

Never Give Up

Jason Navallo

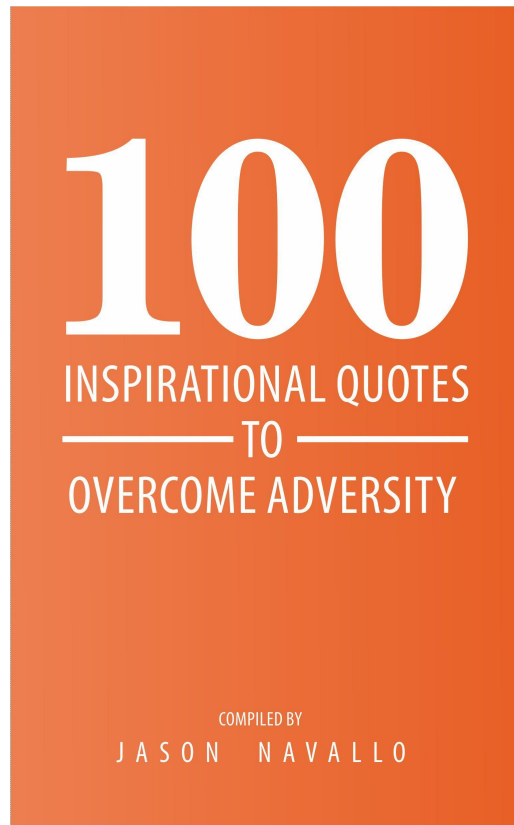


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Introduction

It's easy to give up. It's easy to throw in the towel when life throws us a big punch. People let us down, things don't always go according to plan, and we may feel as if we will never achieve what we set out for; as if things won't get better. Sometimes, life's ups and downs can seem too tough to handle.

I refuse to give up on my dreams. My vision for the future is stronger than any struggles or setbacks I face in the present because I know the surest way to succeed lies in never giving up. No matter how long it takes or how hard I have to work, I will not stop until I've achieved what I set out for, even if I have to fall flat on my face in order to improve and learn a valuable lesson.

I write books that I would like to read; books that I would look to for inspiration when times get tough. Some people love my work, and some people don't. This is something I have accepted, as an author, for having a writing style that's extraordinary. It's never easy having your work judged and reviewed. However, I'll accept a few negative reviews in order to reach my core audience: the visionaries, from all walks of life, who are driven to become successful. To them, my work is fuel for the hustle, which is exactly what I intend for it to be.

I've learned never to compare myself to others. Everyone has their own path; their own journey. And success takes longer for some than others. That's why I look straight ahead towards my goals, and try to always surround myself around the right people who will help me succeed because it's a team effort. You truly cannot make it on your own.

Aim for greatness. You may go through hell to get there, but nothing will stop you if you keep a determined mindset; if you keep moving. This book would've never come into existence had I given up; had I gave into my fear of failure. I pushed myself to great lengths, sacrificing my time and energy to chase perfection, in order to achieve excellence, even if no one reads.

A continuation of *Success: 30 Interviews with Entrepreneurs & Executives*, this book, features 20 inspirational interviews I've conducted with the leaders from some of America's fastest-growing private companies. It's a short book that serves as a commitment to my readers, and to myself, that I will keep writing, even when times get tough. Never give up.

Luther Cifers



Luther Cifers is the founder and president of YakAttack LLC; a paddlesports accessory manufacturing company focused primarily on the kayak fishing market. From 2009 to 2014, YakAttack has averaged 156% annual growth, with a 3-year growth of 902% from 2012 to 2014.

A self-described homeschool dropout, Luther started his career in manufacturing with an entry-level position of putting sheet pans into a belt oven that cured carbon brushes. He quickly climbed the ranks at the 3rd tier automotive component manufacturer, acquiring skills in manufacturing, engineering, programming, and management, spending most of his 20-year career designing products and automated manufacturing equipment.

In 2008, Luther took up the hobby of kayak fishing, and as a problem solver by nature, identified some opportunities for new products for outfitting kayaks. A classic “garage startup,” YakAttack was launched in 1999 with a few hundred dollars and has remained organically funded. An unwavering adherence to a set of core values including honesty, creating success for customers, creating opportunity for employees, and manufacturing exclusively in the U.S.A., has propelled YakAttack’s rapid growth and has made it one of the most popular and respected brands in the rapidly-growing kayak fishing market.

1. How do you define success?

I define success as the achievement of one’s goals. Success for individuals, groups, and companies can be very different since goals vary. When you achieve what you set out to accomplish, you’ve succeeded.

