

# My 2016 Theory of Success & How I Plan To Achieve It

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LGST 227: Literature of Success  
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May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016

*Live in the moment.*

*Welcome each day - its pleasures and its challenges.*

*Make others feel welcome.*

*Share.*

*Feel the spirit of those who have gone before you.*

*Imagine those who will follow you.*

*Appreciate those who walk with you today.*

- A pilgrim's prayer from El Camino de Santiago



## I. Introduction

In May 2013, I began a pilgrimage across Spain along the ancient Camino de Santiago. In 32 days I walked over 500 miles from the south of France to the western coast of Spain. It was a true adventure, full of danger, surprise, fear, love, and discovery. Blizzards and blisters slowed the way, but I eventually arrived at the Cathedral of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, the pilgrim's final destination. After so long, this moment should have been the sweetest reward. But I felt oddly empty at my arrival. I did not enjoy the elation or sense of achievement I had anticipated. It was not until dinner that night that I understood my feelings of anticlimactic disappointment. Though entering the Cathedral marked the completion of my pilgrimage, it did not define my journey. Moreover, finishing did not make my trip successful. Instead, sitting around dinner that night with 20 new close friends, sharing memories and laughing, gave me the sense of satisfaction that told me my trip had been a success.

It is tradition on El Camino to wish pilgrims *buen camino*, which translates to 'good path' or 'good journey.' That phrase has stuck with me, and nagged at the back of my head as I attempt to define success three years later. These simple well wishes seem to touch the root of a subconsciously held definition of success. After all, pilgrims do not wish each other good arrivals or safe travels. They wish each other *good journeys*. They understand that arrival in Santiago merely marks the end, while the journey's success or failure lies in the experiences along the way. These pilgrims are soul-searchers who have set aside their lives to pursue a journey, who have risked life and limb to be true to themselves. They realize that the pilgrimage itself enlightens and brightens, instead of

expecting the Cathedral to do so. Reflecting upon this phrase and my experience arriving at the Cathedral taught me an important lesson: life is about the journey.

With that in mind, I present my definition of success: success means having a *buen camino*, built on pillars of authenticity, love, impact, and excellence.

## II. Defining Success

There are three important things to keep in mind about this definition. Firstly, I define success foremost as a journey. It is not a box to check, line to cross, or point to arrive at. Secondly, there are four pillars a successful *buen camino* is built upon. In this section, I will offer a detailed explanation for the importance and definition of each of these pillars. Finally, these pillars fall into two primary categories: they are either focused on “inner” dimensions of success or “outer” ones (Shell, 28). Inner dimensions relate to our relationships with ourselves and the way we experience life. Outer dimensions relate to our interactions with the world, and the way the world experiences our existence.

### *A. The journey: “Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.” – Constantine Cavafy*

To begin with, I believe success is a journey. It is not a destination to arrive at. Instead, it is the cumulative experience of thought, action, and interaction. This belief comes both from El Camino and from the poem “Ithaka” by Constantine P. Cavafy. Its central message is simple: it is better to journey than to arrive (Galens). Cavafy expresses this sentiment in the form of advice to the famed Odysseus as he sets out for his home island of Ithaka in the Odyssey. Its message, beautifully conveyed through five stanzas, frames my definition of success.

“Ithaka” begins with a simple wish: “As you set out for Ithaka, hope the journey is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery.” While a modest phrase, the sentiment

is profound in its address of Odysseus' alternative motivation. Odysseus seeks only to arrive home safely in Ithaka, viewing the journey as merely the time between the present and his goal. He doesn't hope for a long journey, but a short and simple one. Cavafy urges a new consideration: that Odysseus ought to value the journey, and hope for a long and meaningful one. Cavafy goes on to support this by conveying three central ideas in three main stanzas.

In the first stanza, he advises Odysseus that the monsters and dangers he fears come from within. He need not fear Poseidon or the Cyclops, "as long as you keep your thoughts raised high, as long as a rare excitement stirs your spirit and your body." These are the main dangers Odysseus is to face, and Cavafy proposes that carrying such fears in his heart causes them to arise in front of him. Thus, if Odysseus desires a safe and pleasurable journey, he must fix his thoughts on enjoyment, rather than preoccupation with future fears.

