Why Chasing Success and Happiness Are Making You Unsuccessful and Miserable

by Alexander Heyne | 58 comments

“If you live just for today, to make today the most successful, happy day of your life, I am sure that you will have an extraordinary life. A successful life is nothing more than a series of successful days.” – Unknown

In the last two years, I was obsessed with “finding” success and happiness – because I didn't have much of either.

I was feeling lost in life, stuck, and had no idea which way to go. And I also was struggling with one big thing that many people complain of today: I was trying to find meaning in life.

And that’s how I got obsessed with finding happiness.
I was also at a crossroads in another part of my life: work, which had been a massive source of unhappiness. I was working incredibly hard, but on things I didn't care about. So I decided to jump ship and start my own thing business.

And that's how I got obsessed with finding success.

**Success. It's what we're all obsessed with.**

Who doesn't want to be successful? I mean, ego aside, even spiritual folks want to be successful.

We all have to pay bills right? Even if we don't like money, we all need it as much as the next person.

I've got car bills to pay, rent, kids someday, college loans, and I want to be able to travel and see the world.

I figured, why not just learn everything it takes to be successful, instead of struggling my whole life?

So I did what anyone else would do – I got obsessed with success. I read *every* bestseller. I went to all kinds of classes. I started my own business.

I began a meet-up group for entrepreneurs. I ate, breathed, and dreamt about making my life easier by being successful.

I sacrificed everything – friends, family, sleep, time – my entire life, to get this as soon as possible so I wouldn't have to worry about it later.

A little bit over a year passed, and an interesting realization occurred: **I was completely miserable, and not one step closer to success than I was before.**

Hmph.

Interestingly enough, the same thing happened when I searched for happiness.

“Always Searching For Happiness.”

**Happiness.** It's what we all feel we deserve and want, no matter how much success we have.

When life gets tough, we just tell ourselves “I just want to be *happy*, nothing else!”

And ironically, happiness, which is one of the most fundamental states of being, is notoriously absent from modern day life.

I mean, just hop on over to Amazon and type in “happiness.” Look at the first seven search results:

1. Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill
2. The Happiness Project
3. The Happiness Advantage
4. The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom
5. The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living
6. Stumbling on Happiness
7. The How of Happiness

**Does anyone else think this is absolutely insane?** The most basic, fundamental state of being in life – being happy – is something we experience so little these days that we have to go looking for it.

Alright. So many of us are unhappy in our lives. Not surprising.

*But here’s the problem.*

When you’re lacking something, what’s the first thing you do? **Go looking for it.**

And that’s exactly how I got into this predicament in the first place.

**Why The Western Way of Life Is Killing Us**

So I began to wonder: **What am I doing wrong?**

If pursuing happiness and success isn’t bringing me happiness or success, I’m obviously doing something wrong. Time to switch strategies.

And that’s when I came upon a little article that compared the western approach to life to that of Taoism, which went something like this:

**In the west,** we encourage goal setting. In fact, we’re obsessed with goals – that end point we are striving so hard to reach.

We jump through hoop after hoop, stepping-stone after stepping-stone, sacrificing everything just to get to that finish line. But once we get there, we realize our thinking was flawed.

Now we’re unhappy again and need to set another goal.

We just spent however many hours, days, or years, sacrificing our health, our happiness, our every-single-day, to reach some goal – only to realize that it was the hours, days, months and years we skipped *that actually was our life.*

We become obsessed with the goal – the outcome – and forget that the 364 days are much more important than reaching that goal on the 365th.

**The result?** We’re miserable, we burn out, and we hate our lives.

**But there’s another way,** the article went on.

**In Taoism** – there is no defining purpose of life, no goal, no end point. So you have no choice but to live today how you want your life to go.

You have no choice but to be happy *right now.*

So in the west, the *goal* becomes the defining purpose of your life.
In Taoism, *life becomes the defining purpose of your life.*

Crazy, right?

