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### Measuring Success Right and What That Means

Nathan Lake

Brigham Young University, chaselarsonmsr@gmail.com

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# MEASURING SUCCESS RIGHT AND WHAT THAT MEANS

By Nathan Lake



I have been a Marriot School student for 2 years now. School is... difficult for me. Throughout my time in the business school, I have constantly suffered from the existential worry of not knowing why I am here. I have switched majors 3 times during my college career, and I would probably switch again if not for the fact that I'm close to graduation. Truth be told, I still only have a vague of idea what I want to be when I "grow up."

In contrast, I have encountered many students who know exactly why they are here. They have figured out their career paths and are taking all the necessary steps to become the people they want to be. I envy these students. I wish I could wake up tomorrow and know exactly what I want to do with my life. A while back, I began wondering how I could emulate these individuals.

The difference between those students and I, is they have defined exactly what the word "success" means to them, and they know how they are going to measure it.

In trying to be more like these individuals, I attempted to learn what the word "success" truly meant. Success is a fickle concept. If we simply want the definition of the word, Meriam-Webster defines to succeed as, "to turn out well" or "to attain a desired object or end"<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, this is vague and unhelpful. What does it mean to "turn out well? What "desired object or end" should I focus on?

When the dictionary failed me, I attempted to learn what success means by learning about what experts and highly successful people mean when they define success. As Steven Covey, the legendary author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, puts it: "If you carefully consider what you want to be said of you in the funeral experience... you will find your definition of success."<sup>2</sup> To me, this quote majorly put things in perspective. Rather than focusing on what I want to do now, I should focus on where I want to be in the end.

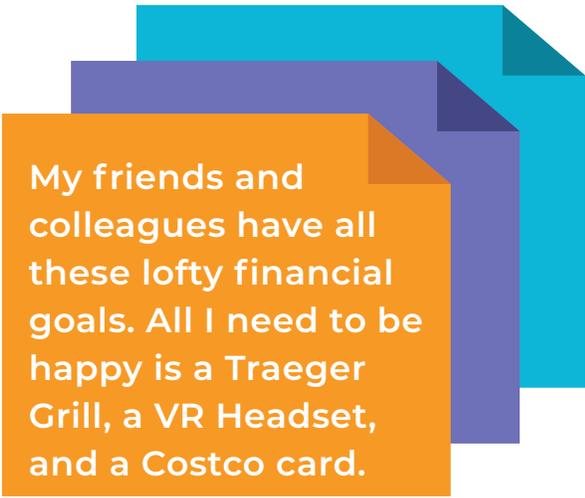
At the Marriott Student Review, we have a podcast entitled "Measuring Success Right," and in that podcast we discuss the meaning of success with exceptional business men and women all over the world! In the podcast, these individuals have shared incredible stories and personal experiences on how they have defined and achieved success.

Dr. Dan Allen, a physicist and fantasy writer, told a story about how a sensor he created was essential in saving the life of a woman having a heart attack. He defines that moment as success<sup>3</sup>. Not all of us are going to have the opportunity to be an essential part in preventing a heart attack, but I think he meant that success is seeing your work be a meaningful part of somebody's life.

"My greatest success in business was not going into bankruptcy," said Case Lawrence, CEO of Circus Trix<sup>4</sup>. This is an interesting quote coming from a man who runs a multimillion-dollar company. Success doesn't have to be about fancy jobs or awards; sometimes it can just be about not going broke.

As you have probably surmised, no one has an exact definition of success, and that is because what I consider to be success might be different from what you consider success. Some focus on financial gain, others on their physical appearance, and some on the quality of their relationships. Each of us must individually determine what we value and what we are searching for. In my own life, when I realized that success is a personal concept, I defined success as money, or, more specifically, the things money allows me to have.

A little over a year ago, I was attending an event with some of my very "successful" peers. We were discussing financial goals, and many of my colleagues talked of goals like having a house by the age of 30 or having over \$4,000 dollars in their savings account. It was there I told a joke:

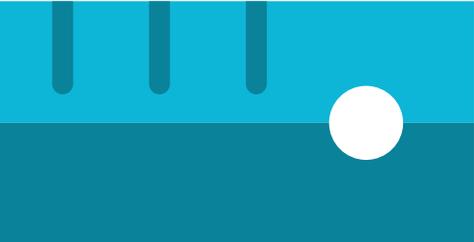


**My friends and colleagues have all these lofty financial goals. All I need to be happy is a Traeger Grill, a VR Headset, and a Costco card.**

This joke entered my lexicon, and it ended up being one of my greatest hits throughout the year (I define a “hit” as any joke that consistently gets giggles whenever I use it). The joke aside, many might find these goals trivial—after all, they are just possessions—but I genuinely found value in them. The joke was that my standards are low, but, to a poor college student like me, these items seemed just as unattainable as \$10,000 in a savings account or a house by the time I’m 30.

