

# INTRODUCTION

*“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do and liking how you do it.”*

**(Maya Angelou)**

*“Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.”*

**(Stephen Brennan)**

If there is one aspect of the educational experience that has more to do with engagement than simply acquiring the right credentials, it is *personal success*. Does this change once students get to college? Absolutely not. While admission into a post-secondary institution does in fact signify a certain level of personal success, it does not end there. In fact, with the increased independence, responsibilities and expectations, it often intensifies at the collegiate level. And to be honest, achieving personal success

is not always easy nor does it happen instantly. Students cannot just use an all-powerful ring like the Green Lantern or wiggle their nose like Samantha on *Bewitched*. That's right, there is no quick gimmick for success. Instead, students must identify, understand and apply a formalized plan to accomplish their goals and fulfill their dreams.

During their first year in college, students typically receive ample literature related to academic success and are usually directed to the Office of Career Services (or some department similarly named) to get literature that promotes professional success. Although these efforts are highly commendable, rarely is literature given that promotes *personal* success. And if there is information about personal success distributed to students, they receive little to no instruction in how to use the information effectively or in ways that maximize impact. Generally speaking, there is no formal orientation to personal success. By no means am I diminishing institutional efforts. I just want to make it clear

that there are different ways to harness resources in higher education. There are a number of structured, institutional strategies that can be employed to promote personal success, all of which can open doors to a world of possibilities and help students see success in new ways. With that in mind, this book reflects a very strategic approach to help students attain success. I offer this book as a complement to institutional efforts designed to help students achieve academic and professional success. Understanding how students' quest for personal success is grounded in the larger context of higher education -- with its assumptions and possibilities, its barriers and benefits -- adds value to the overall educational experience. In this regard, students and educational institutions are both beneficiaries.

I am well aware that a principal measure of success for college administrators is the number of students who graduate and pursue graduate or professional degrees, or who obtain jobs in their field of study. People often ask,

*What is your GPA?* or *What are your plans after graduation?*

Although students may perform well academically and excel professionally, personal success is not narrowly contained in a classroom or a graduation ceremony either. What cannot be measured quantitatively is the number of students who feel they achieve personal success while still enrolled in college. So the question has become much more pressing for those who truly realize the intrinsic value of cultivating skills for personal success. In this vein, I approach this book in a way that brings personal success into sharp focus. I think institutions should capitalize on students' time spent inside and outside of the classroom, and shape their experiences decisively around personal notions of success.

Personal success means different things to different people. To jumpstart the discussions and make sure we are on the same page, we must first have an operating definition of **personal success**. In its broadest sense, success is defined as *the accomplishment of what is aimed for or desired; achievement*.

More specifically, personal success implies an explicit and implicit process that results from internalized attitudes, ideas and perceptions about what one can or cannot achieve. Clearly defined dreams, ambitions, goals and expectations are critical ingredients for personal success. But personal success is neither automatic nor manufactured, nor does it come without sacrifice or struggle. Individuals must overcome obstacles and confront challenges that impede their personal success. They must also possess the drive and perseverance needed to remain on the path to their goals and dreams. Since personal success transcends the academic realm or the professional domain, students must willingly take the initiative and shoulder the responsibility of going beyond these arenas when striving for personal success in college.

It is my hope that this book will have far-reaching impact in helping students achieve personal and professional success within the broader context of the collegiate

experience. The book is designed to stimulate and encourage an appreciation of the benefits that will accrue as students achieve personal success in college and beyond. So I offer this book as a uniquely appropriate mechanism that elevates discussions of personal success and promotes serious self-reflection for the reader, but especially for students within the time of matriculation on the college campus. It is also my hope that this book will validate the experiences of college students in general. It is intended to help students fully realize their potential and empower them for success, regardless of race/ethnicity, age, gender, classification or socioeconomic status, or in spite of a checkered past. With each page that is turned, I want students to feel a greater sense of purpose and be propelled to a higher level of personal success.

