

WHAT THE SUCCESS BOOKS SAY



BRIAN MICKLETHWAIT

For as long as I can remember I have enjoyed reading books about how to achieve personal success. These volumes, being mostly of American origin, and implying as they do that personal success is actually possible, for anyone, are scorned by most of the intelligensia, and by almost all of the British intelligensia. This is the intelligensia's loss. These books contain important truths many of which are far from obvious, and all of which are regularly contradicted by people who should know better. These truths are not only about the world and how to get on in it, but equally significantly, about how the human minds works.

I simply don't know how the ideas that follow compare with the opinions that professional psychologists have developed about how humans work in general and the human mind works in particular. My ignorant suspicion is that these vulgar Americans with their positive mental attitudes and incurably anecdotal styles of writing have a lot to

teach the self-styled scientists of the mind. But I leave that argument to those qualified to have it.

SUCCESS IS A GOOD THING

Probably the most important proposition to be found in these books about success is not about the mind, but about the nature of and consequences of personal success itself. Quite simply, *personal success is a good thing*. To me this seems very obvious. But it is regularly denied. It is constantly asserted that success by one person must necessarily come at the expense of others, that success, in other words, *causes others to fail*.

In some circumstances success is indeed a fixed quantity, and more success for one person does indeed mean an exactly corresponding reduction in the success achievable by others. But in any society that is working half decently,

Psychological Notes No. 7

ISSN 0267-7172 ISBN 1 85637 099 2

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance,
25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
www.libertarian.co.uk email: admin@libertarian.co.uk

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Director: Dr Chris R. Tame

Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait

Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb

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the success of one person makes life *better* for others. To use one's opportunities is to *create* opportunities for others.

If I clear a bit of jungle, I don't stop you clearing another bit of the same jungle, and even if you don't get hired to clear the jungle because of me getting the job, you still might get hired to exploit the opportunities that come from the jungle having been cleared by me. I get a job installing a phone line. As a result you can then get a job telephoning people down it. You sell me a machine. I use it to do my work better. And so on. Success means cooperating effectively with others, not just competing.

Most of the success books simply take for granted that success is desirable, both for the successful individual and for people generally. It is a truth of such importance that it is well worth being explicit about it, as I here have been. Indeed, I would call it truth number one expounded by the success books.

SUCCESS IS IN YOUR MIND

Truth number two very definitely *is* about the human mind, for it consists of the statement that *it is in the human mind that success is to be found*. Success means having a success *attitude*. Success means *thinking successfully*. Success means having, or cultivating, a "positive mental attitude".

Many regard success as a matter of luck. Not surprisingly, the success book writers all pour scorn on this idea. Success can, on the contrary, be achieved by doing the success-breeding things they are telling you about and wanting you to read about, and that success can be repelled by doing other, less helpful things. And one of the best ways to repel success is to imagine that success is indeed largely luck and that therefore there's nothing positive you can do to achieve it.

The critics of the success books complain that this comes perilously close to saying that people are poor through their own failings. This is true; it is a lot like saying that. And lots of people *are* poor through their own failings. They could indeed have been much richer - much more successful - if they had adopted a different attitude to their problems and to their surroundings.

YOU CAN CONTROL THE CONTENTS OF YOUR MIND

Closely related to the truth that success has its origins in your own success-making thought processes is the fact that you can *control* those thought processes. Often the anti-success people concede that indeed some people do have a more success-oriented attitude than others, but that this too is matter of luck. The success-equals-luck thesis starts as a statement about the unavailability of opportunity. When that objection is itself objected to, the success-is-luck statement is altered to say that although most of us do indeed get plenty of chances, only some of us are born with what it takes to seize our chances.

Again, wrong. Not only is success largely in the mind. The really good news is that we can control our minds, what we think about, what we imagine, what we tell ourselves, what we *feel*. No sooner have we grasped the importance of what our minds contain than we can immediately set about improving those contents.

THE WAY TO GET SUCCESS IS TO PICTURE IT

It is a cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words. It is a cliché because it is repeated so often, and it is repeated so often because it is true.

