

## Success Isn't Easy, and It's Not Self-Sustainable

By Richard E. Goldman

*Author of Luck by Design: Certain Success in an Uncertain World*



Decide right now that you're going to be successful, and decide right now that you're going to be able to handle that success when the time comes. "Ha!" you might say -- "I should be so lucky! I'll cross that bridge when I get to it." If you want to design your own luck and put yourself on the path to success, start planning for it now. The graveyard of successful people who didn't know how to handle their success is full. There's no need for you to join them.

What really is success? Maybe a good place to start is to articulate what success *isn't*. It's not a big house, a fancy car, or a bunch of bling. It's not the American Express platinum card or the limousine. Success isn't easy, and once you have it, there is no guarantee that you'll keep it. So prepare for success by accepting that success does not equal significance or security. Success is, quite simply, peace. Peace of mind that you've done the best that you can. Peace of heart that you are part of something -- perhaps a family -- whose members support you, love you, and will always be there for you.

What might success look like? Is it giving your all? Is it doing your best? Is it getting the job done? Again, it's none of the above. Success is much more about the journey than the end of the road. It's about the experience of your passion. It's the satisfaction you can get from planning and then doing, and then watching the seeds of your planning and doing take root and create something that wasn't there before. Real success is the ability to embrace the discoveries and enlightenment you encounter along the journey in whatever it is that you do. Crossing the finish line is inconsequential. Or, as late singer Harry Chapin once wrote, "It's got to be the going, not the getting there that's good." You will never arrive; you're always, and only, just "here."

Who defines success? We all measure success differently. The best measure and the only one that really counts is how *you* define it. Before beginning a project, decide what *you* think a successful outcome might look like. Use that as your barometer -- nothing else.

Then, what are you going to do once you're successful? Once you've done *well*, redouble your efforts to do *good*. Once you've become successful, you might have the money to give some back. You'll certainly have the expertise, so part of what you can give back is the knowledge that you've gained on the way to being successful.

At any point on the trail to success, and at many points after, there is always the temptation to take the easy way out. If you've achieved some success, chances are you already know that there aren't any shortcuts. But once you've achieved this success, you have to remind yourself of how you got there in the first place; surely it wasn't a single-handed effort. Remember to thank, appreciate, and reward the people who have helped you along the way. Have the self-discipline to do the right thing, rather than the easy thing, and hopefully integrity will intersect the two.

With success comes privilege. While I would love to contest that, it's a reality that is far bigger than I am. It's important to keep in mind that the greater our privilege, the greater our obligation to avoid acting special -- more importantly, to avoid even *feeling* special. If you're successful, then good for you! But just let it end at that. And move on. Nobody's *that* special.

Sometimes the road up the corporate ladder can be so consuming that you miss your original goal. You push and push to get that next raise, that next promotion, and one day you turn around and you've lost touch with yourself -- and in many cases, you've lost touch with your family. You don't *always* need the next toy, that bigger house, or that office with the big window and great view. None of it is worth it if in the process you lose sight of who you are or lose your connection with the people most important to you. All of that is a danger if you subscribe to the theory that success equals money.

### **Are You Going to Be the CEO?**

Just as money doesn't buy happiness, if you think being the CEO will bring you happiness, there's another bubble to burst. If you've envisioned yourself as the Big Kahuna, don't bet the farm. So many people want (or at least *think* that they want) to lead. But the numbers are against them. By definition, there is only one captain, one quarterback, or one CEO and a limited number of teams and companies. Given that, what do you do? Realize that there are leaders and there are followers. For the vast majority, the question is, how can you be a good follower and still have that role be consistent with the rest of your life? How can it be consistent with your values and your dreams? A great way to

start is to attach significance before you attach meaning: be absolutely clear about what your objective is when you're getting into a job. If your values and your dreams are more important to you than a title, then it should be pretty easy to accept that you're not going to be the CEO.

It also helps to know a little about group dynamics. Whether it's a class, a fraternity, a club, a company, or a nonprofit, whenever you get a group of people organized under one name or entity, group dynamics are critical. In any group, the work that you do is an exchange between you and the group. It is an exchange of ideas, values, time, effort, energy, and sometimes money. The difference between successful and unsuccessful groups is the ability to keep the exchange open and productive. If people are free to ask questions and know what they can expect from each other, they are more inclined to be productive and content in their roles, to trust one another, and to want to share in a commitment to a common vision.

In any group, people will sift out to a leader, an additional person or two who lead in certain areas, some willing followers, and some followers who are less than willing, to say the least. If most people become followers, how do you become a great follower? To begin with, you have to learn to shelve your ego. There will always be times that you think you know more or can do more than the leader. What do you do then? You learn to make your point, state your opinion and *move on*.