**The Error in Both of My Plans: Exposed**

My relentless ambition was making me miserable – I was so focused on that end goal – being self employed – that I turned something that started out as a "*want to,*" into a "*have to.*"

I sacrificed my happiness because I told myself a huge lie: that only the end mattered, and that the process I had to ignore.

I stopped seeing *my friends* as much to pour every hour of *my free time* into work, hoping that it would set me free later.

I started reading happiness books – with the idea that *looking for* happiness, and having a "goal" of being happy, would actually lead me there.

I had it all backwards.

When you focus on the goal, you become myopic – nothing now matters, just that tiny point at the end. Ironically, this is the exact way to sabotage yourself and never reach that end.

How many miserable days are you willing to put up with before you tell yourself that the goal isn't worth it anymore?

**The Real Secret to Success and Happiness: How to Have Your Cake and Eat It**

I decided to spend some months reflecting, and revisited this idea of western "goals" versus eastern "journey".

What I found was very interesting. Book after book profiling successful people repeated the same thing over and over: *very few of the most successful people on earth actually planned on being successful.*

They just loved the game (the day-to-day) of business and doing something they enjoyed.

Interesting.

As I kept diving deeper and deeper into books and literature, three themes repeatedly emerged:

*Flow, Intrinsic Motivation, and Intuition.*

**Flow** is the state where you’re totally *zoned in* to whatever you’re doing. You know when you’re playing a sport, doing something creative, or reading an incredibly good book and time evaporates? *Flow.*

Flow, aside from being a state where we’re generally most happy, is also a state where learning is accelerated. It’s our most efficient spot to be working in.

Many of the "happy" and "successful" I read about had an insane fire for what they were doing – days would evaporate as they worked on a project in their garage, programmed
something new, or planned their next move.

**Intrinsic motivation** is where you want to do something because you enjoy it and are inherently interested in it, without any desire to be rewarded for the work.

This is very closely aligned with flow – it basically means that you are going with activities you find rewarding to do *right now*, rather than activities you find rewarding because *later* you’re going to get some kind of reward, accolade, or praise for them.

Virtually all of the successful people I read about had a high degree of internal fire about the subject or work they were pursuing.

The irony is that there’s a growing body of research showing that intrinsically motivated people are not only happier, but *actually make more money in their lifetimes too.*

The people that were profiled repeatedly mentioned that, instead of logically reasoning and trying to figure out the best path forward, they just sat down and asked: “What do I *really* want?”

Usually the answer is clear almost immediately.

These three things: flow, intrinsic motivation, and intuition all have **one thing in common:** none of them focus on the “pursuit” of anything – they focus on maximal engagement *right now.*

**When Looking For Success and Happiness, Remember This: Forget Them In Order to Find Them**

Success and happiness are actually very closely aligned.

My one key revelation here, for finding both success and happiness, was simple yet paradoxical:

**When you stop pursuing success and happiness, you end up focusing on activities that make you enjoy your day-to-day life.**

You focus on flow-producing activities that intrinsically motivate you.

You become obsessed with the process – the 364 days that take you to the 365th – rather than just focusing on the 365th and ignoring the other 364 days.

Paradoxically, when you just focus on the activities that result in maximal engagement, enjoyment and flow, happiness and success come as natural side effects.

You’ll realize you don’t have to search for them after all.

**What has your own experience been with trying to “look for” happiness and success? Do you think it’s possible to look for them – and find them?**
58 Comments

**Candice Beckmann** on April 23, 2013 at 7:09 am

Awesome and very enlightened. Sometimes it can be such a challenge to live for today. We get lost in surviving the day rather than enjoying it.

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 10:22 am

Hey Candice —

It’s a tough one for sure! And I think something that many of us get sucked into easily. With so many “success” books and so many “happiness” books it makes it easy to keep going to the next one and never stop to pause and question it all.

— Alex
Great blog – perfectly describes the last 2 years of my life. I hit 50, and suddenly had to pursue my dream. I read every one of the happiness books you listed, and then some. I signed up for a very expensive coaching certification because I thought the woman’s book was my key to happiness.

