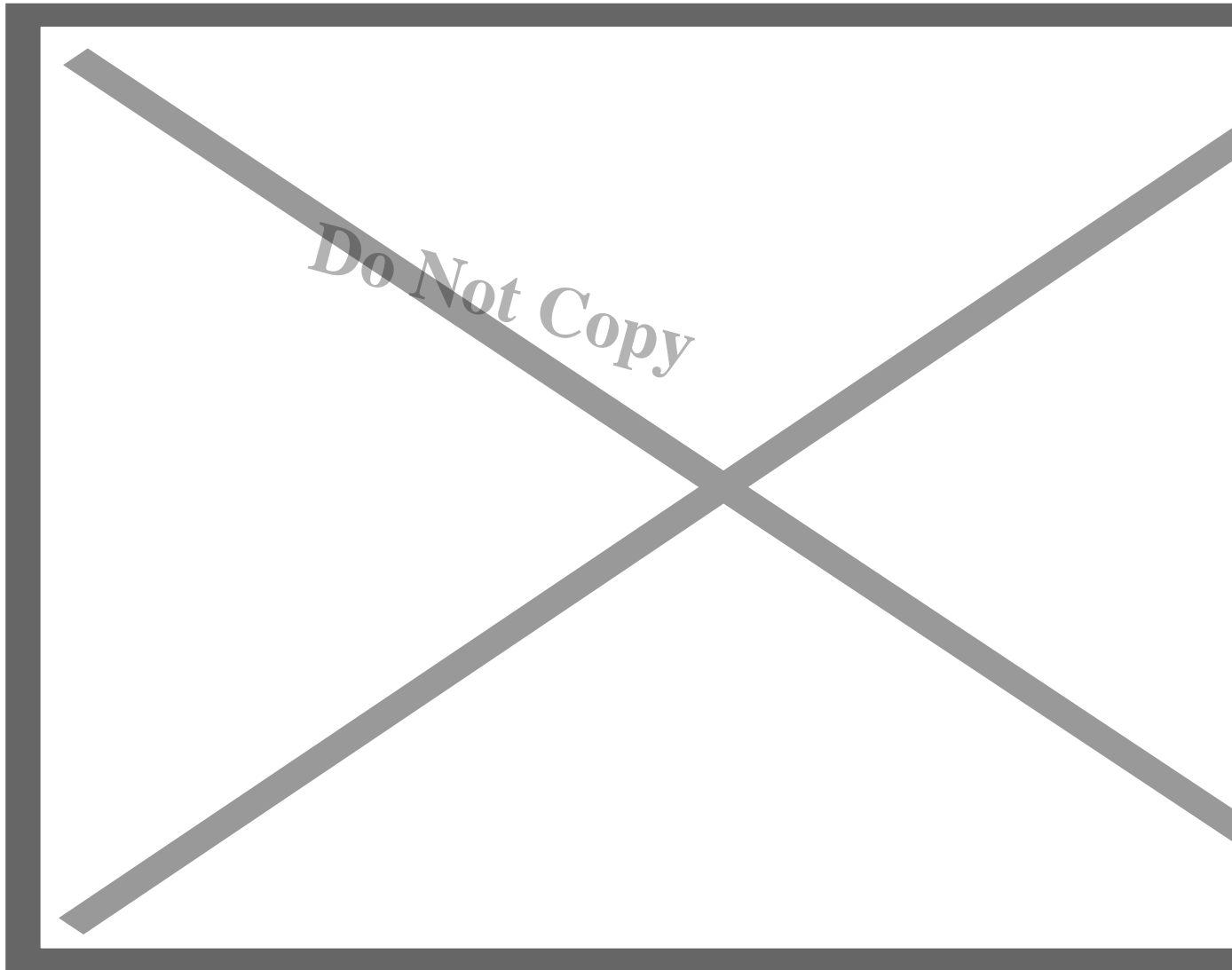


How you define "success" defines you as a leader

## Description

**When you have too much time to think!**



2020 is a shit show of a year! We who are living through this will forever be asked how it was to live through a pandemic like the one we are in right now. Through this, I have been struggling to keep my focus on this blog, as an example. It seems somewhat trivial to talk about leadership principles and managing teams when the whole world is in crisis and so many people are suffering.

