

## The Pursuit of Success

Nearly everyone wants to be successful and people like Unitechers who have been identified as high achievers even more so, but what does successful mean? Does it mean being a celebrity? Or becoming wealthy? Or influencing the lives of others? Or holding a position of power? Or having a family? Or being happy?

When I was 22 I thought I wanted to become a millionaire by the age of 30. (I also thought sometimes that I might not make it to the age of 30.) I realized within a couple of years that goal was much less important to me than others (and I therefore still haven't achieved it, just in case you were wondering). At about the same age I did an exercise for the first time that I have repeated many times since and would like to recommend to you. It is deceptively simple, but very powerful.

Take a piece of paper and a pen. Close your eyes and focus your thoughts on yourself. Then ask yourself what you want to accomplish with your life. What are your life goals? Write down everything that comes into your head without judging or censoring. Keep writing until you are sure you are done. Then look at your list. You will probably find a mix of tangible and intangible goals, some personal and some professional. All are related to who you are, even if some of them surprise you. Read the list out loud and notice how you respond to each item. Put a star next to the five that feel most important to you. Remember that these are your goals and no one else's. Try to eliminate any "shoulds" or goals that have been imposed on you by others. Reading your goals will give you a sense of what is important to you, what your values are. There is no right or wrong here. They will give you a sense of what you see as your purpose in life, what you want to contribute, the direction you want to grow in.

If you want, you can expand this exercise by writing your five-year and one-year goals. After that, ask yourself, if you only had six months to live, how you would spend them. That will give you some perspective on how aligned you are now with your life goals. We tend to forget that not only are we not immortal, but in fact we can die at any moment. Rather than letting that depress you, let it inspire you to live according to your own values.

As companies try to increase productivity and achieve better figures for shareholders, many employees feel pressured to work longer and longer hours. This is a short term strategy for everyone involved and I urge you to be wary of it. I have worked many 80+- hour weeks in my life. There is nothing wrong with that per se as long as you are in touch with your goals and values. Work/life balance is really about not abandoning your own goals for someone else's and not pursuing one goal at the expense of all the others. While it is possible to allow work to consume your whole life for short periods, longer term your body and soul will claim their attention if you neglect them, often through illness.

Success sometimes means having the courage to say no – to a promotion into a position you don't really want or to a relocation that will jeopardize your well-being or that of your family. It is easy to get swept along a career path. Stepping out of the stream and taking time to reflect requires a conscious effort, but is well worth

investment. Success involves communicating clearly – within yourself and with others. Keeping sight of your long term goals and values has the added benefit of helping you to handle setbacks and frustrations.

There will always be events in your life that you cannot control, twists and obstacles in your path that you didn't plan on. The same principle applies in dealing with difficult events as with difficult people: focus your attention on what you can influence or change. The formula  $e + r = o$  will help you remember this: the events in your life plus your inner and outer reactions to them equal the outcomes you get. The reactions are what we have complete control over.

The word "crisis" in Chinese is composed of the words "danger" and "opportunity." It is through my reaction that I determine which outcome I get. Just as with the 50% rule (the working assumption that I am always at least 50% responsible for what happens in my life), the proof of this lies not on the theoretical level (we could waste lots of time arguing about whether it is "true"), but when it is applied. Let's say you blow an important presentation. If you ask yourself what you can learn from the situation or what the opportunity is, you will get corresponding answers that will put you into a resourceful state. If you ask yourself why everything always seems to go wrong or what is wrong with you, you will get accordingly discouraging answers. So you don't have to believe me, but I suggest you not dismiss it before you've tried it out.

"I don't have time to think about these sorts of philosophical things – I'm too busy" is an excuse I hear pretty frequently from people trying to avoid taking responsibility for their quality of life. "Doing" tends to take precedence over "being" in our world. But we think all the time (well, most of us, a lot of the time) and our self-talk (that running commentary at the edge of your consciousness) has a tremendous influence on the "r" of  $e + r = o$ . Take conscious hold of that mechanism and ask yourself occasionally what is important to you. Your answers will keep you on your path to success.