Here was my turning point: I went to a session in Santa Fe because I had a gut feeling I was supposed to attend this session on “finding my story.” This, I decided, would be my turning point towards success. It was – because everything completely broke down. I realized that there wasn’t going to be a mystical epiphany, even in Santa Fe, the most mystical of places. Instead, I faced the fact that I was going to have to just take it all one day at a time.

I’m still doing that – focusing on the next step – and I am at peace. I love to write, and am doing as much as I can, but am also accepting paid consulting work if it appeals to me. Thanks for encapsulating so much of what I experienced!

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 10:23 am

Hey Donna —

Well at least you got an awesome story out of it huh? I did the same thing – and went to the Sahara desert for a similar reason :)

For me it was like you said – just focusing on baby steps, and making sure to enjoy every day. It seems like the more you search, the less happy you become.

— Alex

**Donna Highfill** on April 24, 2013 at 9:17 am

I think the “search” engages the left brain, which immediately warns us about all of the things that might devour us. Left-brain is all about survival, and sends negative messages all day long. When you stop searching, the right-brain kicks in, as does the soul, and that’s where our GPS is. Great article. I’ve shared it with all of my readers!

**Ridhi** on April 23, 2013 at 7:29 am

Beautifully written and goes to explain a lot. I think its also closely related to being mindful and self aware of what we do each day,
sure humans have a habit of really holding on to the past or being anxious about the future but that's only because they don't have enough resourcefulness to optimize the here and now and through this article, there has been some insight about how to go about living the life of your dreams.

Thank you for this!

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 10:25 am

Hey Ridhi —

Totally agree! Mindfulness goes a LONG way towards making us happier and actually more successful. Ultimately, in order to be happy and successful, we have to first have happy and successful days, right? And then we can have weeks, months, and years that follow suit.

— Alex

**Sage** on April 23, 2013 at 7:54 am

Great insight and wisdom in this article.

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 10:52 am

Thanks Sage :)

— Alex

**Nick Alva** on April 23, 2013 at 8:01 am

Good info and reminder that a happy and successful life IS a journey and not the destination. Live in the moment and enjoy even the smallest of wonders.

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 10:54 am

Hey Nick —

Yeah it's tough because we hear that ALL THE TIME, but almost no one actually lives it, you know?

Sometimes we work so hard just to get to the end, and once we've gotten there, we're like "whoa, this is it? This is what I sacrificed 10 of the best years of my life for?"

Scary proposition!

— Alex
Nilson on April 23, 2013 at 8:28 am

Amazing. It was like an answer for so many questions... ;)

Alexander on April 23, 2013 at 10:54 am

Hey Nilson!

Glad it helped ;)

— Alex

Vicki on April 24, 2013 at 1:10 pm

I love this post. I always struggle with the whole "get real, be normal get a high paying job and quit playing around" as if my dream or chasing it is just a silly kid thing and i need to grow up. As if its impossible to achieve because everyone else does the daily grind that it looks as if there is no other way. I almost have myself so discouraged and believing these things that I drive myself crazy. I’m 28. Female wasted half my 20’s in a no where relationship and find myself tryin to find myself again. Jesus and faith are a big part of my life or I would be lost.

I dream of being a writer. One day...

Joan Harrison on April 23, 2013 at 10:04 am

Sometimes we are so influenced and distracted by everything going on around us we forget to stop, take time and just look within. The answer is there all the time.

Alexander on April 23, 2013 at 11:41 am

Totally true Joan!

Lena on April 23, 2013 at 10:37 am

Thank you for the post and sharing. It really does speak for me. Here I am at 25 and I have no clue whatsoever of what I am supposed to do. I am lost and I don’t even know what my life purpose is. I experience similar things as mentioned in your post. I quit my big salary job in order to find happiness by setting up my own business. Yet I am not even happy now. I do not enjoy my life, and spend most of my days stressing things out. But I keep telling myself, this is what I need to get through to finally reach the end, to suffer so
then I'll be happy at the end. I read many self help books, novels, joining motivational blogs reading articles and yet still I can't seem to find the thing I need. I do not feel complete and at lost. But reading your post, it helps me a lot understanding about what I am in right now. Especially the part when you told how we obsess with our goal and yet completely neglect the process to reach that goal. It gives me insights and new perspective. Thank you again for the sharing.

