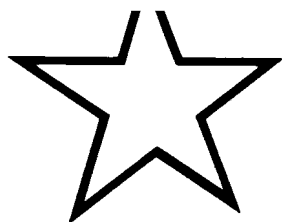




# THE GREAT AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY

Factors That Affect Achievement



George Gallup, Jr.  
Alec M. Gallup

with William Proctor

DOW JONES-IRWIN  
Homewood, Illinois 60430

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## PREFACE

The idea of doing a book on success came to me a few years ago as I worked on a biography of my father, the late George Gallup, who founded the Gallup Poll.

Dr. Gallup was clearly a success. In the 1930s he gained recognition as one of the world's leading public opinion researchers. Consequently, he was included in all the leading biographical listings, including Marquis' *Who's Who In America*, which is used as a major source for this book. As I tried to determine the factors in my father's background that led to his accomplishments, it struck me that he was an example of a far wider phenomenon—one that could be explored and explained through a carefully designed sample of successful people.

There were a number of factors about my father's childhood that seemed to destine him for achievement. His hometown of Jefferson, Iowa, where he was born in 1901, has an ethos that promoted success among its young people. People in Jefferson placed a top priority on a good education. Virtually all local high school students went on to college, a fact that set the town apart from other American towns in the early 20th century. Residents also placed a high premium on hard work. My father had to contribute to the family income from a young age. When he was 10, he started a milk route with his brother John. They went out every morning in a horse-drawn cart to make deliveries to their customers.

Another important factor is that he was an insatiable

reader from childhood on. Although his mother was strict in many ways, she allowed him to stay up late at night as long as he was reading a book. And more often than not, that's what he did every night.

I remember my father as a true intellectual in the classic sense of the word. He was interested in ideas more than events or people-related issues and he discovered at an early age the pleasures of using his mind.

I learned a great deal from my father and I began to think, "Wouldn't it be valuable to be able to learn from *many* people like him—people who had achieved great things in a variety of fields?"

The Gallup Poll was the ideal instrument to probe the minds of a large number of successful people. And Marquis' *Who's Who In America* represented the best source for selecting a sample of those individuals.

This book provides an opportunity for individual readers to sit down for a few hours with the most successful people in America—presidents of the largest corporations, top artists and writers, military leaders, prize-winning scientists, great educators, and important members of the clergy. The few hours you spend perusing the following pages represent a distillation of over 1,000 hours of in-depth conversation with the most important and successful people in the United States, concerning their thoughts about the meaning of success and how they attained it.

One of the lessons of this book is that anyone can be a success! Although many people automatically assign themselves to the status of an *also-ran*, the results of our study show that most of us have the potential to be high achievers. There's no reason to rationalize the success of others by offering such excuses as, "She has a silver spoon in her mouth" or "He always gets all the breaks." Success is within your grasp if you'll just take steps to achieve it!

For example, common sense, which high achievers con-

sider the most important personal characteristic for success, is something upon which we all draw. Also, successful people place a lot of importance on old-fashioned virtues like hard work, the desire to excel, goal setting, and caring about others.

Of course, success isn't something a person can always control. Many times, we found, success arose from some combination of acquired traits *plus* a kind of "X" factor—such as luck, accident of birth, a teacher's early influence, an exceptionally high intelligence, or religious faith. I remember a newspaper editor who said he owed his success to "hard work, perseverance, and the fact that my father owns the company."

Yet, our study seems to say that, while there are no shortcuts, success is possible for most people as long as they're willing to plan and work toward it.

Another point to keep in mind is what might be called the *maverick factor*. This refers to the many exceptions, represented as small percentages of the total, that emerge from any broad study or survey. *Most* of the successful people we questioned said they weren't motivated by money. But a *few* were. Most had high IQs, but some were only average. Most had at least a college education—but not all did.

In any case, we hope every reader will find this book instructive and perhaps even inspiring. Above all, if you do reach a high level of achievement, we trust you'll be motivated to use your position for the good of others, as most of these successful people have.