Woven into the discussion of the principles is a unique blend of revealing stories, personal experiences, and intriguing anecdotes that help bring the principles to life and

make them more personally meaningful for students. Clearly, the list of principles is not all-inclusive. I deliberately focus on twelve practical principles that I feel will *most* help students achieve greater levels of personal success:

- Principle 1: Self-Motivate
- Principle 2: Dream Big
- Principle 3: Embrace Challenges
- Principle 4: Link Arms and Stay Connected
- Principle 5: Make a Difference
- Principle 6: Soar, Don't Creep
- Principle 7: Plan Purposely and Prepare Strategically
- Principle 8: Accept Change as an Essential Part of Life
- Principle 9: Find a Mentor
- Principle 10: Visualize Success
- Principle 11: Cherish the Moment
- Principle 12: Protect Your Front Row Seat

Individually, each principle is its own lens that sharpens students' focus on success. Each serves as a guidepost, a kind of architectural flow chart that navigates students through the personal success maze. Collectively, they function as a vehicle through which personal success can be achieved. The degree of success attained is directly related

to the extent to which students embrace the principles. Ultimately, the level of success attained is a matter of the heart – *the heart of a student!*

As a bonus, I include reflection questions at the end of each chapter. The reflection questions are introspective in that they help readers discover deep-level connections between their personal life and the success principles. They help stimulate the readers' thinking about the principles in a way that is conducive to student success. Readers are encouraged to reconnect with self and embrace the courage to pursue the success they desire through honest reflection. At their core, the reflection questions promote more actionable results and application of the principles that would show that, quoting from Sidney A. Friedman, "You can achieve anything you want in life if you have the courage to dream it, the intelligence to make a realistic plan, and the will to see that plan through to the end."

## PRINCIPLE 1: SELF-MOTIVATE

- ♥ **Matters of the Heart:** This principle focuses on the importance of motivating yourself and renewing your spirit in order to achieve greater levels of personal success.

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*“The wonders you seek are within yourself. The wizard never gave anything to the Scarecrow, the Lion, and the Tin Man that they didn’t already have.”*

(Anonymous)

*“In the midst of winter, I found there was within me, an invincible summer.”*

(Albert Camus)

One of the most valuable lessons we can learn and pass on is to **value ourselves**. Even when we’ve made mistakes or seemingly have a scarlet letter burned on our chest, we still have value. But we cannot simply wait on someone else to define our worth and value – we should define it ourselves and remind ourselves of our worth

constantly. To use this familiar saying, you cannot wait on your ship to come sailing in; sometimes you've got to swim out to meet it. This only happens when you have a positive, healthy definition of self. That is the premise of this principle.

In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey (1989) discusses the importance of "sharpening the saw." Sharpening the saw relates to renewing yourself physically, spiritually, mentally, and socially/emotionally. Covey writes, "It's preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have – you" (p.288). It is this type of deliberate preservation and enhancement that allows you to create an atmosphere that positively frames your world. But you must invest holistically in your own success. Whether your goals and dreams are secretly desired or openly declared, sharpening your saw helps to condition your mind for success. So you should consistently sharpen your saw, take action and move in a direction that propels

you to new heights of success.

I am sensitive to the fact that many anxieties may plague college students. College culture is replete with a barrage of papers, exams, group projects, organizational meetings, campus activities, etc. Consequently, students may become mentally fatigued or personally overwhelmed. But have no fear. There are remedies and techniques you can use to self-motivate and better deal with the anxieties:

(1) **Carve out some “me time.”** Investing time in yourself is never a waste. In fact, it helps to reduce the stress in your life that can make you vulnerable and susceptible to more stress. So learn to be protective of your time by creating boundaries. Cease and desist from over-committing. At times you have to establish boundaries and simply tell people, “it’s me o’clock.” You deserve some of the energy you devote to others, so put yourself on the “to do” list. After all, aren’t you worth it? Sometimes we are so consumed with what’s going on around us and we are so busy trying to help others

manage their lives, that we neglect our own lives. Well I encourage you now to resign your position as general manager of other people's problems and spend quality time with YOU.