In the second stanza, Cavafy wishes for Odysseus to find many beauties and discoveries. He wishes the enjoyment of "pearls and coral, amber and ebony," and that "there be many a summer morning when, with what pleasure, what joy, you come into harbors seen for the first time." These treasures are the antidotes to the dangers of the first stanza. Cavafy wishes Odysseus to find knowledge, adventure, pleasure, and more in each day of his journey, even if that pleasure delays his journey.

In the third stanza, Cavafy addresses his central message most clearly. He presents the notion that it is better to journey than to arrive. He writes:

Keep Ithaka always in your mind. Arriving there is what you are destined for. But do not hurry the journey at all. Better if it lasts for years, so you are old by the time you reach the island, wealthy with all you have gained on the way, not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Cavafy is not telling Odysseus that the destination is unimportant or that he should not think of it. Rather, he is saying that the destination is important because it gives you the journey and allows you to arrive experienced (“old”) and enriched (“wealthy with all you have gained”). The last line is perhaps the most important, as Cavafy predicts that arrival at a destination with the expectation that it will make you rich will ultimately disappoint you. Instead, Odysseus should acknowledge that the riches it gives you are in the trip. He expands upon this idea in the final two stanzas, saying:

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey. Without her you would not have set out. She has nothing left to give you now. And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you. Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

Ultimately, Cavafy wants Odysseus to understand how to think about his journey and destination. The earlier stanzas having already described confrontation of fear and enjoyment of pleasure, this last stanza drives home how Odysseus ought to put the journey as the goal and the destination merely the marker of completion. Success, as Cavafy implicitly suggests, exists in the journey and not its completion.

*B. Authenticity: “This above all – to thine own self be true.” – William Shakespeare*

I believe a *buen camino* requires authenticity because of the experiences I witnessed walking El Camino. While there are of course differences between the physical nature of a pilgrimage and the broader challenges of life, I believe many of the same guiding principles overlap. Foremost, pilgrims must find their own paths to their final destinations, and not attempt to duplicate others. For example, when pilgrims attempt to follow another's pace, they often push themselves too hard and get injured. Other times

they are not challenged enough and feel something lacking. Almost always they miss out on experiences they desire or are brought into situations they regret. No two journeys are the same, and a *buen camino* is marked by the bold pursuit of one's own path. A *buen camino* is authentic to the traveler. But how can a pilgrim know what is authentic?

In my midterm paper, I defined authenticity as “a meditation on one's truest self.” (Antoniou). I used the term meditation in order to signify the importance of conceptualizing authenticity as an active process, a verb rather than a noun. Here, I would like to take the same basic definition and build upon it by connecting it explicitly to my definition of success. To do so, I look to Michel de Montaigne's assertion that, “There is no one who, if he listens to himself, does not discover in himself a pattern all his own, a ruling pattern.” This inward look to find a pattern is a form of meditation on the self. It is an active process of self-mindfulness that seeks not to judge but to understand. I introduce it here because I believe that the discovery of such a ruling pattern (or patterns) allows one to have an authentic *camino*, and thus to be successful. The identification of ruling patterns tells the pilgrim his fears, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses. Then, breaking down those elements to understand them gives direction and indicates where to go at what pace. The ruling patterns become a compass. Thus a *buen camino* is one that recognizes, listens to, and utilizes one's guiding patterns.

*C. Love – “Keep love in your heart. A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead.” – Oscar Wilde*

Love is integral to a *buen camino* because a journey taken alone is meaningless. The relationships we develop with other people give joy and meaning to life. As Professor Shell quotes in *Springboard*, “As I see it, happiness is just three things: good health,

meaningful work, and love” (Shell, 84). Love, of course, takes many forms. Love between romantic partners, friends, family, and even pets can give purpose to life. Moreover, love can make us happy! Investing in and displaying love in all relationships can actually contribute to overall happiness (Shell, c. 2). But how do we define love?