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 11:42 am

Hey Lena —

I actually have a site entirely dedicated to lost 20 somethings trying to find their path. Check it out, it will probably answer many of your questions.

Milkthepigeon.com

— Alex

**Lena** on April 24, 2013 at 1:24 am

Thank you, Alex. Will definitely check it out.

**Look Around** on April 23, 2013 at 10:58 am

I always reply to these links and read them AFTER I submit my comment. It makes for a much more higher probability I will read the entire text as I prefer the conclusion and avoid the mumbo jumbo ~ get to the point !! Tempus Fugit ~ Latin for Time Flies … Please read on ~ Because like myself in the “past 15yrs to date, sadly (!) we are chasing goals and doing things that other people and family want us to do and we are not actually living our lives as we personally want to … and everyday wasted on the wrong path compounds the depth we submerge ourselves into these wrong jobs, relationships, and diets …. and really the solution and need to change paths is impossible unless we stop and take a vacation to rethink the path we are on and this is again, very commonly impossible because a day lost in our current path may hinder progress in our minds, which is so incorrect. Ideally, and I wish at least 1 person could take a week or 2 off, a month ideally, no cell phone nor computer or contact with any current friends and minimal family contact to see what they are doing on this planet every day from a birds eye view, or at least within our minds. Like meditation for example. Hopefully then some of us may realize we are living the life of another person who wants it for us. As for me, it is seemingly feeling as if its too late some days because the money is gone, the contacts are gone and above all my physical health will
I'm going to a conference and am going to be in my physical state not permit me to work my old 60 hrs weekly and remain oh so positive and cheeky. Now I rather play a lotto ticket and await the millions to fulfill my dreams .. yet know it will take extra more work I need to put in to make my life what is should be to make me happy. I. You. No them. No pity please, just send money as I have several million dollar ideas that require capital and financing .. funny now that I wrote it down.

John Bulmer on April 23, 2013 at 11:40 am

Feeling rather down of late as I have been trying to figure out what direction I "should" take my life.

Having just turned 50 and having a couple of recent life upheavals lead me to believe that 2013 was going to be a year of transition for me. Not for the first time in life have I said that, and it is unfortunate.

I say unfortunate for it seems that then I become fixated on finding what that transition will look like – before it even occurs. It is problematic because I generally live an awesome life. That awesome life has come from not pursuing any single objective, but as outlined in your post, in comes from living a grand day everyday.

This post will be a reminder for me, to relax and to remind myself that when the transition happens I will be ready to spread my wings and let the winds of transition carry me to my next great destination.

Thanks again

John B

Alexander on April 23, 2013 at 5:42 pm

Hey John –

My life has fortunately/unfortunately been filled with an insane amount of transitions too the past few years. One of my favorite books on the subject is Martha Beck's "Finding Your Own North Star."

Sounds cheesy... but I swear this is the best book in the business. Check it out ! Hope it helps.

– Alex

Roberta Budviitas on April 23, 2013 at 12:05 pm
It is interesting how so often when we seek success and happiness we fail to find them but when we live our lives on purpose and with gratitude we experience more of both. In writing about success thieves, the one thing I found was that unless one always does their best, avoids assumptions, keeps one's word, regrets nothing and keeps one's word both success and happiness elude us. And it helps if you love yourself, work passionately at whatever you do and be grateful for all the blessings you have the ability to love and contribute. The dichotomy of the east and west philosophies in your post is so true. Thanks for writing about your insights.

Alexander on April 23, 2013 at 5:44 pm

Hey Roberta —

Totally with you there. They two of them really are paradoxical, and I think few people really understand this in their lives — (I think I’m only beginning to understand it). It’s ironic that the less you focus on your goals, the quicker you reach them.