2. What is the key to success?

It might be more of a ring of keys to success. When I think of a key, I think of something needed to unlock a door. The path to success has many doors and requires more than one key. I’ll list what I view as the 5 most important ones:

Key #1: Know yourself. Success requires persistence, and too often people set out on impulsive journeys only to find when things get tough, they have embarked on a journey they don't want to be on. If you don't truly know yourself, it can be easy to set goals that seem attractive at first, but do not really suit you. Knowing yourself is a prerequisite to the second key: knowing your mission.

Key #2: Know your mission. Too often in business, the defined goal is simply "to make money." While creating wealth is a worthwhile endeavor, it's a means, not an end. What will making money help you achieve? What is the thing you really care about? Is it security for yourself or your family? Luxury? Power? Empowering others? Making the world a better place? Leaving a lasting mark on the world? There is intrinsic value in the mission because the act of farming is often greater than the fruit. The road to success is not an easy one, and the water of perseverance is drawn from the well of purpose. A shallow or misplaced purpose doesn't give you much to draw from. Know what truly motivates you. Know your mission.

Key #3: Know your principles. Your principles should establish your moral and ethical boundaries. Every road has boundaries, and the road to success is no different. Along the way we are tempted by many things, and as the landscape changes, it may become difficult to remember what those boundaries used to look like. Defining your principles up front, and keeping them in your field of view, will keep you from being led astray, chasing results. By definition, to succeed is to achieve results, but if you have to violate your principles to achieve something, it's not worthy of achieving. This appears, rightly so, to be a moral argument, but has strategic value as well. Short-term achievements gained by violating principles are often acquired at the expense of more substantial, long-term success. We can't control everything in life, and our shortsightedness often produces unintended consequences. If your principles are well-founded, and you allow them to guide you, letting the chips of success fall where they may, more often than not, will have them falling in your favor.

Key #4: Know your limits. This doesn't mean you shouldn't be ambitious, get out of your comfort zone, or test your abilities. It means simply to acknowledge your weaknesses and failures. Weakness is a rock in the path. If you ignore it, you will most likely trip over it again and again. But if you're willing to acknowledge it exists, you can remove it, find a way around it, or use it as a stepping stone. Failure is tripping over the rock. If you don't know the weakness exists, failure is the thing that makes it evident to you. We all have inherent weaknesses, and we all fail. One of the primary things that differentiate successful people from unsuccessful people is their level of willingness to acknowledge the rocks in their path, and how they choose to deal with them.

Key #5: Surround yourself with people who have found or are seeking the first four keys. Even if you feel like you can do anything in your business, you cannot do everything. You need good people around you, and finding them is not always an easy task. Hire people who want to go where you are going, who share your mission, and who share the principles that guide you. The easiest and most common thing to do, as a manager, is to build a high maintenance workforce. Forcing people to do what you need them to do will produce mediocre results amid the chaos,

but this is stressful and ultimately distracts you from your mission. Hire people who want to help you do what it is you are doing, and your capabilities multiply rather than being subtracted from.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

No. I attribute a lot of the drive early in my life that led me to discover I had the potential to succeed, to a perceived need to work as hard as possible just to be average. It was through this that I learned I had some unique skills and talents, and the journey of developing those skills and talents led to an understanding of what it takes to succeed.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

Confidence. Adversity is and should be expected. But the mission doesn't change just because there are barriers. The thing that enables me, to see adversity as something to be understood and dealt with rather than something that is preventing success, is a confidence that I can overcome whatever comes my way.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

This one is easy. Do the right thing and let the chips fall where they may.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love to fish (mostly from a kayak), and besides working, most of my free time is spent with my family. I'm very close with my kids and share different interests with each one. As they grow older, I hope to have opportunities to combine the two things I enjoy most, my work, and my kids, to help them get their own businesses started.

7. What makes a great leader?

By definition, a leader is someone that others willingly follow. To me, a great leader can only be defined as someone who is able to bring out the greatness in others.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Specifically to college students, I would say to understand the laws of supply and demand. Our society has changed greatly in the last 50 years, and workers with college degrees are no longer in short supply. Knowledge gained by formal education, while important, is not superior to knowledge gained by any other means. Consider this in the information age, where knowledge on any topic is a click away. A person's value in the marketplace is increasingly being determined not by credentials, but by an ability to achieve results. I expect this trend to continue as technology enables more and more unconventional methods of becoming educated, and the workforce becomes more and more saturated with college degrees. Start your career with determination, purpose, and humility. List your objectives and then describe, on paper and in detail, how you will go about earning each of them. Society owes nothing to any of us. Regardless of the job you have, always conduct yourself like you need to do a little more to deserve being there. This will keep you challenged, sharpen your skills, and will increase your value greatly to employers, particularly in an age of an increasingly entitlement-minded workforce. Value is relative, so create contrast between yourself and everyone else, not by pointing out their flaws or your strengths, but by simply being the one that is different in a

positive, inspiring, and productive way. Do these things faithfully and opportunity will gravitate towards you.