In all cases, love is a verb. It is not a passive state, but an action. Nilanjana Sanyal notes that, “In the great literature of all progressive societies, love is a verb. Love is something you do: the sacrifices you make, the giving of self, like a mother bringing a newborn into the world. Love is a value that is actualized through loving actions” (Sanyal, 160). Thus, as it pertains to cultivating a *buen camino*, the pillar of love encompasses a wide variety of actions. Each person will have different experiences loving and being loved – what matters is that they do have them. Thus a more relevant definition of love is an action distinct to each person on their journey. A journey can be enriched by the love for one’s family, for a partner, for a child, or even for work. In all cases, the active and intentional behavior of love will contribute to a *buen camino*.

*D. Excellence: “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.” – Martin Luther King Jr.*

Mainstream society often conflates success with achievement. Individuals are deemed successful through their attainment of wealth and power, because of an invention, or due to a high position, when these are really just examples of high achievement. The confusion of these two terms ignores the broader important elements of success. That being said, the common usage of achievement as a synonym for success indicates to me



that society highly values excellence. In my definition of success, the interaction between individual and society matters, and I thus include two “outer” success elements. The first is excellence, or the quality of being superior at something (Dictionary.com). I include it because it yields external validation and drives us to better ourselves.

In addition to the general value that society places upon excellence, there is an entire school of success thought that focuses on excellence. Dating back to the days of Aristotle, the ancient Greeks used the term “arête” to describe “work performed at the highest level of excellence and effectiveness” (Shell, 103). Such performance can occur in any field, independent of the specific activity. Cal Newport, professor of computer science at MIT, proposes that pursuit and development of a talent towards excellence is the path to meaningful work. He urges young people considering their futures not to over consider what they are meant to do. Rather, they should pick something they are good at, pursue it, and meaning will come. He writes, “Passion is not something you follow. It’s something that will follow you as you put in the hard work to become valuable to the world” (Newport). Such perspectives in the Excellence School suggest the importance of doing something well, and letting that give meaning to your life and contribute to your success.

The importance of excellence became personally apparent to me in Professor Richard Shell’s 6 Lives Exercise from *Springboard*. The exercise tasks participants to rank the lives of six different individuals from most to least successful. Each individual has pursued a different career and life path, and embodies a different element of perceived success: answering a values-based calling, craftsmanship and family, individual excellence, power and independence, personal loyalty and commitment, and

organizational excellence/teamwork. The way that individuals rank these lives indicates their emphasis of different elements of success. When I completed the exercise, I valued excellence and achievement as a determining factor in my order of success. Similarly, I ranked second to last the life of the Stone Mason, who displayed no significant excellence or special characteristics.

Reflecting upon my rankings felt uncomfortable, as it forced me to confront the value I place on external judgments. Most people, even high achieving CEOs and professionals, rank the Stone Mason as one of the most successful lives, citing his close family, love of work, and cohesive life. However, I could not move past his insignificance, lack of excellence, and small scope of impact. Throughout my life, I have strived for achievement in academics, arts, athletics, and even social life. I have always sought to better myself and hone my abilities, deriving satisfaction both internally from progress and externally from praise. While I may not like the importance external validation and recognition hold in my life, I simultaneously cannot ignore it. To me, a *buen camino* will involve pursuing the things I am better at than most and honing those skills to reach excellence.

Moreover, I believe the valuation of excellence benefits a journey for its process as much as its product. Basketball coach Pat Riley said that, “Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better.” Thus, even ignoring the achievement of excellence, I believe the act of improvement and quest for betterment are integral elements to success. They drive us, motivate us, and challenge us. Excellence thus is a pillar of a *buen camino* both through what its achievement reaps, and through what pursuit of it yields.