How many of you have been living through this pandemic and thinking, "What I'm doing really doesn't matter in the big picture"? Some days I do. The one thing crisis can bring is clarity of

meaning to certain things. I have been more aware of the importance of relationships and family, given that seeing some people is nearly impossible while seeing your immediate family 24/7 can be equally challenging. Building meaningful relationships is one of (if not the biggest) keys to happiness in life. There is a great TED talk from [Robert Waldinger](#), the Director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, that shows just how important relationships are to overall happiness and health.

## You are succeeding at what truly matters to you

Bear in mind that the measure of a man is the worth of the things he cares about.

*Marcus Aurelius*

Sometimes I've had bosses where I think their actions are absolutely crazy. The work is coming in, but because revenue is delayed or there are problems they want to cut staff, or are directed to, in order to make that quarter's bottom line look good. How can you let people go when the backlog of work is so bad? I ask. But to them, the most important measure of success is profit.

It may sound cold and greedy to some, but in business let's face it revenue and profit are the most widely used and understood yardstick of success. And in many organizations, especially publicly-traded companies, profit means more than anything else. So it's understandable that priority trickles down the management ranks, and becomes the only thing that matters to some.

So is that boss successful? To him, he is, if he cuts staff and delivers on his profit target for that quarter. Is it the right thing to do from leadership and long-term success points of view? Well, that's a great debate to have, but in the end, it all comes down to what your definition of success looks like.

Defining success to each person is like your fingerprint. It's unique. No one can tell you what success means to you. Many try to and define the right and wrong of success. But all of that debate does is reflect each person's values and filters of what matters most to them.

Is Donald Trump a success? To him he is. He wanted power and the presidency and he got it. To others, he's a failure because he didn't deliver on promises, or they think he's unethical and therefore a failure at being a leader. To some, he is a success because his randomly tweeted thoughts at 2 a.m. match their random thoughts and beliefs. To yet others, his actions are seen as failures of leadership because he divides the nation into two camps instead of trying to unify. It all depends on your own values and priorities.

The point is to be successful you need to match your goals with your actions. Whatever you think your vision of success is, you need to live it. Or maybe you think you want something but you really just want the image of it.

You will naturally start acting like a leader if you're performing something in line with your inner values and priorities. If taking care of others is in your core values and you're working in HR, then you will naturally start leading in that area. If personal recognition is your priority and you are on a team of people, then you will frustrate people because your personal glory is more important to you than team success.

**You can't succeed swimming against the current**

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How often have you told yourself to do something you knew in your heart you would never do?

- I need to lose 15 lbs
- I gotta get out of my job
- I need to call my friends more
- I want to make a million dollars
- I need to get out of debt

You tell yourself these things are a future life you think you should have. But let's face it you're not committed to getting there or you would be there already. There are plenty of potential reasons why you don't make these things happen (including insecurities, fears, etc. ) but a really important and often overlooked problem is what you think success looks like.

Our modern consumerist society puts a ridiculous amount of pressure on us daily, to have more stuff, achieve more happiness, live an easy and luxurious life, where we are constantly smiling and holding hands, running down a sun-splashed beach with our loved ones, drinking a Diet Coke, gazing longingly at our new Tesla, and showing off our perfectly sculpted, blemish-free bodies.

We have emphasized so much that happiness is a destination, not a journey. That success looks like having it all, and if we don't we are losers. We all fall for it. And if any of this sounds true to you, then your definition of success is skewed by what society says you should chase.

