

Sue Mann explains why if we all experienced a little more success in life perhaps we would have the confidence and drive to achieve more. But could it be that we are allowing others to define what success means for us and will this inevitably lead to failure, disillusion and discontent?

WORKING OUT WHAT SUCCESS MEANS

There's a line in the 1980 hit movie *Fame*, which goes: "You want fame? Well fame costs. And right here is where you start paying. ... with sweat." The trouble is in these reality TV days, fame - and sometimes fortune - seem to be pretty easily come by for those plucked from obscurity to appear on telly programmes and start "living the dream". And what is that dream exactly? Well, it seems to be based on the notion that Posh and Becks and other celebrities of stage, screen and football field live the kind of successful lives that the wannabes aspire to.

And that is where the problem lies. Happiness and fulfilment are only really possible if we define our own terms for what success means and work towards achieving our goals. Take engineer Steve Byrne for example. He was one of the employees influenced by a change programme at the Home and Personal Care division of Unilever, Port Sunlight, which was spearheaded by human resources specialist Damian Hughes.

For Byrne success meant giving his children the opportunities that he never had. "He defined this as giving them access to the best possible education," says Hughes. "But the best school was in a [catchment] area where he could not afford to buy a house so, even though he had no previous building experience, he bought a plot of land and built his own house as near as possible to the school so that his children would be eligible to attend the school."

It is remarkable to think that a change programme at work could motivate someone to realise such a huge personal ambition but Hughes says there have been many other similar stories arising from the Port Sunlight programme, many of which he relates in his book *Liquid Thinking* (£11.99, ISBN 0955 184800).

He reports stunning benefits for Unilever too, in terms of improved productivity and performance, at the factory which manufactures liquid products - hence the title of the book.

Recent research by the Chartered Management Institute indicates that the majority of employees are still a long way from bringing their whole selves to work. Even a tiny bit of that enthusiasm that they might show for a pastime or hobby could make a real difference if applied in the workplace but the question remains, how do you switch people on to work if they don't have that spark within them?

The Institute's survey found that individuals believe their organisations are failing to help them reach their goals. Jo Causon, director of marketing and corporate affairs at the Institute, says: "What appears to be missing is the link between understanding that achieving potential is important and the provision of appropriate training and development to ensure talents do not go untapped. It is a scenario that, if it carries on, will impact on organisational performance with individuals moving on, taking their skills and drive with them."

It is a gap that is expanding warns Causon. "More often than not development programmes are not properly aligned to the needs of individuals or the business. There is still far too much in the way of training for its own sake or ad hoc programmes that are not tailored to the long-term goals of the organisation, or the aspirations of the individuals concerned."

Hughes says that his voluntary work with youth club Collyhurst and Moston in inner city Manchester has helped him to develop an understanding of what enables people to start realising that they can and should own their own definition of success.

As an example he says: "When Robin Reid joined the club as a young kid he was absolutely frightened of stepping into a boxing ring. Gaining some respect and ability and going into school were his goals."

Hughes says that over time Reid learnt to box really well and eventually competed in the Barcelona Games in 1992, winning an Olympic bronze medal before turning professional.

Gaining skills in the boxing ring, or the workplace arena, gives individuals a sense of achievement and self worth. "Ask most managers and they will tell you that, from the individual's perspective, the issue is about acquiring skills so that they are able to take on new responsibilities and address more complex changes," says Causon. "They talk about having a sense of purpose in their work, achieving their goals and career development."

Setting achievable goals is the secret to long-term success. It is possible that Reid had the Olympics in his sights from the outset but he nevertheless took it one step at a time.

This notion of taking small steps to achieve big goals is derived from Tao Te Ching who said: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step".

In engineering circles this principle is known as Kaizen. It has gained widespread recognition and can even be applied to your workspace - see article on page 30.

Dr Robert Maurer, author of *One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way* (Workman Publishing New York 2004, ISBN 0761129235), is quoted as saying: "Think small thoughts, take small actions, solve small problems. Lose weight not by a crash diet but by eating one bite less at each meal, then, a month later eating two bites less. Start a life-changing exercise programme by standing - just standing - on a treadmill for one minute a day."

Institute research shows that 38 per cent of managers frequently look back over their career wishing they had developed new skills and one in five (22 per cent) often consider how they could have progressed more quickly by 'taking more risks'.

At the turn of the year many of us may be pondering what we could have done better in the year just past and even, perhaps, musing on the meaning of life. Author Nigel Marsh certainly did in his book *Fat, 40 6-Fired* (Piatkus, £7.99, ISBN 0 7499 2701 1). I quote: "It seems a shame if life's all just about upgrading your car to the latest model or paying off your mortgage. The perplexing riddle of the purpose of life is perfectly encapsulated by the contrast of two of my favourite quotes," writes Marsh.

The first quote is by George Bernard Shaw and includes the lines: 'Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations'.

The second is attributed to Danny DeVito in the film *Other People's Money*: 'The person with the most money when he dies, wins.'

If you are not yet convinced by the argument that fame does in fact cost and that happiness lies in setting your own goals, spare a thought for the people of Bhutan whose Shangri-la style peace and tranquillity was shattered in 1999 with the sudden arrival of cable TV:

Bhutan was the last country in the world to get television but it has since been blamed for outbreaks of crime, anti-social behaviour and even anorexia in the tiny Himalayan kingdom. However, once people have seen the light flickering from that box there is no turning back just a hope that they will learn how to adjust their mindsets.

The experiences of the Bhutanese is one that Hughes relates to illustrate how easy it is for individuals to succumb to imposed definitions of success, from X-Factor wannabes on our own reality TV shows to disgruntled Himalayan truck drivers, perhaps dreaming that success means owning a Humvee.

He says: "In my experience most people never actually take the time to define what success means to them."

But perhaps the last word on the subject should go to Hughes' father Brian, a professional boxing coach who has trained amateur, British, European, Commonwealth and World Champions to success.

Many of the boxers he has taken under his wing had never set foot into a ring before he coached them at the youth club he founded in Manchester.

Hughes senior taught himself to read and write and has written eight sports biographies, including one about Dennis Violet, one of the 'Busby Babes' Manchester United team players. This book reached number one in the Sunday Times sports books listings.

Incidentally, father and son have written a biography of boxing legend Sugar Ray Robinson, which comes out in February.

Brian Hughes says: "Find something you love doing and then do it to the very best of your ability. Don't worry about not being the best in your class, your area or your country but worry about being the best that you can possibly be and don't stop working until you can answer that question positively."

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