*E. Impact: “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.” – Jackie Robinson*

Impact is the second outer element. In the social impact sector, impact is often defined as a positive, meaningful change in the lives of others. I take this definition as the pillar of impact for a *buen camino*, and believe it is the single most important pillar. In fact, it is a product of authenticity, love, and excellence. Leaving an impact on the world is the greatest challenge and calling of all. When we die, our happiness, character, and all other intrinsic qualities fade. What is left is how we made people feel, what we built, and our external contributions to the world. These contributions of course range from person to person. Intellectual work in academia, extreme love for friends and family, sacrifice through service, and endless other actions can leave an impact on the world. What matters is to always seek to maximize one’s impact. The maximization component will become clear from the following metaphor.

I conceptualize an individual’s impact as someone standing on the shore of a lake throwing stones. Every action in life is a stone that breaks the surface, causes ripples, and sinks into the mass of the lake. Some large rocks cause waves that affect the entire lake, while small pebbles make a small ripple. This, I believe, parallels the summative nature of human life on Earth. Here I have to acknowledge my personal biases that form this theory. I do not believe in predetermination, destiny, or God. I do not believe that any external force or being has any power over our lives. Nor do I believe that we are either doomed to destruction or destined for salvation. I believe humans control the future.

I believe in the importance of life. I believe that every single action and event adds energy to the universe. This energy can be positive, negative, or both. The amount

and quality of energy contained in any action adds to the overall balance in the universe. Thus, the best thing we can do as individuals is to always seek to add as much positive energy to the universe as we can. Only through a positive imbalance will we achieve widespread change and growth. Each of us has a pile of stones next to us, and the best way to make a *buen camino* for ourselves and for others is to throw as many big, positive stones into the lake as we can.

### III. Conceptualizing success: the lives of trees

I believe that trees embody success. They can do nothing but grow in a manner authentic to their nature; they have intimate, loving connections with the plant life around them; they are excellent at what they do; and they are positive forces in their environment, impacting the lives of people, plants, animals, and the environment. Most importantly, trees have incredible journeys that allow them to meet their potential.

Every tree begins as a seed, and then grows into a sapling by pulling nutrients in its protected space in the ground. Eventually it breaches the ground to greet the sunlight, and actively grows towards the sky. Its roots spread. It connects with the world around it in many complex ways. As it grows, it twists, turns, and bends in reaction to its environment. But it stays rooted. It may be shaken, cracked, scarred, dehydrated, or even dismembered. But it continues to grow so long as it can continue to get energy. It grows strong, beautiful, tall, fruitful and old. Insects and animals make their homes in it. It bears fruit and leaves. Forever, as long as it lives, the tree continues to grow in a manner that beautifully unites its nature and its reactivity to the world around.

Moreover, there is a beautiful array of trees in the world that each lives uniquely.

Baobabs, the trees of life, are great solitary providers for whole communities. Birch trees are beautiful and elegant members of vast forests. Giant sequoia are towering giants, ancient and strong. There are many trees, and each that follows its own journey and growth is beautiful and successful.

In more than just my name, I feel a special connection with trees. I have nearly been killed by a tree on three different occasions, and each near miss feels unlike a threat and more like a greeting. On one occasion, a tree was blown over in the middle of the night while I was camping, landing less than a foot from my head. Earlier that night, I had sat in a circle of friends and looked up at that very tree, and asked everyone to appreciate the beauty of the wind blowing through its leaves. I brought our attention to the sway of the tree and the whistling of the wind. Hours later, the tree lay next to me. I choose to view that incident as an intimate connection in which the trees acknowledged me acknowledging them.

Moreover, I feel that my growth parallels that of a tree in many ways. I have very strong roots, grounded in a loving family, privileged upbringing, wonderful friends, and wide diversity of experiences. I am uniquely suited to my environment, like a tree in its natural habitat, and feel that I was gifted with aptitudes and opportunities to excel. But like a tree bending and stretching to meet the light, I have also constantly sought growth and moved intentionally towards light. I have always sought to better myself, provide for others, and be a positive force in the world. In that I feel very much like a tree. In my current phase of growth, I am twisting even further, feeling cast in shadow, but looking for the best patch of open canopy to reach towards.

