

Five Principles For Achieving Personal Success, Happiness, Courage And Leadership

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I get interviewed a lot. Questions usually focus on leadership in the digital age, governance, corporate culture, personal success or happiness. People specifically ask about one of these areas based on their individual situation or the interest of the audience for whom they are recording. But the other day someone posed a question I've never been asked before:

How can one achieve phenomenal success and happiness, develop courage, and be a great leader at the same time?

Wow! The question was both deep and broad. How do I answer it succinctly while providing practical guidance at the same time, I wondered? I reflected for a couple of minutes, then said that the four goals of success, happiness, courage and great leadership can indeed be achieved at the same time. But to do so, one must first shed conventional wisdom about what those words mean, then believe in and live by five highly interrelated and interdependent principles. Here they are:

1. Chase life-worth, not net-worth

Most people think success and happiness are about possessing wealth and power. Yet, we've all seen examples of extremely wealthy and/or powerful people who still feel unfulfilled. We've also seen people who have very little, but they feel genuinely successful and happy. The secret lies in maximizing



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one's life-worth by consistently practicing a set of personal values you believe to be right and noble, and in relentlessly pursuing a worthy purpose based on those values.

There's nothing wrong with the desire for material success, but truly happy people know that success should be measured by what they give to the world, not in terms of what they receive from it. They are not selfless saints. They know that only when one experiences the joy of giving does one fully understand what it means to receive. So, they never stop trying to make their life worth living – a life of giving something meaningful to the world. For some, the

result is great wealth, prestige and power. Bill Gates wanted to change the world with software – the resultant wealth was a very welcome by-product. For others, it is the immense satisfaction and pleasure they feel from simply giving – think nurses, teachers, rehabilitation workers and soldiers. They don't feel the need to amass huge amounts of wealth and power because their purposeful work itself makes them feel deeply happy and successful.

Courage too is a function of deep conviction in a values-based purpose. Gandhi was unafraid because he was deeply convinced that the purpose of attaining freedom based on the values of non-violence and humility was worth dying for. Mandela was not afraid of 27 years of harsh imprisonment for the same reason.

6. Use the power of love rather than the power of position.

People who seek to prioritize life-worth over net-worth are deeply in love with their values and purpose. This makes them live their values at all times; and gives them the strength to pursue their worthy purpose against all odds. In doing so, they earn the respect, admiration and trust of others. This soft power is far stronger than formal position power or ascribed authority. I once worked for a boss who never stopped trying to create a better future through his thought leading research and writing. An incredibly dedicated hard worker himself, he often said: "There is so much pain in the world... if we can make a small contribution to ease some of it, what can be better than that? And isn't it great that we get paid to do this?" He never told any of us what to do. Yet, we were so in awe of his love and dedication to the profession that we wanted to do as much as we could to contribute as well. He never used his formal authority to assign us tasks, but everyone on his team regularly went above and beyond.

7. Create happiness by replacing hate, regret and envy in your mind, with gratitude.

Try this thought experiment. For the next five minutes, think about all that is unfair in your life. List everything (and everyone) you hate, regret or are envious of. Exercise your [emotional integrity](#) to the fullest by being totally honest with yourself. Take a pause from reading further to complete your list.

How do you feel after making the hate list? Frustrated, angry, sad?

Now spend the next 5 minutes listing everything in your life you are grateful for. Count all your blessings. How do you feel now?

The point is simple. If you fill your heart with gratitude, a feeling of deep happiness overshadows any feelings of hate, regret or envy. Hate, regret or envy cannot co-exist with gratitude, so happiness is a choice – a choice YOU have all the power to make.

4. Build enough inner strength and self-belief to be able to forgive unconditionally.

People who live to maximize life-worth rather than net-worth feel so happy and successful giving to the world what they believe to be worthwhile, that they learn to love and respect themselves. In doing so they become independent and are less impacted by the behavior of others. Such people don't get hurt easily. Even if someone does manage to hurt them, they find the inner strength to forgive. They rise above the desires of revenge and punishment because their need to make a meaningful contribution to the world is far greater than the desire to get even. So, they forgive easily. And by forgiving, most of all, they create their own happiness and peace of mind.

5. Lead yourself, not others

The biggest problem with leadership, or rather the lack of it, lies in two fundamental misunderstandings about it:

- I. To be a leader one needs to have followers, and
- II. Leadership is what one does to influence others to get things done.

Be it commanding, controlling, inspiring, motivating or coaching subordinates; leadership is believed to be *an act of doing something to others*. Yet, all the great leaders I've observed and studied did the opposite. They did nothing to other people. Most of what they did, they did to themselves. Like my former boss I described in Principle 2, they understood that leadership is about constantly driving *oneself* to work harder and harder towards creating a better future. By relentlessly living their values and pursuing a values-based purpose, they became powerful examples for others, and gained dedicated the followership of others without having to manage or control them. As Gandhi aptly said, *Be the change you want to see in the world*.

I have learned these five principles by observing many successful, happy and courageous leaders over 30 years. I am grateful to them because I have tried to live my own life by these gems, and in so doing have discovered my own version of success, happiness courage and leadership. I wish they do the same for you.

Here's a little cheat sheet to help start your reflection. Rate yourself on each of the following five statements on a 1-5 scale where 1 is strongly disagree, 2 is disagree, 3 is neither agree nor disagree, 4 is agree, and 5 is strongly agree. Once you've completed your self-scoring, ask yourself what you would like your scores to be, and what you are prepared to do to make that happen.

#	Principle Based Statement	Rating
1	I prioritize life-worth (living my values and pursuing my purpose) over maximizing my net-worth	
2	To inspire others, I use my love of purpose and values more than my formal position power	
3	I regularly choose to create my own happiness by replacing feelings of hate, regret and envy with gratitude	
4	I have enough self-respect and inner strength to forgive unconditionally	
5	I am working hard enough to become the change I want to see in the world	