Alexandra Vaccari on April 23, 2013 at 1:11 pm

Hi Alexander,

I’m Alexandra from Brazil, loved your name :) You post was really in the right time for me. I’m for a long time (years) reading and studying about the process of life. How to face my fears and find success, and your a really right, your post gave me the shift I needed. I was studing to much and not living the day-by-day as I should. I feel like I know many theories but I’m missing the practice.

Thanks for the wisdom that you shared

Alexandra

Alexander on April 23, 2013 at 5:45 pm

Hey Alexandra —

You’re welcome, I hope it helps :)
the moment. There is no planning. They go from one thing to another seeking joy, and move on if they do not find it. Success “is” being happy. They succeed when they laugh as our couch cushion fort comes crashing on their heads, not when it has been perfectly erected and they stand back to admire it. They succeed when they paint a big smeary blob and call it tree. They succeed with every hug, with every I love you.

We can’t live without goals and plans. We need to grow up. Unless we wish to remain illiterate and dependent we need to acquire skills, pay bills, feed ourselves, clean our bathrooms. But we don’t have to lose our childlike connection to happiness. It’s all around us, in every moment. Success just might be rediscovering everyday joys. A good cup of coffee, a beautiful hike, an organized closet, a laugh with good friends. Success.

Thanks for a wonderful article. It’s started a thought process that puts me at peace.

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 5:51 pm

Hey Angela –

I love this! It’s pretty cool how much kids can teach you huh? The examples you gave are incredibly true. It’s like a kid painting – when they’re creating art, or building a fort, or creating something, they’re just involved in the process and disappear for a few hours. Time passes and a creation appears.

But when we get older it gets weird... it’s like we forget about the painting, and just start planning. We have an idea what we want it to look like already. We have a deadline. We try to paint it by 3 pm, because we have to do something at 3:30... It ruins the entire process. The result is sometimes the same but the entire process (our life) takes on an entirely differently quality...

**Hazel** on April 23, 2013 at 2:49 pm

I really enjoyed your post and can totally relate to it – thank you. It certainly does seem that when we focus on wanting something, that is what we get – wanting! I am only just learning to embrace whatever comes before me. Everything changes for the better.

**Alexander** on April 23, 2013 at 5:56 pm

You’re welcome Hazel!
Cecilia Harry on April 23, 2013 at 9:28 pm

Hi Alex, what a great post. It reminds me of one of those corny “Successories” photos with the gorgeous nature shot and the inspiring quote underneath (in a good way): “Success: It’s the journey, not the destination.” It truly is that. It is hard to think that way in the west with all the external pressure to climb, climb, climb, but I think every moment/day/chunk of time where we can focus on just being and just living is a success. :) Cheers!

Alexander on April 28, 2013 at 8:42 am

Haha it’s totally true!

The thing that we don’t realize is that you become both successful and happy by first doing TODAY right. Success comes as a natural consequence of working hard today, then tomorrow, then the next day – but it’s only one day at a time. I’ve found that the more we obsess about the endpoint the tougher it is to get there – and the less happy we become.

— Alex

mahavir nautiyal on April 23, 2013 at 11:18 pm

Beautifully written insightful post. Happiness eludes us when we chase it, mirage like, but it may descend upon us gently like snow flakes when we least expect it. We are happy when we are at peace with ourself and in harmony with the world. Happiness is a byproduct and not an acquisition; byproduct of living life in the present meaningfully and intensely, as suggested in the article. Bhagvad Gita ( a Hindu scripture with universal appeal ) says that one should perform one’s duty well and to the best of one’s ability and not worry about the result. The result is dependent on various factors, many of which are not under our control. Hence , it diminishes our intensity and joy of doing the job at hand if we keep worrying about the result. Happiness is in journey and not the destination. Same applies for success. Thanks for the post, Alexander.

