

How Do You Define Success?



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HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS? Everybody has a unique way of looking at it.

Some consider it financial security; others envision a life of service to others. Each person has a unique, God-given mission to fulfill. It's a one-of-a-kind task that belongs to no one else—and can be accomplished by no one else. How you define success affects the way you live your life.

Consider these definitions of success that are adapted from the work of author Robert Louis Stevenson: "That person is a success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent people and the love of children; who has filled a unique niche and accomplished his or her task; who leaves the world better than before, whether by a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of the earth's beauty or failed to express it; who looked for the best in others and gave the best he or she had."

Here are some stories based on Stevenson's definitions of success.

One who has lived well...

To 72-year-old Franklin H. Smith of Brunswick, Georgia, living well involved finding contentment in his simple life as a cobbler who repaired the townsfolks' shoes for 44 years. "It doesn't cost me anything to be happy," said Smith, who always greeted each of his customers with a smile and a joke. Because of his positive approach to his job, most people in his county knew him. His work felt satisfying because he enjoyed his craft and loved his neighbors. "You can't get along without people," Smith observed.

Laughed often...

The Rev. William Pindar of Philadelphia not only laughed often but encouraged others to join in. His ministry involved visiting hospitals and prisons to administer the therapeutic healing of laughter. He carried a "humor bag," in which he kept funny hats, masks, joke books, and other materials designed to create good cheer. He got folks to tap into their sense of humor and playfulness.

Loved much...

According to Sukey Rosenbaum of New York, loving others starts with meeting their basic needs. Most nights, she left her job as a magazine copy editor to walk to Grand Central Terminal, where she offered food, clothes, and kindness to homeless men and women. Sharing their hardships

Belgium's Cardinal Désiré Mercier (1851-1926) once offered the following advice on living a successful life: "I will reveal to you a secret of sanctity and of happiness: If every day, during five minutes, you are able to quiet your imagination, to close your eyes to the things of the senses and your ears to the rumors of the earth, to enter within your self, and there, in the sanctuary of your soul, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, thus to speak to the Divine Spirit."

"Holy Spirit, Soul of my soul, I adore Thee. Guide me, strengthen me, console me. Tell me what to do. Give me Thy orders, and I promise to submit to whatever You desire of me and to accept everything You allow to happen to me. Let me only know Thy will."

"If you do this, your life will flow happily, serene and consoled, even in the midst of pain, for grace will be proportioned to the trial, giving you the strength to bear it; and loaded with merits, you will reach the gates of Paradise."

changed the way Mrs. Rosenbaum saw herself and others. The homeless, she said, are individuals "all trying to maintain some dignity and sense of self...I seem to have some capacity to make people feel better about themselves. So I guess that's why I'm here."

Gained respect...

Fashion model Jeffrey Calenberg made up to \$7,500 a day for a photo shoot. But that was not why he earned the respect of his colleagues. He chose only jobs that didn't conflict with his principles and moral standards. For him, that meant refusing to work on ads promoting cigarettes or alcohol.

Gained children's love...

Bernadette and Landon Richie of Springfield Gardens, New York, experienced the love of 45 children in a period of 15 years by serving as their foster parents. It was out of gratitude for their happy family life that the couple opened their loving home to children without one. The Richies vowed that although more than one foster child might be in their care, each would be treated fairly and equally, but as the unique youngsters they were. Mrs. Richie believed it was important to "do things for people out of the kindness of your heart."

Accomplished a task...

Joe Giron and Manuel Martinez had their work cut

out for them when they decided to do something about the deterioration of Denver's Westside back in 1971. The unsafe living conditions compelled the men to set up an organization that would help minorities repair their homes with voluntary labor. Over the years, more than 1,000 homes were fixed by Brothers Redevelopment Inc. Additional projects to build and finance houses meant renewed vitality in the once decaying area. "We were serious about what we were going to do," said Giron. "We made a commitment to deliver a product that the community needed, and we weren't going to stop until we did. We were set on helping our families, so why not help the entire neighborhood?"

Rescued a Soul...

Officer Roger Behr of the Austin Police Department was paid to arrest criminals. Deacon Roger Behr gave his time to lead them in prayer. After he joined the diaconate, one of Officer Behr's duties was visiting the county jail. "When you come face to face with these people, you realize they're just another human being, just like me," he said. "They want to know that even though they have screwed up, they are still loved by God."

Appreciated the Earth...

Betsy Hannula of Westminster, Massachusetts, was the third generation of her family to welcome urban children to their country home as hosts for

the Fresh Air Fund. One of the first to visit Mrs. Hannula and her husband, Edward, was Valarie Rivers, then age nine, who returned for the next five summers.

The rural vacations left such an impression on Valarie that she went on to earn a college degree in agriculture. "I'll never forget the first thing she did," recalled Mrs. Hannula about first meeting the girl who had only known city streets. "She asked if she could walk on the grass."

Looked for the Best...

Godfrey Kobets opened the DeLaSalle Education Center in Kansas City, Missouri, to teach troubled teens with learning disabilities, behavior problems, and drug dependency to succeed by finding and developing their individual talents. Student Aaron Cann, a one-time crack dealer, said the school helped him discover his self-respect: "Now I see a chance that I can amount to something."

Gave the Best...

"If you take the initiative, you can make things happen," said Maryland homemaker Lynda Draper. She made things happen after learning that refrigerator repairs routinely resulted in the release of chlorofluorocarbons that damage the ozone layer. She complained to General Electric, to environmental groups, and to government officials. Their joint efforts worked. Within months, General Electric revised its repair procedures to recapture the damaging gases.

 **"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."**

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Between Failure and Success

Failure and success are not always opposites. Failure can be a necessary step leading to achievement. For instance, diver and four-time Olympic gold medalist Pat McCormick assured her students, "You will never become a champion until you learn how to fail." And Motivation Corporation founder Joe C. Hearn observed, "If you've never failed, you haven't set your goals high enough. Fear of failure is the reason people don't establish goals."

There wasn't much that John Pierpont didn't fail at doing: teaching, law, business, poetry, ministry, politics. When he died in 1866, he had achieved none of his ambitions. But where he saw only failure, others found a kind and honest man who stood against slavery and supported social reform. And he left the world a remarkable legacy as the writer of the song "Jingle Bells." Its simple, happy words still echo from one Christmas season to the next.

Sometimes, too, it's possible to mistake success for failure. On Good Friday, it seemed apparent to all that the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, was over, that His message had no meaning. It all seemed obvious. It just wasn't true.

The triumph of Easter Sunday revealed the resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, making it the ultimate success story. Jesus had fulfilled His mission and accomplished God's plan for humankind.

"Our souls are not hungry for fame, comfort, wealth, or power. Those rewards create almost as many problems as they solve. Our souls are hungry for meaning, for the sense that we have figured out how to live so that our lives matter, so that the world will be at least a little bit different for our having passed through it."

—Rabbi Harold Kushner,
"When All You Ever Wanted Isn't Enough"

This is an edited reprint of the classic Christopher News Note "How Do You Define Success?"