

How Do You Define Success?

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I was navigating through Facebook the other day when I came across a page that had this question posed as its status: How do YOU define success? Underneath were many comments about, “pulling yourself up when life hands you a knockout punch,” and, “accomplishing feats that you once thought were impossible.” Reading through these responses from people who were self-proclaimed motivators and alleged life-changers, I couldn’t help but be taken aback. Why were their definitions of success so dramatic, and were they implying that anything less than a positive life-changing event was not a success? What happened to doing your job, or rather, just doing what you are supposed to do, day in and day out? To me, that defines success.

In today’s society there is an overwhelming need being expressed for glamour and glory and *things*. Our economy is down, yet people still feel the need to be as materialistic as ever. Why? Because to them, having nicer and bigger *things* portrays them as being successful. But successful in what regard, and by who’s standards? Obviously there is financial success that is portrayed by newer and nicer things, but is that really the only type of success that matters? What about those who are morally successful, setting guidelines for their actions and then adhering to them?

To me, moral success is one of the most overlooked and least sought-after qualities in people today. The problem, in my opinion, is that being morally successful is often conflicting with one’s ability to be financially successful. It is sickening the differences in income between those who lie, cheat, and step on others to get ahead compared to those who put in an honest day’s work. This simple observation is so backwards to me and screams that something is terribly wrong with our society. Nonetheless, people are increasingly eager to fuel this vicious cycle if it means ensuring their own prosperity.

Let me clarify something here. I am not saying that money is evil or making money is evil. Money is a very powerful tool that can allow people opportunities to experience different things that society and this world have to offer. However, money is only a tool, and it must be treated as such. If you treat money as an objective marker used to measure yourself, then you will never become any greater than the numbers you are chasing. On the other hand, if you use money to afford yourself experiences from which you can grow as a person, then you are using this tool in a way to better yourself, and in turn better society as well.

A great example of how completely misunderstood the power money can have on someone’s life can be found throughout the novel *Hunger In America* by my uncle, David Allen Cates. The underlying storyline throughout the novel is the need expressed by the characters to get out of their current situation and move on to something bigger, brighter, and better. There is an overwhelming optimism that this will in fact happen, and when it does, happiness will finally be found, their marriage will be perfect, and every day will be the euphoric joy that life was

intended to be. The kicker is that everything they feel will truly make them happy they already have, but they are so caught up in the delusion that money will be the catalyst to make their life fall into place that they can't appreciate that everything they want in life is staring them right in the face.

So how do you define success? That's my answer. Here's to faith, strength, and passion.

Get big or die tryin'.

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