Alexander on April 28, 2013 at 8:45 am

Mahavir —
I love that quote from the Bhagavad Gita! It's true – the more you focus on the fruit, the more you forget that you need to plant the tree first.

Michael Z Miller on April 24, 2013 at 12:49 am
Hi Alexander, nice post. When I compare my experience with yours, I found the opposite to be the case. I started a business and had a lucky start. We went to $2 million per year in the second year. My whole life I had just flowed with life, and I let it carry me wherever it wanted. I was the poster child for flow and intrinsic motivation. I did what I wanted all the time.

Making $2 million in 2000 didn't change that either. I just intuitively did what I felt was most necessary at that moment. I ran my days, weeks, and months with rough to do lists, and I remembered most of my necessary tasks. "It's all good," was my motto.

It took 6 years, but that business slowly evaporated underneath me and left me alone, confused, and broke.

My demise was created from what seems to be the mindset you are speaking of: "Going with the flow."

Since then I've turned my life completely around. I've reformed myself to be in flow, yet be focused. I don't think the two are mutually exclusive. Now, I'm more motivated and happy because I know what I need to do and I'm accomplishing it. I have found that when you fail to plan, you plan to fail – it's really true. I've experienced it firsthand and I've realized the benefits of planning and goal setting.

The truth for me is, I'm happier now than I ever was before, even when I had plenty of money in the bank. I'm excited about what I'm doing, passionate even, and I can look at my to do list and see the tasks crossed off. It's exciting. Even more motivating to me is the fact that I know what I'm doing today, tomorrow, the next day, and next week.

That said, I appreciate the experiences you went through as well. I know that your conclusions were hard won. It gives me much to think about. Thanks for that!

Alexander on April 28, 2013 at 8:47 am
Hey Michael –

You definitely bring up some really good points.
My proposed solution definitely is not "going with the flow." Sorry if I came across like that.

For example, every day I have a very structured four hours where I work on my own side thing, despite having a full-time job. Those four hours are timed, planned, and extremely organized. I show up even when I don’t want to.

I don't think I would ever be content just going with the flow either. From an ego perspective, there’s lots of stuff to achieve and get done.

All I’m saying is this: regardless of how successful or happy you want to become, focusing on success or happiness (to the exclusion of all else) rarely results in the two. Usually we end up dramatically screwing over our quality of life.

Yeah we need to do lists, yeah we need structure, plans and goals, but we also need to take it a day at a time.

Does that make any sense? haha

— Alex

sumit on April 24, 2013 at 2:32 am

That was an awesome article. loved it. and got it just at the right time. thank you Alexander

Adedayo ojo on April 24, 2013 at 5:30 am

it all depends on what your definition of happiness means, what some people call success and happiness differ from individuals but true success and happiness comes from God.

Adedayo ojo on April 24, 2013 at 5:32 am

it all depends on what your definition of happiness means, what some people call success and happiness differ from individuals but true success and happiness comes from God.

dan erickson on April 24, 2013 at 5:52 am

I don't chase happiness. I love writing. I love blogging. I love music and photography. I love learning about technology and social media. These things add up to a continual momentum toward
http://www.danericksson.net

ki jong park on April 24, 2013 at 3:43 pm

nice post!!! – i just read over and over.. never was i trul rngaged in what i was doing in that moment... ifrom now on i make it a rule to enjoy the situation and blend myself into enviornment i am in

Miguel Monsivais on April 24, 2013 at 11:19 pm

I’m currently reading “The Power of Now” by Eckhart Tolle and this blog rings a similar bell. It’s just one of those things that I’m currently trying to work on for myself.... but its like the more I try to work on being present in the moment the more negative emotions start happening all over again. I’m alone. I got very few friends. I’m far from family. Far from my old friends. I don’t meet so many people. There are so many resentments that I can’t get over. I feel trapped and its increasingly impossible to even find any motivation to get in the flow. I’m trying and I’m not giving up. I hope I find myself at some point soon.

