

How to Define Success for Yourself

By Marcie Olinger

What does success look like to you? Making a million dollars? Having the nicest car on the block? Maybe it's earning enough money so you have the time and resources to do the things you enjoy...like playing golf, going fishing with the kids, doing volunteer work, or taking a Friday afternoon off just to hang out.

Every day I work with people who wonder what life is really all about. When I ask the question, "What does success mean to you?" I get many different answers. Usually the first answer has to do with making a lot of money. But when I ask if that's it, they have to step back and think.

Have you considered that maybe success really isn't about the almighty dollar, but rather about enjoying what you do at work while having the time and flexibility to do more outside of work?

I enjoyed a 20-year career in corporate America, but now consider myself to be one of the lucky ones to be let go because of downsizing. I went through the research necessary to find the business that was right for me, and now help others through this self-discovery process that has benefited thousands of people.

Most of us reach a point when we start to wonder what life is really all about. Is it only about money? Or is it more about finding purpose, enjoying our work, helping others, or doing something of significance.

It's truly important for you to think through these questions for yourself. Determine what really is important to you and what you are willing to do about it. Did you always want to have your own business? Take a trip to the rain forest? Join the Peace Corps? Whatever your vision of personal success, it isn't nearly as important as the plan and commitment you make to attain it.

Terry and Rob Ingraham are brothers who each have very successful corporate careers in the Kansas City area. But they've always yearned for something more. When we first talked it was more

money, more income streams, and more control over their lives. But as we probed more deeply, we learned that they desired things like more control of their business decisions, a more secure future, a "decent" income, and more flexibility. Having a business would satisfy their mutual dreams that had been in place for well over 20 years.

They wanted a business that would allow them to hire a manager to run the day-to-day business. That would allow them to continue in their corporate jobs until they could attain (or better) their current incomes. They aren't ready to cut the corporate strings ... yet.

The Ingrahams now own Cartridge World, where they refill inkjet and laser cartridges that typically save customers up to 50 percent off retail prices. They also sell new and compatible cartridges and assist companies in saving money in other ways.

To Jere Smith and Don Leuders of Liberty, Mo., success meant things like more control, security, independence, financial rewards, freedom, and time (a huge desire for many people). They wanted to be able to take care of themselves, to work hard and have something to show for it besides money. Sure, they had concerns. Could they make it financially if they started out on their own? Would they have to put everything (all of their money and 110 percent of their time) into a new business?

After careful consideration and research, they found a business that would be able to meet their goals. They now own the only Mr. Transmission shop in the Kansas City area. They specialize in transmission work for foreign and domestic vehicles, automatic and standard light trucks. They have the lifestyle they desired and the flexibility to do other things that are important to them.

I work with many people who are tired of (or maybe just bored with) working for someone else. They want to make a difference, take a risk and gain control of their destinies. When we work together I ask lots of questions—and these aren't the easy ones you can study for. They're tough questions like, "Imagine it's five years from now, what do you want more of in your life? Are you satisfied with where you will be? Will you feel successful?"

After they've answered those ques-

tions, we do some style analysis testing to determine their communication styles. This also helps in determining what will work best for them.

If they are still on track to own a business after this discussion, I research options and bring three or four back to them. Next, we validate those options to find out what a typical owner's day looks like, what kind of money it takes to get started, when they can expect to start making a profit, and what kind of money they could make. We determine if it's the right business model for them (retail, home-based, industrial, or office, etc.), and if it's something they can really "see" themselves doing.

It's amazing how much you can learn—not only about the business models, but about yourself—as you get more and more information. Suddenly the retail model with lots of employees and customers seems stifling. And working for yourself and being responsible/accountable for what happens (or doesn't) seems much more appealing.

Most importantly, you learn that the dream you've had to own a business seems attainable. Sure, it's a risk; a well-calculated risk. But it's one that you can handle. You now know what to expect and you are more prepared to take that satisfying first step. You know how much money it's going to take to get started and you're willing to make that commitment to yourself. You are ready to find out what you can really do if put to the test.

Having your own business can be tough, but research is the key. It's the key to making dreams come true and taking control. It's the key to determining if corporate life is right for you or if you want to step out and try something new and more personally rewarding.

So if you've always wanted something more, take the time to ask yourself those tough questions. Determine if you are on the right path to achieve your vision of personal success.

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