

Success is a Choice

BY Rick Pitino

Winston Churchill's rallying cry for the British people during WW II was simple and succinct: hoping and praying for victory was fine, but deserving it was what really mattered. According to Churchill, victory comes only to those who work long and hard, who are willing to pay the price in blood, sweat and tears. Hard work is also the basic building block of every kind of achievement: Without it, everything else is pointless. You can start with a dream or an idea or a goal, but before any of your hopes can be realized, you must truly deserve your success.

You want to succeed? Okay, then succeed. Deserve it. How? Outwork everybody in sight. Sweat the small stuff. Sweat the big stuff. Go the extra mile. But whatever it takes, put your heart and soul into everything you do.

Success is not a lucky break. It is not a divine right. It is not an accident of birth. Success is a choice!

The 10 Steps

To succeed you need a plan of attack. These 10 steps are based upon the premise that any of us can achieve things we never thought possible -- because [too many](#) of us constantly undersell ourselves. We are conditioned to think we can't do things. We are conditioned to settle for less. We are conditioned to think our dreams are always going to be out of reach. We are conditioned to think that it's always going to be other people who grab life's brass ring. We are conditioned to fail.

But we don't have to. [Instead, we can choose to succeed.](#)

Step 1:

Build Self-esteem

The important thing to remember is that self-esteem must be earned. If the effort is there, plus the discipline to back it up, you will automatically start to feel better about yourself. Life is not something that happens to you, something you are powerless to do anything about. You make the choice to succeed or you fail. You decide by your work ethic and your will. It is never too late to transform your life and implement the changes that are going to lead you to your dreams.

People with low self-esteem are often unfocused and easily frustrated. They lack discipline, have poor organizational skills, have an inability to finish things, and have a sense of discontent, sensitivity to criticism and envy others. They are set up to underachieve.

Underachiever mentality is about making excuses. Other people are lucky. The boss likes them. Men (or women) get all the breaks. It's someone else's fault, not mine.

Step 2

Set Demanding Goals

Goals are the individual steps we must take in pursuit of our dreams. Your long-term successes are a direct result of what you achieve every day.

A big component of a successful attitude is to recognize your weaknesses and confront them. Short-term, attainable goals can ease you through the process of shoring up the weakness. For example, if you decide to get in shape, you could start by exercising once or twice a week. After reaching these short-term goals, and feeling good about the results, you can begin to create goals that are more demanding.

Understand that you are not going to attain all of your goals all the time, but the pursuit of the goal is a step in the right direction and something that should be commended. Small successes breed larger successes. You must constantly push yourself to make your victories bigger and bigger.

Attaining your goals changes your behavior, and it is that change in behavior that will ultimately lead to your dreams.

Step 3

Always Be Positive

You can be extremely hardworking, but if you are not positive, you are inhibiting your chance of success.

You will always be surrounded by people that are negative. These negative voices can become a chorus that knocks the life out of you. You must try to cut these people from your life, or at least be aware of their destructive message. Looking at a situation positively enhances the quality of life.

Self-motivated people look at each day as a new opportunity. The more trying the times, the more positive you have to be. We must learn how to live in and enjoy the present, and not dwell on the failures of the past, nor the anxieties of the future.

Step 4

Establish Good Habits

The only way we can systematically acquire good habits is by being organized. Start off each day knowing there is a purpose in everything we do. The day is not something that happens to us. It's something we control and shape with our actions. If we are not organized, we set ourselves up to be unfocused, to underachieve and ultimately fail.

Do not put things off. Do the more unpleasant things early in the day, thus freeing yourself for what you enjoy doing. Get yourself in shape to be mentally and physically prepared for your day and strive to impress not only the people you are meeting for the first time but also the people you see every day.

Do your homework. You must always operate on the axiom that knowledge is power, and the more knowledge you have about something, the more completely you can control the situation. Remember, if you are not prepared, someone else will be.

Step 5

Master the Art of Communication

Good communication skills are essential, and they start with listening. Most of us can instantly improve our skills simply by listening more and speaking less. One way to better communicate with people is to own up to your mistakes. By admitting your mistakes, your inherent message is that you are trying to be conciliatory, that you really do want to correct the misunderstanding.

One thing to avoid is having to be right all of the time. Your goal is to communicate better, not to try to win every discussion or treat every conversation as if it's a contest with a winner and a loser.

People want to know why they are being asked to do things. They want to feel they are part of the process.

Don't let things fester when problems arise. Confront problems immediately because if they aren't attended to and dealt with, they invariably get worse.

Step 6

Learn from Role Models

People all around us have things to teach us if only we could be aware of them. We don't always have to be reinventing the wheel. The people we know and work with must be used as resources, or we short change ourselves. We are interested in identifying traits in others that we can use to make ourselves better.

We must also learn from other's mistakes. Sometimes learning what not to do is more important than learning what to do. Take advantage of the lessons learned by people who have made the journeys before you; consider what might have led to failure, as well as what contributed to success.

Step 7

Thrive on Pressure

Stress is the enemy. It robs us of our focus and inhibits our performance. Pressure is only negative if we allow it to be. Pressure only becomes a negative when we are ill-prepared to handle it and not ready to perform in a given situation. If we have taken the steps to be prepared and to anticipate how to deal with these situations, we can actually turn up the volume of pressure and let it benefit us.

When Michael Jordan calls for the ball with 30 seconds left at the end of the game, you know that he has worked hard to be ready for the pressure, and will succeed in scoring the final goal to win the game.

Pressure can bring out extraordinary accomplishments. It pushes us harder. It focuses our efforts on the important goals. It concentrates our power where it counts.

Step 8

Be Ferociously Persistent

More than anything else, it is persistence that keeps us great. Anyone can be great for a day, a week, a month. The people who ultimately will be successful are the ones who understand that success is a long-term commitment, a marathon instead of a sprint.

You must develop a “PHD” attitude. Poor, Hungry, and Driven. The kind of attitude that will never allow you to be content but will always drive you to learn more and be better. It’s the kind of attitude that starts with the premise that we can always improve.

You are always going to face difficult times that tax and challenge you. This is the time to keep working as hard as you ever have, because the harder you work, the harder it is for you to surrender.

Step 9

Learn from Adversity

We all at one time or another will encounter an adversity that threatens our will to continue and leaves us doubting our abilities. This is when you have to step back and evaluate your role in the process. Why did you fail? Were your goals wrong, or was it the means you took to get to those goals?

You have to examine your role in the failure and accept your share of the blame. You can't blame it all on other people. You can't blame it all on fate. You can't fall victim to the notion that your failure was totally due to forces beyond your control, regardless of what they might be. All this does is reinforce the theory that you have no control over your life and what happens to it.

You create your own luck. You create what happens to you, based on your decisions. You create your future, both by your actions and your non-actions.

Sometimes you will find that your goals weren't misguided; it was your approach to them.

No matter what your job is, no matter how many success or failures you have, you must always conduct yourself with the utmost respect. For the image you leave behind today could well determine how you'll do tomorrow. You want the image to be of a positive, honorable person.

Step 10

Survive Success

Becoming successful is a process that never ends. The methods you used to become successful must always be part of your life, or you will start to drift back to the same bad habits that you put so much time and effort in changing in the first place.

Never forget what you did right. Keep going back and examining what you did to get you here. Write down your own secrets to success. Study them. If nothing else, they will remind you that it wasn't luck or good fortune that caused your success, but an entire lifestyle of achievement.

“If it ain't broken, break it” – and then make it better.