The human mind is not a machine, or not the kind of machine that most of us are familiar with. It does not take to being merely *commanded*, with *words*. What the human mind responds to is a picture, a vision.

It's not that orders, routines, little procedures and short steps in the right direction are unimportant or irrelevant to achieving success. They are very important indeed, and more about such things follows very shortly. However, you must first create an overall picture of what success will be like. It should be as detailed a picture as possible, like an expensive movie rather than a cheap photo. You should picture yourself winning the race, and feeling all the feelings that you would feel at such a moment of triumph. You should picture yourself climbing onto the rostrum, and receiving your gold medal. You should picture yourself returning home in triumph, waving from the top of the municipal bus. You should hear the roar of the crowd, feel the kisses of your husband, imagine the delight of your parents or your children. You should picture yourself then making maximum use of your wondrously enhanced social status to achieve further triumphs. Seriously, if you want to win an Olympic gold medal, close your eyes, relax, breathe deeply, and picture yourself doing it.

Fine, so you are picturing yourself winning your gold medal, commanding your ship, scoring a treble century for England at Lords, or in my case helping to create the most impressive and successful libertarian organisation on the planet. Then what?

This is the mysterious and wonderful bit. It happens. Well, not all of it, not necessarily, not all at once. But good things start to happen, almost of their own accord. Your mind, having been programmed with a positive picture of what it must achieve, sets to work of its own accord. It starts to think about what will be required, and then it starts to do what is required.

We humans respond *automatically* to whatever picture we have in our minds, or allow others to put in our minds. We also respond to negative pictures. If you fill your mind with pictures of what you do *not* want, then that too is what your mind will doggedly set to work achieving. Moral: think positively. *Picture* positively.

President Bush referred rather disparagingly during his recent Presidential election campaign to the "vision thing". His failure to offer such a vision to the voters (it didn't have to be especially original, merely vivid and credible) does much to explain his relative failure at his job compared to his hugely successful predecessor, Ronald Reagan.

Intellectuals, whose stock in trade is words, are especially prone to resist the truth that a vision can be so potent. That Ronald Reagan's political genius consisted largely of his ability to paint appealing pictures of how America should be, while at the same time regularly fluffing his mere words, does much to explain the unthinking contempt in which intellectuals tended to hold him. (The other thing they didn't like about Reagan was that they disagreed with his pictures, but that's a different argument.)

To bring all this firmly down to earth, about a decade ago I recall being frustrated by my inability to produce writings for the Libertarian Alliance. I knew what libertarianism was and I told myself to start writing it down, but nothing happened. Then I read a success book which described how you only get what you picture, *pictured myself writing things*, and have been churning out stuff for the LA ever since. I lacked “willpower” then, and I lack it still. So instead I used picture power.

USE WORDS TO ORGANISE AND INSPIRE

Not that words are insignificant to the achievement of success. Quite the reverse. Why else would people write or read success books? But words only have power when they work in harmony with the imagination. Your words must fit your pictures. First, get the pictures right.

Then, make speeches and write memos and tracts to yourself, and to others, about what you want. Write things-to-do lists, which clarify what you are doing, and the order in which it must be done. Devise slogans and mottos which say quickly and simply what you are about, to inspire and guide both yourself and others. Give yourself regular little pep talks, and speak with energy, involvement and enthusiasm to others about what you are doing, and about what they might do alongside you. (Writing this will certainly help me in these ways.)

SUCCESS IS SUBJECTIVE

If you find it hard to pursue success, this could be because you have defined it badly. More precisely, you may have allowed others to define success for you, and to define it wrongly, in a way that doesn't inspire you. *Success is what you think it is*. Once you are pursuing what you truly want, you'll have far less of a problem putting in the hours, and making the required effort.

Don't let others decide for you your rules - ethical or merely procedural - without you thoroughly digesting what they've told you and making the rules you act upon *your* rules. This doesn't mean turning your back on everything your parents and friends have told you, far from it. It does mean thinking about these things carefully, committing yourself with renewed intensity to some of the rules you've been taught, while altering or abandoning others that are only holding you back.

YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR MIND FROM OUTSIDE

Fine, you make a picture, and it's your true picture. You stir in some appropriate wording. Good. But what if your problem is more fundamental than a mere inability to *do* something? What if what you *are* is all wrong? What if your mind is congenitally miserable, or congenitally afraid, or congenitally anti-social? How are you supposed to change that mind, and do happy, courageous and sociable things with it? How can you use your mind, to correct your mind?

It is here that outward appearances can be brought to bear on the inner person. If you want to *be* happy, yes, picture yourself being happy. But you can do better than that. You can go further by *acting as if you already are happy*. If you want to be more at ease, pretend that you already are. Go through the motions of whatever you want.

Improve your posture. Shoulders back, head up, tummy in. Smile. Laugh. Give her a bunch of flowers. Make yourself *look* the part that you are trying to play. Shine your shoes, iron your shirt, put on a tie, buy a new suit. Look the part, even if you don't feel it. If you go through the motions, the motions will eventually become *you*. You'll actually *be* happier, calmer, more in control, more authoritative. To be successful, start by *looking* successful and *acting* successful.

Use words to help this process, by regularly repeating to yourself that you already *are* the character you wish to grow towards.

DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS

Good. Success is good, and will help others besides you. You picture it, describe it, act it, feel it.

Now *measure* it. Now put numbers to it. Set targets, and picture yourself reaching those targets. Make your goals tough, but attainable, to stretch you, but not to crucify you. Make them exact. Picture the little stars on your chart being added and added. See the party you'll throw for all your friends, when you hit your next year's target. Imagination and analysis, pictures and words and numbers, need not and should not be in conflict. Make your imagination and your analysis work together, each feeding the other.

But make sure you focus on measurements that you truly want to do well at. Make sure you've thought long and hard about exactly what you want to measure, and what you don't want to measure. Be ready to pause, after a spell of success by your current measurements, to consider if those measurements are still relevant, and if not, what new measurements are needed. (One of life's commonest forms of failure is to remain wedded to a once perfect but now obsolete success measurement.)

In my case, I decided that the number that mattered most to me was *number of Libertarian Alliance publications*. I decided that I needed to measure this number more exactly than I'd been doing hitherto, and I homed in on what I decided was the appropriate annual figure. I spent the whole of last year putting one yellow stick-on note on my kitchen wall for each completion, and having imagined the little yellow stickers accumulate, I duly watched the annual target achieve itself. This year I find I'm not using the yellow stickers, but have got the total for the year fixed in my head instead. Is my last year's annual target appropriate for this year also? Is this still a good measurement of success? Should I have others? These are good questions.

CONCENTRATE

Having decided what matters most, *concentrate*. Don't try to be everywhere, or do everything. Be the person who hits hard and high at the numbers that really matter, but no more than average at the other numbers that everyone else is taking seriously. Don't try to sit on every stool, or you'll fall with a crash between them. There'll be enough irrelevant demands on your time as it is, without you wasting any more of it trying to do ten things at once.

Do what you do best, and leave what you can't do and don't enjoy doing to others to do for you. If you love to make houses but hate to garden, make houses, hire a gardener, and sell him a house. (In other Libertarian Alliance

pamphlets you will encounter this fundamental piece of wisdom referred to as “the division of labour”. An even more fundamental word for it is: civilisation. Be civilised.)

CHANGE ONLY WHAT YOU CAN CHANGE; DON'T TRY TO CHANGE WHAT YOU CAN'T CHANGE

Keep your head in the clouds, and dream the impossible dream, yes. But don't make it a dream that really is impossible. Keep your feet on the ground. And don't measure your day-to-day progress in terms of a variable you cannot yourself control. That way you put yourself at the mercy of the world, and your plans degenerate into mere prayers. Reality doesn't care what you think of it. You have no right to happiness, to wealth, to a free lunch or a free ride. You have no *right* to success. All that reality offers you is the right to *pursue* success as best you can, using whatever is yours. Other people are as they are, and you must work with their characters and capacities, rather than against them.