One of the happiest surprises for me was that the achievers we interviewed are not overly aggressive or insensitive people who are only out for "number one." In our society, we tend to admire the wheeler-dealer who scores by aggressive but not necessarily admirable behavior. In contrast, our respondents prove that personal success often involves a great social consciousness as well. They care about others, they volunteer their time to aid the needy, and the large majority give money to charity.

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I find such results reassuring. In a way, the most successful people in our society seem to *deserve* success. On many levels, they are worthy of emulation.

So what we have here is an affirmation of the old-fashioned American credo that hard work and determination pay off. But at the same time, *The Great American Success Story* doesn't tell us to succeed at all costs. The greatest achievers are concerned citizens who have contributed a great deal, not only in their own fields, but in a variety of voluntary activities—and this, I believe is one of the keys to America's strength.

George Gallup, Jr.  
Princeton, New Jersey

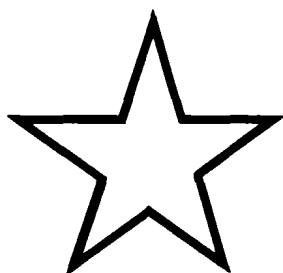
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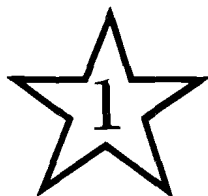
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# Part I

# THE KEYS TO SUCCESS



## CHAPTER



# WHAT IS SUCCESS?

*The hope of the future rests with the citizen. To be effective, he must be well informed, and he must discover ways of making better use of his own great mental capacities and those of his fellow men. . . . Man has scarcely begun to make use of his almost limitless brain power, either individually or collectively.*

George Gallup, Sr. (from *The Miracle Ahead*,  
New York: Harper & Row, 1964, pp. 202–3).

You're sure you want it. You probably think you haven't got it. Even if you do have it, you want more of it. What is it? Money? Fame? Power? Great achievement?

In part, perhaps. But what you're *really* looking for runs into deeper waters. It may be all those material and worldly things, or it may be none of them, depending on your viewpoint.

In short, if you're like most people, what you really want in life is *success*. But like all other great goals and virtues of life—including love, joy, or happiness—the problem first is defining exactly what success is. Then, after you understand the nature of this Holy Grail you're in quest of, the question becomes, “How do I get it?”

The quicksilver quality of success and of savoring its bene-

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fits has long been pondered by our most sensitive thinkers. Emily Dickinson, for instance, wrote:

“Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne’er succeed.”

There’s little doubt that ambitious folks who lack success tend to crave it most, and this hunger may emerge in a variety of forms. The one who aspires strongly to success may dwell on the subject in conversations; he may devour every how-to article and achievement-oriented book he can lay his hands on. Or she may formulate detailed strategies about the best way to “get to the top” or “grab the brass ring” or “go for the gold.”

Yet, more often than not, success, like joy and happiness, tends to slip up on us through people and paths that have not been part of our master plan. Even after a successful person makes it, he may not be able to tell you exactly how it happened—though plenty of those who observed the progress are sure *they* know. A consummate 19th-century quipster, John Churton Collins, made the point rather ironically when he said, “The secret of success in life is known only to those who have not succeeded.”

So trying to answer a question like “What is success?” is risky business. But this element of difficulty and uncertainty in nailing down a definition is one of the things that has fascinated us as we’ve probed into the meaning of success.

For example, if you asked John Marks Templeton, who has been called the world’s greatest living investor, what success means for him, he would certainly point to the fact that his Templeton Growth Fund was the most successful public mutual fund in the world for the two decades spanning the 1960s and 1970s.

But Templeton’s view of success goes far beyond outward achievements and the accumulation of money. He stresses what he calls “stewardship,” the idea that all his assets and

talents have been given to him by others (i.e., those investing in his mutual funds) and by God. As a result, he feels he has been entrusted with the weighty responsibility of managing those assets and talents so that their use is maximized for the common good. Success, then, can be measured by the degree to which he helps and enriches others, even as he is helping himself.