Last semester, the joke started hitting a little closer to home. My grades waned, I didn’t get internships with any of the large companies I applied for, and I felt my passion for my field dwindle away. By all intents and purposes, I had truly and utterly failed, and yet...you won’t believe what I got this summer!

On the morning of my birthday, I woke up to a wonderful surprise. A few days earlier, I had found a Traeger grill warehouse sale. We visited the sale, and it turned out they had a model in our price range (with the help of my best friend and some birthday money). While I was not able to secure an internship with any large prestigious companies, I was able to



get one with a small Provo start-up, and it just so happens that one of the perks of the job was free use of the company’s VR headset. Lastly, my wife’s mother decided to add us to her Sam’s Club ac-

count. That’s close enough to Costco for me.

This joke that I told transcended irony and became reality. Life imitates art as they say (if you can call my jokes “art”), and I have been very fortunate to obtain the form of success I sought, but it left me with a brand-new dilemma. Now what?

I illustrate this journey to inform you that defining your personal form of success takes time. You (most likely) will not wake up one morning knowing what you want to do or who you want to be. That is okay. Your idea of success will change as you age and gain experience.

I have reached the time to define my own success. Over the past few months, many of my perspectives changed, and I learned a valuable lesson: possessions come and go. Having these things I previously sought has been awesome, and they did make me happy in the sense of enjoying myself, but now I seek after a more lasting and fulfilling form of happiness and success. Rather than financial and monetary gain, I seek for success in the context of the thing that makes me happier than anything else: my family. That’s not to say that financial and monetary gain are unimportant—to take care of my family, I need them—the happiness of my loved ones is more important to me than anything else.

Personal fulfillment is another aspect of my definition of success. Perhaps I am being selfish, but if I am going to spend a significant portion of my life doing something, I need it to be something I can be fulfilled in (and enjoying myself wouldn’t hurt either).

So, with these guiding values in mind, I personally define success as waking up every morning knowing that my family is having their physical needs taken care of and knowing that I am doing something interesting and fulfilling.

Now that I have defined success for myself, I must set proper goals and measure them.

My first goal is simple: graduate. Barring something crazy happening, this will be simple to attain and measure. My next goal is to make sure that once I graduate, I have a good job that I can enjoy and will provide for my family’s financial needs. I am considering several companies or perhaps PhD studies. These are my goals—simple yet measurable.

You might have set goals that can’t be measured in numerical terms. I certainly did not, and that is okay. Measuring success is not about mathematically defining your goals (though some

goals can be measured that way), but rather determining if the goals you set are truly meaningful to you and if you are making adequate progress to accomplish them. For me, it would be very hard to numerically determine if what I am doing is something interesting and fulfilling, so I will measure that goal by paying attention to how I feel when I go to work. Do I dread going or am I excited? Like the definition of success, measuring success is a totally personal matter.

**Focus on the journey, not the destination. Joy is found not in finishing an activity but in doing it.**

Measuring success right means looking at our values to determine how we can become our best selves and then taking the steps necessary to become the people we want to be. As you embark on that journey, your idea of success—and therefore your goals—will change. Even those who knew what they wanted to be from an early age experienced changes in perspective. We need to remember to, as the author and cancer survivor Greg Anderson once said, “Focus on the journey, not the destination. Joy is found not in finishing an activity but in doing it.”<sup>5</sup> Defining and measuring success is a deeply personal matter but also the most fulfilling task that we will ever take part of. I wish you luck in your personal journey.

If you would like to know more about success and how exceptional individuals define it please listen to the Measuring Success Right Podcast on Spotify or iTunes. 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>“Succeed”, Merriam-Webster, Succeed. Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster Inc, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/succeed>, accessed August 14, 2019

<sup>2</sup>“Steven Covey Quotes”, Brainy Quotes. Stephen Covey Quotes. BrainyQuote.com, Brainy-Media Inc, 2019. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/stephen\\_covey\\_636494](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/stephen_covey_636494), accessed October 3, 2019.

<sup>3</sup>“Dan Allen and Branching Out”, Spotify, Dan Allen and Branching Out. Spotify.com, Spotify Technology S.A., 2019. <https://open.spotify.com/show/4ymZy1NKqzk57rGirw6KhV> accessed September 17, 2019

<sup>4</sup>“Case Lawrence and Risk”, Spotify, Case Lawrence and Risk. Spotify.com, Spotify Technology S.A., 2019. <https://open.spotify.com/show/4ymZy1NKqzk57rGirw6KhV> accessed September 17, 2019.

<sup>5</sup>Brainy Quote, “Greg Anderson quotes”, Greg Anderson Quotes. BrainyQuote.com, Brainy-Media Inc, 2019. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/greg\\_anderson\\_132548](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/greg_anderson_132548), accessed October 5, 2019.