I, for example, can control with complete exactness the words I put into this piece of writing. But I can't force you to read this if you don't want to, and I certainly can't force you to agree with it if you don't agree. So if I defined success according to *how much people agreed with me*, or according to *how many people agreed with me*, I'd be storing up unhappiness for myself. But, the number of these things that I produce? This number is mine to manipulate at will, all mine. Success by that measure is more or less inevitable.

SUCCESS DOESN'T MEAN BEING A GENIUS; IT MERELY MEANS DOING AS MUCH AS YOU CAN OF THE ABOVE, AS BEST YOU CAN

Or to put it another way, and as it often has been put: genius is not “genius”; it just means taking more trouble over things, more intelligently, more enthusiastically and more diligently than the competition.

The success books are adamant that you don't have to be Einstein or Henry Ford to make a huge success of your life. They are full of anecdotes about all manner of celebrity high-achievers, the point of which is that Einstein wasn't actually “Einstein” either, that Henry Ford was also a regular sort of fellow with his fair share of human failings, and that therefore *you too can be a success*. If you merely apply whatever talent you've got to what you want, and apply the kind of procedures you have just been reading about, then you too can be successful.

So, away you go! You've only got one life. Make the most of it!

SEEK OUT PEOPLE WHO THINK LIKE THIS, AND AVOID PEOPLE WHO SNEER AT THINGS LIKE THIS

Success is infectious, and so is failure. Mix with people who have a positive and optimistic outlook towards life. Avoid those who react to ideas like these by sneering and grumbling and by saying that stuff like this is all very well for some but that it won't work for them or for you and that it's all luck anyway. If you are compelled to associate with people who think like losers and failures, then do your best to infect them with your attitude, rather than let

them infect you. Get them to do the things above, along with you doing them. Get them to picture and to think through what they mean by success, to put words and numbers to it, and to go for it. Don't let them grind you back into being a failure.

... AND STICK WITH US!

One final plug. The Libertarian Alliance is run by people who thoroughly understand all of the above tried and tested success recipes. Accordingly, and as we never tire of telling everybody, the Libertarian Alliance has a glorious, star-spangled future. Not the least of the LA's tremendous success will occur because, partly through having read this pamphlet, a significant proportion of our supporters will in due course become colossally rich and colossally successful themselves. (Some of them already are.)

My favorite success books are:

Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, first published by John Murray, London, 1859. There have been numerous modern editions and translations. My current version is a Sphere paperback, London, with a foreword by Lord Thomson of Fleet, published in 1968. Many stories of how humble perseverance yields success.

Dale Carnegie, *How To Win Friends And Influence People*. First published by Simon & Schuster, New York, in 1937. My recently repurchased copy is a paperback published by Cedar, London, 1991. The classic persuasion text.

Napoleon Hill, *Think And Grow Rich*, also first published 1937, my edition Wilshire Book Company, California, 1966. The title explains itself!

David J. Schwartz, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1959. Ditto!

Maxwell Maltz, *Psycho-cybernetics*, my edition published 1960, from (by? it's very confused with some of these books) AMP Books, California, 1960. Unavailable now. Concentrates on visualisation techniques.

Peter Drucker, *The Effective Executive*. First published 1966. Always seems to be available. My edition is a Pan paperback, London, 1970. Time, contribution, concentration, effective decision making.

Robert Ringer, *Winning Through Intimidation*, first published 1973. First published in Great Britain as a Futura paperback, London, 1978. Things are as they are, not as you might wish them to be, but the Tortoise can still win against the Hare! Ringer is a libertarian, but reality often isn't. Very autobiographical, and very good.

Harry Browne, *How I Found Freedom In An Unfree World*, Macmillan, New York, 1973. The most explicitly libertarian success book, and a modern classic. Don't let others define success or virtue for you, or generally box you in. Don't waste time trying to change people or things that can't be changed.

Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr., *In Search of Excellence*, Harper & Row, New York, 1982. Organise by communicating clearly and inspiringly, and by aiming high.

And see also:

Judy Tame, *Women and Success*, Libertarian Alliance pamphlet No. 13, joint publication of the LA and the British Association of Libertarian Feminists, London, 1989. Most of what Judy says applies also to men.