The problem is, in your deepest corners of truth, it's probably not what matters to you. So while you tell yourself these things, inside your conscience is telling you, "that's full of shit, stop wasting your time". So you go back to Candy Crush and tell your conscience to shut up.

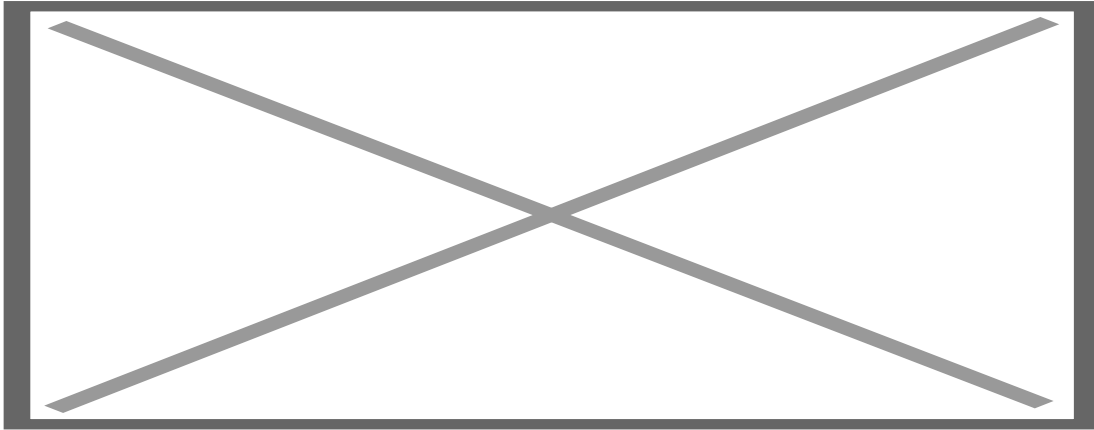
If you are not really clear and honest about what matters most to you, you will constantly be fighting an internal battle between what you think you want and what really matters.

And there is no judgment here. If your priority in life is to have the biggest pile of money when you die, then go for it. But then don't try to be the emotionally intelligent leader who cares for their people first, because it won't ring true.

## What is your real priority

Have you ever had a real look at your values? Your real and honest values? I've done this several times over the last decade or so, and it's very instructive. It changes too, so it's a great idea to check in with them every so often, to see if your outlook shifts.

There is a great website I use from the [VIA Institute](#), where for free you can get a ranking of your top values and strengths. For fun, here are my top 5 values/strengths.



See? The internet says I'm a leader! Source <https://www.viacharacter.org/>

For me, success is enrolling a group of people towards a common cause. One that helps humanity in some way, and relies on creativity to get it done. If I'm to call myself successful I will be working on that.

And above and beyond that, what do you want your legacy to be? We are all going to die some day, and that can give real purpose to your life, if you keep in mind you have a limited time to do something with it. I don't think anyone on their deathbed said, "Dammit I wanted to get to the end of the Game of Thrones series", or "I wanted one more like on my Instagram post". The things we spend our time on are often not what we view as long-term success.

## Write your eulogy

I'm sure if you're reading this and have gotten this far, you're interested in leadership too, and have heard this before. But it's still a great way to provide focus on what success looks like for you. In Steven Covey's [7 Habits of highly Successful People](#) Habit #2 is Begin with the End in Mind. I love this idea because it can really provide clarity of purpose if you know where you want to end up.

Thinking about the end of your life, and having a eulogy sum it all up can really make you think about what does a successful life mean to you. Everyone is different, but there undoubtedly will be common themes: making a difference, being loved and giving love, having great relationships, giving back to others, legacy.

Take some time and write what you would want others to say about you. Then reflect on that, and ask yourself if that is what success truly means to you. Then, maybe with a glass of scotch in your hand, ask yourself if you're living it today. If you are, then I want to know your secret. I've struggled with this often.

### Category

1. Uncategorized

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