#### IV. Emulating success

As I reflected upon what role models of success I looked up to, a piece of advice came back to me: stick to what you know. Thus, I turned immediately to my music and my formative life experiences. Surely enough, two important figures emerged.

##### *A. Joshua Redman*

I met Joshua Redman in fifth grade, the first time my dad played one of his albums. I still vividly remember listening to “Chill” from his album Moodswing, with Redman playing lead tenor sax. The first time I heard his sound I fell in love with it. The warmth and roundness of his tone, his extraordinary control over his sound, and his melodies captured me. My dad and I bought every album, put him on as we cooked dinner, and even went to see him live in concert. He quickly became my favorite player and a huge influence on my musical development, and since that first listen I have kept up with him through every album and three live concerts.

It turns out that Joshua Redman is not only a musical role model, but also a person to emulate in life. A journeyer, he has boldly pursued his passion and been true to his own journey. Redman grew up in Berkeley, CA and was the son to the famous saxophonist Dewey Redman and dancer Renee Shedroff. A musician himself, he progressed through his young life with music as a passion, but not a career. In 1991, he graduated from Harvard summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa and with a Bachelor of the Arts in Social Studies. He was set to attend Yale Law upon graduating, planning to study civil rights or constitutional law. But when the time came, he decided to defer his acceptance to go play music in New York. After falling deep into the jazz scene there, he dove into music fully and professionally.

Over the course of his career, Redman has become “one of the most acclaimed and charismatic jazz artists to have emerged in the decade of the 1990s” (JoshuaRedman.com). He has recorded and performed with many of recent history’s greatest musicians, produced 14 albums as a bandleader, won acclaimed awards and held positions in a variety of respected musical organizations. This humanities major and almost-lawyer jumped ship to follow his passion, and has achieved at the highest level in his field (Joshua Redman.com).

I chose Redman as a role model because he embodies my definition of success in three important ways. Firstly, he has followed an authentic journey, staying true to his passion. In the face of something that did not feel right, he chose something scary and true. This boldness is reflected in the musical evolution of his career that has wound and twisted through genre and group. Secondly, he has become world-class at what he does, embodying the value I place on excellence. Lastly, he has had an enormous impact, a far-reaching ripple, on the world. He has collaborated with hundreds of musicians, furthering their careers. He has inspired and given joy to hundreds of thousands of people through his music, myself included. He has even fundamentally shaped professional music. Because of the alignment of these three qualities, I view Joshua Redman as incredibly successful.

*B. Matthew Callahan Healey*

Matt Healey was a student at my high school three years ahead of me. He was a senior Peer Advisor when I was a freshman, and also a lead role in that year’s musical production. Through these two contexts I came to know Matt as a leader and role model.

He passed away after graduating, and his death shook both my entire school community and me.

Matt's death catalyzed in me a period of introspection and reflection. His example and memory have continued to shape who I am and the impact I want to have on the world. As I return to him now, my thinking framed by my new definition of success, I believe Matt is a role model to me because he embodied three important elements. Firstly, Matt loved openly and freely. This characteristic was evident throughout his life, and especially in the two other characteristics I will discuss. Secondly, Matt had an enormous impact on the world in a very short time. While he passed away in his young twenties, he profoundly shaped the lives of hundreds of friends and family. Simply put, he had a special ability to make people feel special. So much so, that since he has passed his Facebook wall has never stopped being filled with emotional, thoughtful, grateful posts. The profound impact he had on people in his life is evident in posts like these:

I'm always trying to live life the way you would want me to...I think about you and all the joy you brought to everyone's lives that you touched... You left such a presence at Thayer and will always be loved and remembered by everyone there... It's amazing how big of an impact you left in our lives. Just remembering your positive attitude and great sense of humor makes me feel so honored to have gotten to know you my first year at Thayer... I'm still trying to make you proud.

Not only was this impact deep, but it was also broad. He made a lasting impact on nearly everyone he met, from across phases of his life. I think integral to that impact was the way he shared love with everyone.