Dan on April 26, 2013 at 11:10 am

Miguel, from personal experience, after reading Power of Now it created a huge sense of awareness and empowerment for me. I knew I wasn’t my mind and the junk it was spitting at me. However, it’s not going to be easy (even harder), because you are now aware and all the negative emotions are rising to the surface. I went through the same thing and then ”judging” voice comes out. The KEY is to be aware and to not judge yourself. This is good because you are slowly letting go of the negative BS, as long as you don’t believe or judge it.

Alexander on April 28, 2013 at 8:48 am

Hey Miguel –

For whatever it’s worth, I think “finding oneself” is a flawed idea.

If you’re in a tough spot in life, the only suggestion that has worked for me is this: Keep making moves – and don’t be afraid of making the wrong one.
Chris Akins on April 26, 2013 at 11:44 am

Alexander,

You have some great insights. I would add that in order to be “successful” and find meaning in life we first must define what we mean by “success” according to our own core values. When we are chasing something that is not aligned who we are inside, we stop living a life of integrity, and life lacks meaning and is unfulfilled.

However, when we align our pursuits with our values, we find meaning and begin living as purposeful beings.

And that, to me, is the ultimate journey... becoming who we truly are.

Chris

Cecilia Harry on April 26, 2013 at 1:45 pm

Chris, that is a great suggestion. I also think we need to be open to reddefining success when our experiences and knowledge change our perspective. I would not define success today the same way I did 5, 10, 15 years ago.

Alexander on April 28, 2013 at 8:51 am

Yeah this is my experience too, Cecilia.

When I first really got into entrepreneuruship my definition of success was very much "someone else's" because I hadn't thought of my own definition.

Just two years later it's worlds away from what it used to be. I'm with you there!

Alexander on April 28, 2013 at 8:50 am

Chris –

TOTALLY agree. Waaaaaay too many 20 somethings have this idea that success is the 30 million in the bank from selling a successful startup, while living in SF or NYC.

I'm 100% with you there – we all need to really figure out our own definition of success. It's all too common to realize you worked your entire life in pursuit of someone
else's dream... and then wake up miserable.

**Elle** on April 28, 2013 at 11:29 pm

Hi Chris,

I agree with you. We need to define what “success” is.

I think every individual has their own ideals of what success is. Growing up, I had always thought of success as having a high paying job.

However, in the last year and a half, I met some people who challenged my definition of success. Now, my definition has changed. I want a successful life where I can have positive and meaningful relationships with my family, friends, and loved ones.

I’m so glad someone got me to really think of my own definition of success, because now it’s much more meaningful to me.

**Elisa Leeder MS** on April 27, 2013 at 5:22 am

Thank you for sharing your journey of searching for success and happiness as a grown up, Western society young man, and your experience of finding wholeness and satisfaction within Taoism. Your struggle of finding happiness and success guided you to your enlightenment about what it takes to fill your mind with completion through the distinction of the paradox in your lived experience in life.

Your journey can help people find solutions to overcome their struggles. The solution was within you and your life. You found a way to utilize your resources and embrace positive change in your life. Solutions, such as yours, can help to further excel through our preferred set of mind.

Elisa Leeder, MS

**Zidaz** on April 30, 2013 at 5:38 pm

A great article to get people thinking. Happiness is not even possible to experience all the time. We live in a world of duality and knowing one is not possible without experiencing the other. So happiness is only experienced in contrast to sadness. Of course we can come to a point where neither happiness or sadness is experienced for what these are. That is, these are feelings triggered by thoughts that are associated with circumstances and our life.
by thoughts that are associated with circumstances and our life experiences. Nothing more. Observe these and be content. All things will pass, except for contentment with what is.

Sue on May 1, 2013 at 11:20 pm

What a really great article, you are a great writer and you make it all so simple! Thank you!

Sebastian @ www.findingonespath.blogspot.com on May 13, 2013 at 10:00 pm

This was a great post. I enjoyed it. I think it is true that we have to find what motivates us internally in order to find happiness. We can’t do something and force happiness in the long run, at least I can’t. The people who are very successful and happy are often the ones who would do the thing they are doing regardless of the external validation.