John Sammut



Prior to joining Firstronic LLC, an advanced electronics manufacturing services and optimized supply chain solutions company, John served as CEO of Live Sports Radio LLC, a private-equity backed business, for 3 years. He also served as president and CEO of EPIC Technologies, LLC, a multinational EMS company, for nearly 10 years. He led the company's growth from \$3 million (through its predecessor business, CCI) to nearly \$300 million in annual revenue, while achieving industry-leading levels of profitability. In 2006, he was the recipient of the "EY Entrepreneur of the Year" award in the technology category for the Midwest region.

Prior to joining EPIC, he was responsible for TMW's investment platform strategy in electronics manufacturing. He joined TMW's company Electro-Wire Products in 1990 as manager of market development engineering for the EMP division of Electro-Wire, which achieved revenue growth from \$6 million to \$30 million by 1992. John was also responsible for European business development from 1993 to 1995, during which Electro-Wire acquired a German electrical distribution system manufacturer with annual revenues of \$120 million. Prior to joining Electro-Wire, he held several positions at Ford Motor Company from 1986 to 1990. He holds B.S. degrees in Electrical Engineering and Industrial Management from Lawrence Technological University and an M.B.A. from INSEAD, The European Institute of International Business.

1. How do you define success?

Achieving financial freedom and a balanced life to enjoy the fruits of my labor.

2. What is the key to success?

Doing what you love so that it's not "work." So you can pour yourself into it and do whatever it takes to be successful. I also think a key is being "programmed" early on in life to have high

expectations, which means an important part of this comes from parents or those raising you as a child to expect great things.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

Yes, that has always been “programmed” into my mind for as long as I can remember.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

The fact that failure isn’t an option and knowing that there is always a way. It's just a matter of finding it!

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

That once you start succeeding, remain focused and don’t get distracted with other opportunities, because with success will come many other competing interests from all directions.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time with family and friends.

7. What makes a great leader?

Someone with vision, drive, motivation, inspiration, and tenacity.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Do profile testing to discover all of the options/opportunities out in the world for the type of skills you have to offer. The key early on is to discover what you truly love to do, as soon as possible, so you don’t waste a lot of time discovering what you don’t want!

Jim Spadaccini



Having founded the company in 1999, Jim is the creative director and CEO of Ideum, a multi-touch products and digital interactive company based in Corrales, New Mexico. He helps direct Ideum's commercial hardware and software initiatives and provides creative direction for custom software and installation projects.

Jim was the principal investigator for the National Science Foundation (NSF)-sponsored Open Exhibits software and community initiative and a co-PI for the Creating Museum Media for Everyone (CMME) project. In addition, he was co-chair of the NSF-funded Human Computer Interaction in Informal Science Education (HCI+ISE) conference. Additionally, Jim was a principal investigator on the NASA-funded Space Weather Mobile project and co-PI on a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-sponsored project, Hurricanes and Climate Change.

In addition to his responsibilities at Ideum, Jim is active in the community and volunteers as a board member for the Friends of Chaco and the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty. Before founding Ideum, Jim was the director of Interactive Media at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, California. While at the Exploratorium, his department was responsible for developing educational web resources and media exhibits for the museum floor. For his work at the Exploratorium, Jim received a *Computerworld* "Smithsonian Award," an Association of Science and Technology Centers "Award for Innovation," and three consecutive Webby Awards for "Best Science Site."

Jim taught courses on design and technology at San Francisco State University's (SFSU) Multimedia Studies program for seven years starting in the mid-90s, and more recently, taught Technology-Enhanced Communication for the Cultural Heritage (TEC-CH) program at the University of Lugano, Switzerland. For more than a decade, he has taught courses on digital media and museums for the Cultural Resource Management program at University of Victoria,

British Columbia. Along with his work in informal education, Jim has consulted with Apple and Adobe, and has developed promotional and instructional materials for a number of professional software authoring tools.

1. How do you define success?

I believe a lot of people think of success as something you just acquire or earn over time, and there you are, you've arrived! I like to think about being successful at different stages in life, and in our company's development. I never thought of myself or our company as unsuccessful when there were only a few of us and we were struggling to make ends meet. I thought of us being successful for who we were and what we were at that stage of development.