Thirdly, I look up to Matt for his authenticity. I did not know Matt well enough to make claims about the extent to which he was entirely true to himself. I do know, however, that he is admired, loved, and emulated by many people for an intangible quality of comfort in himself. People remember his unique humor, his strong moral



compass, and the unique energy he had about him. From the outside, it is difficult to pass judgment on another and say that he is truly authentic. But it is easy to tell when the people in someone's life have the sense that he is. The strength of that sentiment among his friends and family means enough to me that I choose to look up to Matt for his ability to be comfortable with and true to himself.

### V. Pursuing Success

Up to this point, I have presented success as a *buen camino*, a journey built on authenticity, love, excellence, and impact. I have conceptualized such a journey as the growth of a tree, and discussed two important role models who embody my definition. I turn now to an equally difficult follow-up question: how do I plan to pursue that success? To answer this, I return to Odysseus and my friends, the trees.

A tension of motions seems to emerge from the conceptualization of a tree against the journey of Odysseus. Odysseus is a person in dynamic motion while a tree is static in the ground. These two ideas appear to conflict, portraying different types of journeys in different states of growth. This stood out to me first as a strong contradiction, but later resolved into a complimentary relationship. I believe that they in fact both tell stories of a simultaneously dynamic and static journey. Acceptance of this duality is how I plan to pursue success.

I plan to pursue success by letting my static roots nourish and support me, while facing the unknown with dynamic responsiveness. This duality is present in both Odysseus' journey and the growth of a tree. A tree is rooted in the ground and grows freely towards the sky. Similarly, Odysseus is rooted in the past and moves freely forward in time. Odysseus' dynamic journey through time parallels a tree's dynamic

growth upwards from earth, both being rooted in something static and unchangeable.

Thus these journeys are complimentary.

Moreover, this duality reflects something integral to the human condition: we can not change or uproot ourselves, no matter how hard we try. We may seek to change, we may even physically leave where we are rooted, but we are the sum of our experiences. We cannot entirely disrupt that history; it is static. Thus, instead of pulling at those roots, we have to accept them. Acceptance will bring nourishment, allowing our roots to feed us like a tree. We have to accept that both a tree's roots and a person's past are in fact living parts of them, active in the present. We have to accept the nature of those roots and utilize them to source energy to grow. Ultimately, by accepting our static pasts and letting them live actively in our present, we can grow and do more.

First of all, I must accept my roots and let them nourish me. To understand my roots and identify my ruling patterns, I turn first outwardly to the Character and Excellence Schools of success. Profilers and assessments like the VIA Strengths Survey, SAME Profiler, and Gallop Strengths Finder help me read my own strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, surveying my friends and family has revealed to me strong patterns in my relative strengths and weaknesses. Through these different tools, I have discovered that my greatest strengths lie in how I relate to other people, my intellect, my sense of morality, and my musicality. My weaknesses are stubbornness and self-doubt.

I plan to build upon and utilize these strengths, while improving upon the weaknesses, by using strategies derived from the Character School of success. In his autobiography, Ben Franklin cultivates a set of virtues and a practice to adhere to those virtues. While I personally do not have the self-control to exercise such a practice, I still

learn from his honesty with himself and open address of his own strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People proposes habits for self-mastery and growth that can be leveraged to enhance my roots.

I also look inwardly to understand my roots. Doing so shows me how I have already struggled to accept my roots and let them nourish me. During a period of intense questioning over the past few years, I have come in conflict with the privileged nature of my identity. It has made me feel guilty. I feel like I owe something or am in debt for all the wrongs different sides of my historical identity have committed, and even like I myself may have mistreated people. A sociological lens of identity disconnected me from how I have always lived and viewed the world: focused on my individual impact on people. I became concentrated on overcoming aspects of my identity, like my whiteness, male gender, and even heterosexuality. I focused on overcoming them because of all the pain they have caused. In an effort to treat people well and compassionately, I became restricted by a singular view of the world.