The renowned entertainer and TV personality Art Linkletter conceives of success in somewhat the same way. He sees an outward aspect to his success in that, during his early years, he actually traveled around the country as a hobo. But now, as he puts it, "I'm a multimillionaire, with money coming in from show business, manufacturing, oil and gas, mining, and real estate projects in the United States and Australia."

Still, success doesn't end there for Linkletter. There's also an inner dimension involving spiritual growth, personal peace, and emotional equilibrium. And he's a family man who puts great stock in his relationships. Success for Linkletter is indeed a comprehensive package.

We've discovered an incredibly varied view of success as we've conducted interviews with accomplished Americans during the past couple of years. The results have turned out to be highly instructive in revealing exactly what success is—and how the average person might go about getting it.

For example, in answering a number of questions we put to him, one prominent writer and editor illustrated some of the problems we all have as we try to get a firm handle on the meaning of success. When we asked what he considered to be evidence of his personal success, he replied in rather traditional, objective terms: "Publication in prestigious journals. Book publication. Editorship of a national magazine."

He also had a rather predictable response when we asked what he regarded as the formula for success in his field: "Ability (talent). Continuous hard work. Stubborn determination. Pure luck."

With an income in the six-figure range and a very satisfying family and personal life, this writer-editor's outlook on life was exactly what we would have expected it to be: "Very happy," he told us.

Yet obviously, success wasn't something that had come easily to him. In advising young people who might want to enter his field, he said, "Since this is the field of creative writing, you must be sure it is what you *can* do and *must* do. It is high risk. Be willing to face intensive work and rejection after rejection."

He also put a high premium on setting the right priorities: "Forget the drive for the dollar. Go where your heart and mind take you. Then work at it."

When we asked him to expand further on his ideas about his fundamental definition of success, an ambivalent and even troubled tone began to surface. "Success is a destructive concept," this writer-editor declared. "It has come to be inextricably entangled with celebrity, notoriety, fame, and, of course, riches."

"Is a lawyer who puts his ability and training at the service of the indigent less successful than one who wins fame and riches in the divorce courts or in criminal cases? Was Pearl Buck, who won the Nobel prize, more 'successful' than James Joyce, who did not?"

"In certain areas—the sciences, for example—success can be measured by specific kinds of progress. In business, money is the critical measure. But what is the measure in the humanities? In the arts? Perhaps personal integrity is the measure that really counts—the sense of true effort, of willingness to risk, of honest accomplishment. These supply the satisfaction that one's life is being well used. What else is needed?"

Clearly, when you ask "What is success?" you run into a number of problems, as this quite successful man suggests. For one thing, some people may assume that there must be



one general definition or standard of success that all reasonable men and women should accept. Actually, we've found there *isn't* just one definition of success that's generally accepted across the board among high achievers.

Also, as we've seen, some people define success objectively, as a certain level of achievement, prominence, or recognition. Others, like the above writer-editor, stress that true success is really a *subjective* phenomenon—a status that is wrapped up with an inner sense of satisfaction, happiness, and fulfillment.

Many others, like John Templeton and Art Linkletter, see success as a combination of both the objective and the subjective; that is, you're not truly successful unless you've (1) reached a certain high level of professional or outward accomplishment and (2) begun to *feel* satisfied and successful to boot.

During the past few decades at the Gallup Organization, we've conducted many surveys and investigations into topics that bear on the meaning of success. But for this book, we've gone even further. For the first time, we've focused in depth on the topic, probing attitudes and personal traits of prominent people and giving them wide latitude to tell their personal stories.

Specifically, we've used Marquis' *Who's Who In America*, now in its 83d year of publication, as our basic source. To ensure the greatest degree of accuracy, a survey sample approach has been employed—that is, the names of those we've polled have been picked by a scientific, random method so as to preclude any sort of bias. Also, we've selected a large survey sample of 1,500 people to interview. This ensures that our results are correct within a narrow margin of error.

But why *Who's Who*?

This brings us back to our basic question about what exactly