Some other tips on not only living with but also *being a great follower*:

- Recognize that being a follower is not a failure -- it's a function. It's a necessary function, just as any and every other part of a team.
- One day, you are going to be *a* leader, just not *the* leader. (See chapter 6.)
- Within any organization, opportunities exist for any one person, regardless of rank, status, or title, to shine.
- Oftentimes being a follower means acting like you're the leader when faced with any and everything that you do. If it's your project, then you're the leader.
- You can be a follower without abdicating your self In fact, being a follower can help you in defining your self -- it's a terrific lesson in learning how to put your ego in neutral.

In thinking about being a follower or a leader, consider that it may be a matter of perspective. Are you looking up the ladder to see who's above, are you looking at the rung you're on to see who else is there, or are you looking at the rung below? Instead of worrying where everyone else is, try to reconcile yourself with the possibility that you are in the right place, making the absolute best of the resources you have available to you *on that day*.

**Lesson Learned: Work, not *Rachmunus***

For several years, I was the person who planned out the buy for suits, sport coats, and slacks; went out and bought them; scheduled the deliveries; decided what merchandise was going to what stores; and finally, presented the buys to our employees in the stores. Needless to say, it was an intense job, but it kept me close to merchandise and close to the stores. I always believed that figuring out why something was selling was easy; the hard part was trying to figure out why something was *not* selling. To know why products weren't selling, I needed to stay close to the stores, and talk to the people who were dealing with customers on a daily basis.

There was a particular manufacturer (not the Stinky Suits vendor) from whom we bought many suits. This vendor's suits were some of those that just didn't sell well -- year after year. After speaking to the employees, I found out that the biggest problem was the inconsistency in the manufacturing of the product: sometimes the suits fit well, and other times, they fit poorly. Sometimes the fabrics were great, other times, poor. The sales force had basically lost confidence in the product, thus not showing it to customers, resulting, of course, in poor sales. I had told the president of the company on several occasions that the suits were not selling well. He was a good friend, with whom I often shared more than business reflections, so when I had to inform him that we weren't going to buy any more suits from his company, he wasn't entirely surprised.

That night over dinner, he acknowledged that he was also concerned about the problems that I had discussed, and he told me that he was considering leaving the company because of his frustration and because he felt like he wasn't being heard. He had an offer from another company and wanted to know my opinion about leaving. The owner of the company he was working for was a very tough man, and I could only imagine his frustration in working for him. I thought the job change was a good idea and told him as much.

A few months later, my friend became president of the other company. He called and asked me to see him on my next trip to New York. I did and looked at his clothing and found that it wasn't really a good fit for Men's Wearhouse. Why? I had an issue with the quality and the price. He countered by suggesting that I buy something as a good-will gesture to him -- the Yiddish word he used was "rachmunus."

I told him that our friendship was one thing and that our business relationship was another. I went on to explain that when I bought suits for Men's Wearhouse, I was putting my reputation and the reputation of the company on the line. My reputation was at stake because I knew that I had to "sell" the suits to the store managers in order to get them behind the product. The reputation of the company was at stake because the managers and the sales people had to sell the suits to actual customers. I went on to explain that when a Men's Wearhouse store manager wanted to know why we

were now carrying that particular suit, I didn't think "rachmunus" was going to be an acceptable explanation for the manager *or* the customer.

What happened to our relationship? There is bad news and good news. The bad news is that we didn't speak to each other much for a few years, and when we did, the communication was tense and short. The good news is that time -- as is so often the case -- heals all wounds. After a few years, and after the suits by his new company had greatly improved in quality, we became friends once again, and Men's Wearhouse began to sell the suits. And after a drink or two at an apparel show, my friend looked at me, winked, and said, "You were right. Thanks." I wasn't sure what I was "right" about, but having my friend back meant more to me than knowing that particular answer.

It's clear that the work part of your life is going to take center stage. And once that you've entered that arena, the next hurdle is management -- both management of yourself and yourself as a manager. After all, one day, somehow, some way, you will be called upon to manage. There is no time like the present to start preparing, as you'll see in the next chapter.

***About the author:***

**Richard E. Goldman is author of *Luck by Design: Certain Success in an Uncertain World*. Widely recognized as the marketing mastermind behind the success of Men's Wearhouse, Goldman has also been a quiet force in business, education, and volunteerism. To learn still more about *Luck by Design*, how you can incorporate luck into your future, and to share your own "lucky" experiences, visit [www.richiegoldman.com](http://www.richiegoldman.com).**

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