(2) **Check in with yourself regularly without feeling insecure.** Tune into your own spirit and let your soul breathe. There are times when you must steal away from others just to refresh and recharge. Don't cheat or rob yourself of this type of personal intervention. Go on a personal retreat and gain fresh perspective. Do what's necessary to calm your spirit. Prayer? Meditation? Writing in a journal? Listening to music? Your moment; your call. But whatever it is, just take a positive pause and check in with you. Every few months, a few of my girlfriends and I get together for a "girlfriends getaway." The location varies depending on the season and our need to recharge. We don't always select places that are far away or costly either. What's most important is that we all come together to *relax*,

*relate, release.* By valuing our quality time together, we put ourselves back on the priority list and check in with self.

**(3) Acknowledge your sources of strength and work on your weaknesses.** Popeye used spinach to make him strong. Kryptonite made Superman weak. What gives you strength? What weakens your resolve to keep pressing on? I love the African proverb that asserts, *He who conceals his disease cannot expect to be healed.* What this suggests is that the only way to go forward is to acknowledge those things that advance your plans as well as those things that hinder them.

**(4) Own your mistakes and move on.** You are human so you are going to make mistakes. But you do not have to be defined by your mistakes or stuck in the moments of your mistakes. Own what you've done and move on. Granted, some of our mistakes may be more consequential than others but do what you can to make it right (if possible), then keep it moving. I often tell my students that "falling in water doesn't make you drown but staying there will." So if you

make a mistake, don't drown in it, so to speak. Own it and move on.

(5) **Prioritize on paper.** It's important to have a clear plan of action so you will know what your goal is and how you will reach it. Whether it's a business plan, spiritual dream or personal goal you want to accomplish (e.g., lose weight, attend a professional conference, get a 4.0 GPA this semester, join a student organization, reduce your carbon footprint, etc.) write it down and put a date on it. Yes, write it down then execute around priorities, which means putting first things first based on what's important to you (Covey, 1989). Once you make a list of your priorities, you should stay focused on the list and keep things in perspective. Writing down your goals, dreams, aspirations, setbacks, disappointments, etc. allows you to chronicle your journey through written word. It also lets you see how you've grown through different experiences and seasons of life. You will have tangible proof of the progress you've made and clear

reflections of the lessons you've learned. As Napoleon Hill stresses, "Reduce your plan to writing. The moment you complete this, you will have definitely given concrete form to the intangible desire."

In order to self-motivate, you sometimes need to "reprogram your mental computer" as noted Pastor Joel Osteen writes in his book, *Your Best Life Now*. He states, "When things don't work out as you planned, rather than complaining, look for something good in your circumstances. Fill your mind with good thoughts." (p. 113) He further illustrates this point with a story about a little boy swinging at a baseball:

*A little boy went out to the backyard to play with a baseball bat and a ball. He said to himself, "I am the best hitter in the world." Then he threw the ball in the air and took a swing at it, but he missed. Without a moment's hesitation, he picked up the ball and tossed it in the air again, saying as he swung the bat, "I'm the best hitter in all the world." He swung and missed. Strike two. He tossed the ball up again, concentrating more intensely, even more determined, saying, "I am the best hitter in all the world!" He swung the bat with all his might. Whiff! Strike three. The little boy laid down his bat and smiled real big. "What do you know?" he said. "I'm the best pitcher in all the world!" (p. 113)*

Attitude is everything, right? This story illustrates the inherent power of your thoughts and words. It also demonstrates that when you transform your thoughts, you transform your life. So release any mental strongholds that may cripple your progress in route to personal success. Negative thoughts are like toxic wastes that seep to the surface. They sabotage your success. Therefore, you need to equip yourself with confidence-building thoughts. Invest unapologetically in your self-worth and network. Sharpen your saw, motivate yourself and let nothing stand in your way.

*Keep rising!*



think you are? Explain how this moment impacted your pursuit of success.