pounding race to the finish line. Our research uncovered four irreducible components of enduring success:

* **Happiness**: feelings of pleasure or contentment with your life
* **Achievement**: accomplishments that compare favorably with similar goals others have strived for
* **Significance**: the sense that you have made a positive impact on people you care about
* **Legacy:** a way to establish your values or accomplishments so as to help others find future success

Unless you hit all four categories with regularity, any one win will fail to satisfy. You’ll experience the “wince factor”: you know what you are doing is right, but it still feels like a loss. By contrast success that encompasses all four kinds of accomplishment is enriching; it endures.

Matching your expectations to the right category is a critical skill for achieving sustainable success. People who are particularly skilled at sifting through the moving targets share two characteristics:

* They view success as a broad and dynamic experience of accomplishment, one that factored in all four categories.
* Their concrete examples of what counted as “real” success included accomplishments of wildly varying magnitude. They weren’t setting maximum goals for themselves in each category.

**The Kaleidoscope Strategy**

An effective success strategy can be compared to a kaleidoscope. Each chamber is separate and holds pieces of glass that shift. However, the eye sees one unique picture made up of the various chambers. While the patterns are inherently unstable, they provide satisfaction.

Successful people:

* Constantly add new chips to each of the four categories.
* The chose their actions so that the whole picture will display a pleasing proportionality. This satisfaction allows them to turn away from one category when another needs attention. This is “just enough.” They recognize the importance of setting their own standards for “enough” and not falling prey to the lure of the infinite “more.”

**Building Your Own Kaleidoscope**

Fill in the kaleidoscope form. Did you want the same things earlier in your life? How have the items in your kaleidoscope changed? Could you ever fully abandon one of the categories and still feel that you were a success? How integrated is your profile? Are some domains empty? Are some too full? How varied is your profile? What have you learned about what you actually do? Where is your time going? How does it speak to what you really want from success? Are you favoring what you do best and neglecting your need for fulfillment in all four categories? Research into success has shown that one of the biggest causes of failure is an overreliance on one’s greatest strengths.

**Getting to “Just Enough”**

How do you know when it is time to stop your work in one category and switch your attention to another? That’s’ where the concept of “just enough “becomes critical. If you see the whole picture, you are better able to differentiate between high aspirations and reachable goals.

Just enough” is the antidote to society’s addiction to the infinite “more.” Seen in that light. It becomes a vehicle for actively making choices that allow you to do and get more, not less, through achieving satisfaction in more areas of your life.