As I have worked through this questioning, I have come to understand my identity differently. The process of intense questioning taught me a lot, and added new layers of awareness and sensitivity. I have chosen to hold on to those lessons, while letting go of the self-critical guilt and exclusive focus on identity. I now have integrated those sociological elements into my existing frameworks, allowing myself to function normally and happily, and treat people even better. That is not to say I have fully or smoothly made that shift, but I have identified that ruling pattern. Now I am seeking to listen to it.

There are also important philosophies that I am rooted in, developed independently of success literature. The first is the notion of *hakuna matata*. The phrase

means, “no worries” and was popularized through the Disney movie, *The Lion King*. A lyric in a song, it means “No worries, for the rest of our days. It’s our problem-free philosophy.” This has taught me to let problems roll off my back and greet the world with a smile and shrug. A second philosophy comes from my Dad. He used to experiment with many different foods, and would require me to try anything in front of me. He told me: “You don’t have to like it, but you do have to try it.” The courage to explore has pervaded every aspect of my life, well beyond food. It reminds me to try anything in front of me, as I may end up really liking it. And even if I do not, I have learned something in the process. A third and fundamental philosophy comes from my mother. She taught me to always take the high road and be the bigger person. A close friend of hers named Susan Tift summed it up beautifully: “Always do the right thing. It will gratify your friends and enrage your enemies.” This is a guiding moral principle that asks me to consider the motivations and consequences of my actions. Together, these three philosophies form a triangular lens with which to meet the world ahead: relax and have fun, try new things, and always do the right thing.

With these roots accepted and actively nourishing me, I must face the present with dynamic responsiveness. To do so, I will rely on techniques and philosophies from the roots of the Excellence and Mind Power schools of Success. Roman Stoicism, for example, presents a philosophy that differentiates between what we can and cannot control. As a tree living through changing seasons, I cannot control the seasons but only my reactions to them. Similarly, the *Dhammapadna* expresses the Buddhist philosophy that we are the sum of our thoughts, both past and present. These philosophies teach me to encounter the moment as it comes, knowing that all I can control are my own thoughts

and behavior. This, even, is only true to an extent. I will often fight against the emotional elephant I ride as a rational being, and often it will win (Haidt). Regardless, I certainly cannot control the weather. I may as well try to find peace with the elephant, whether by letting it reign or reining it in. These philosophies, integrated with a nuanced understanding of my strengths, weaknesses, and grounding philosophies will prepare me to thrive in changing environments. Moreover, all of this growth becomes part of my quest for authenticity, love, excellence, and impact as I develop a *buen camino*.

## VI. Conclusion

In summary, I view success as a *buen camino*, a journey of authenticity, love, excellence and impact. It is the beautiful growth of a tree into the air, ever maturing towards greater potential. I will pursue this success by identifying the ruling pattern in my roots and cultivating philosophies to allow me to meet the dynamic present head on.

However, life is obviously not as neat as I have made it out to be. Trees are blown over by the wind, Odysseus nearly died on his journey, and the application of such lofty ideals as authenticity, love, excellence and impact is messy at best. I acknowledge the complexity of lived experience and the variety of additional factors that play into a definition of success. It is not my hope with this paper to present a universal definition of success, nor to present one that captures every single element of success even for myself. Instead, I hope that this conceptualization captures the current landscape of my journey. In this period of transition, I feel simultaneously grounded and as if I am floating. As I transition from college to the working world, I feel grounded in my principles and self, but floating in my unknown direction. But, true to my definition of success, I must

embrace that uncertainty and face it head on. Like a tree, I can accept that duality and use it to grow.

Finally, I close my investigation of success with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson. His personal definition of success in one way leaves more room for universal acceptance than mine, but in another way is very similar. He proposes a broad spectrum of successful lives, centered upon laughter, respect, relationships, and impact. Embedded in his definition is the idea that each journey is different, and success is defined by small actions as much as by large achievements. Each person must follow their own path and find ways to make the world a better place.

“What is Success? To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty; To find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived; This is to have succeeded.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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