Shari on June 5, 2013 at 9:13 am

Thank you for this very enlightening article!

I can not tell you how much I needed to read all of your blogs as well.
I’ve been just let go from a job and chasing success and happiness was just making me ill.
Bottom line, I truly am an intuitive person, as well as choosing to live in the here and now.
I am going back to my true Intrinsic motivations starting NOW. :)
I will have to come back and finish up reading all of the awesome information/replies to your blog later today.
Again, really really good stuff here. More people should read.
Thanks again Alex! You’ve just made a difference in someone’s life.
(As I was in depression mode just yesterday)

Paula on July 13, 2013 at 12:24 pm

Alex, this is a great piece. I nearly choked laughing at myself when I read, “I stopped hanging out with my friends … and read books about happiness.” OMG! What are we doing?!?!? I didn’t even completely realize the folly in that until I read the words you wrote.
Enough of that! I’m going to call some friends. This is ridiculous. Thanks for pointing out the forest amongst the trees.

Julienne on October 11, 2014 at 3:13 am

I love the article. It makes perfect sense. I have fallen victim to the very same trap, over working to achieve success and in constant pursuit of happiness. Although I am realizing the idiocy of
search of happiness. Although I can rationalize the ideologies presented in this article, I’m not doing well with practical application. How do you apply this new train of thought and still maintain a “happy” life-style when the variables stressing you remain the same. E.g. Work is stressful and not aligned with your passions… do you quit to pursue something else?… what if you don’t know what your passions are… what lights the fire inside of you. How do you find that?

In essence, I’d love to feel the joys of just living to day to day, and enjoying the process rather than the destination. Although I know logically what to value, emotionally I am still not fulfilled from these things with the sense that something is missing. If you don’t know what you what to do, how do you find it? If you’re not supposed to go looking for it, do you just sit around and wait for it… which can be stress inducing in itself. /

Appreciate any insight, comments and feedback from you all.

**Martina on December 30, 2014 at 5:23 pm**

What if what I feel like doing(arty things) are things I’m not particularly good at, and they’re also not the things I think are most worthwhile doing.

For instance, growing up, I thought scientists were the most admirable people, people that bring concrete solutions to problems, or those that changed the way we see the world forever, like Darwin, Einstein, Newton etc.

But the thing I’d like to do most(meaning the stuff I would not mind focusing on, and re-peating, and re-doing constantly, without expecting any pay) is artsy stuff, like painting. Or I’d like to learn how to make my own clothes.

But my painting is pretty much 7th grade level mastery, at best. What should I do?

Initially, I thought I could do both-the artsy thing as a hobby, but I do not see how I could manage to do both, not to mention doing them well.

And now I’ve started a degree in electronic engineering, but I don’t really enjoy it, in fact most of it seems to dull and rigid, I often cannot imagine myself working in this field for the rest of my life.But I wonder if this is because I actually don’t like the subjects, or because I hate the general approach to it in this field(meaning hyper-competitive, male-dominated crap that lives little room for “flow”, as you put it)

**Jim on January 17, 2015 at 11:30 pm**

I have thought often about this as I realize days and weeks are slipping by in pursuit not of success but simple stability-paying the...
bills. I am educated and experienced yet am having trouble keeping a career going. As I get older this becomes more of a problem because age discrimination is real. I see people who are successful for the very reason you mentioned. If I didn't have to worry so much about keeping the lights on (notice I don't say being rich) I'd feel more free to pursue passions and inspirations in the now. The one thing I always wanted to do, and the only thing, was fly. Life has determined that this is not what I get to do so having a passion is not necessarily enough. How can I get to this level of freedom? I've always felt that once I had that lower area of Maslow's pyramid fulfilled I could go onto the higher, intrinsic pursuits. I welcome your thoughts on this.

Submit a Comment
Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment

Submit Comment

☐ Sign up for email updates

☐ Notify me of followup comments via e-mail

Designed by Elegant Themes | Powered by WordPress