

Re:Focus

simple ideas to help you thrive

by Simon Sinek

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How to measure success

This journey I'm on is a deeply personal one. When I put words to this thing called the Why, it completely changed the direction of my life. Not a single thing I'm doing these days -- not the speaking, not the book, not even this column -- was a part of any plan. How could they be on a plan? I couldn't even imagine them. With all that has happened in the past few years, someone asked me a question recently that really made me think: "How will you know when you're successful?"

I know there's a difference between being successful and feeling successful. And if you ask me if I feel successful, the honest answer is "not yet." By most standard measurements, I am enjoying more success now than at any other time in my life, but I still don't feel successful. This is what makes the question so fantastic. If the goal is to feel successful, what is the measurement we should use to achieve that feeling?

The most common standard measurement is money -- our bank accounts. That's how so many people measure their success today, so perhaps it works?

I went to an event for high-performing entrepreneurs and the question was asked of the room, "How many of you have achieved your financial goals?" Amazingly, 80% of the room raised their hand. Then the question was asked, "how many of you feel successful?" and 80% of the hands went down. This example alone shows that there is little to no connection between the standard measurement of success and the feeling of success.

I for one have never been motivated by the money. Most years, if you were to ask me how much I make, the genuine answer is that I have no clue. I usually find out the answer to that question once a year, at tax time, when my accountant tells me. And if money were the only measurement, we'd all have a number in our minds that, if we reached it, we'd stop working. And most of us don't. No matter how much I make, I don't want to stop working. Money doesn't help me answer that question.

Some would argue that you're as successful as the company you keep. Certainly there is a connection between our friends and who we are. James Fowler talked about it a couple of years ago in a piece called "Do Your Friends Make You Fat?"

But can we really measure our success based simply on the company we keep? For example, are Vincent Chase's buddies in the HBO series *Entourage* successful because they hang out with someone rich and famous? Most of us would say no. Sometimes the opposite happens. Sometimes spending time with someone who is perceived as "successful" can make us feel less successful. The irony is that regardless of how successful we think someone is, we don't actually know if they feel successful.

Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to spend time with people I never imagined even meeting. At two events this week, for example, I shared the stage with *The Tipping Point* author, Malcolm Gladwell, and David Bach, author of *The Automatic Millionaire*, respectively. It was so exciting to spend time with them and it was fantastic to get to soak up some of their genius. I cannot dispute that having the opportunity to work with them certainly is an indicator that things are moving in the right direction, but it didn't make me feel successful. For me, the best thing about spending time with people I admire is the opportunity to ask them questions and learn from them. Though spending time with them doesn't make me feel successful, their ideas and their thinking absolutely contribute to making my own work better, which, of course, helps me advance. But it doesn't yet answer the question.

My friend Georgia Hurd is not famous. She's not rich. And she's not yet attained the success she desires. She moved to Los Angeles to become an actress and has been working really hard to achieve her dream. She has been through some hard times. Money has been tight. Her work schedule often hurts her social life. But she perseveres. Her work ethic and her drive are amazing. She is so focused on where she wants to go. It is inspiring. After a couple of years of pushing and lots of wondering if it would ever happen, she's starting to get some momentum. This week alone, she was called in to do a modeling job for American Apparel, she had some fantastic auditions and people are starting to take notice of her. What Georgia has found is momentum. It is that momentum that makes her feel good. It is the momentum that makes her feel successful.

This is my measurement: momentum. That's what I want to track and measure. Money and the people I meet are stepping stones, indicators that momentum is building -- but it is the momentum that makes me feel good.

Studies show that over 90% of Americans don't feel fulfilled by their work. Think about that. The vast majority of Americans go home at the end of the day without the feeling of success. I imagine a world in which that statistic is reversed. That most people go to work every day to a job they love and go home at the end of the day feeling fulfilled. That's the world I'm working to build. My contribution is to share a message that can help make that dream a reality. But only

when others join me in this cause; to help spread the message; to build the companies that people love to work for; and to choose jobs based on how the job makes them feel, not simply how much it pays, will this dream become a reality.

I know momentum is building. That, more than any other measurement, makes me feel successful. So what of the original question, “How will you know when you’re successful?” The answer: When I reach a level of momentum when the movement can advance without me -- then I will feel successful.