Success is being able to work on interesting projects or develop interesting products. Success is getting to work with innovative people and partners on great projects. We've never really focused on the money, except as a way to do more, to take on bigger and better projects, and to develop new and more exciting products. For us, that has been really important. It has allowed us to grow the company with zero venture capital and debt. Because we don't have to spend a lot of time or energy with funders, we can focus on the work, the creative process, and on improving our staff and workflow.

2. What is the key to success?

I think a lot of it is hard work and persistence. That is certainly the driving force when you find yourself in a situation when you don't have a lot of collaborators. For our company, I think finding the right people to work with has been absolutely essential. I've been lucky enough to find people who can do things I can't, and who can bring ideas that I don't have. I can't stress that part enough. It is not really about the individual. It is about having a great and diverse team in place. That and hard work makes everything possible.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

Our company is now getting attention because we are growing and involved in very interesting, cutting-edge technology. While I am proud of what we've accomplished and where we are, I think. Unfortunately, our society defines success too narrowly. It is not always about money and the latest startups or new technology.

I have always thought of myself as successful. When I was a poorly paid teacher in San Francisco, California during the early 90s, I thought I was successful at that job. I think success is something you bring with you when you care about the work, and when you want to make a difference and create something meaningful. In that sense, I always knew I would be successful, because I worked hard at a job that was important.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

You really don't have a choice. You always move forward. I don't want that to sound negative, as some people feel that they are trapped in particular situations. I don't view it that way. When I face adversity, I tend to work harder, try to work more closely with those around me, and try to work with others to constructively solve whatever problems have arisen.

A huge benefit of adversity is that, usually, there are more than a few lessons to be learned in these types of situations. Our products, projects, and processes have all benefited from what we learned over the years from a variety of unforeseen incidents or (unfortunately) self-inflicted mistakes and blunders. Knowing that can also be comforting. You feel like you are getting something positive out of a bad situation. It is also a way to bring closure and close off the negative feelings associated with a bad situation.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

It is hard to choose one. Persistence and making sure you are always thinking ahead are probably the two greatest lessons I've learned.

Persistence is the continuum. It helps you day to day, but also means that you'll benefit in the future from sticking with things. Our company benefits from relationships and contacts that we made in the early 2000s. We have gained experience through projects, big and small, over more than 15 years. The time spent comes back to you and it can help you find new projects, develop new products, and innovate.

Thinking ahead and planning for multiple futures is something I do every day in some way or another. Things won't ever work out exactly as you plan, so that's why I focus on "multiple" futures. In addition, it is not all nuts and bolts kind of thinking. It is not all about staff, space, products, and money. It is also about being the company for which you want to work. What type of work are you interested in pursuing? Who are you going to collaborate with? What new technologies or design challenges are we going to take on? Can we do more for the local community? All of this forward-thinking prepares you for what's next. It has allowed us to grow organically and take advantage of the opportunities that have presented themselves.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I like to take on activities that are far removed from work. I love spending time with my family. Also, I enjoy gardening and have a vineyard with 135 vines. I'm just starting to make wine. I like to ride my bike and exercise. I think it is important to have some balance. It is easy to get wrapped up in work because I find it so interesting.

7. What makes a great leader?

I think great leaders help assemble great teams, find great talent, and inspire people. I also think a great leader provides the tools, the environment, and the collaborators for others to be successful.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

The best advice I have ever heard is to find something you are passionate about. Yes, it is a cliché, but it is true (which is also a cliché at this point). However, there are a lot of people who have jobs they don't like. They do their work just for the money, and that doesn't lead to long-term happiness. If you find something you love and work at it, if you are good at it, chances are that the money will follow.

The other bit of advice I would give is, when you go to an interview, don't think about it as a one-way kind of process. Ask the employer questions. Learn about the work environment. Make sure it is a place where you want to work and a place that would allow you to grow. The type of company and work environment can be as important as the job itself when you are starting out.

Ralph Erenzo



Prior to starting Tuthilltown Spirits, New York's first whiskey distillery since prohibition, Ralph's business Extravertical Inc. provided technical production and event services to corporate and media clients such as ESPN, Ford and Danskin for projects that required technical skills developed over his 25-year rock climbing career. Ralph built and managed New York City's first public climbing gyms, including The ExtraVertical Climbing Center on Broadway. His dream of a "climber's ranch" near the largest rock climbing area in the east was set aside in favor of producing high-quality spirits. Ralph's writing and commentary have been featured in national media including Op-Ed columns for *The New York Times*. His work at the state level resulted in the passage of the Farm Distillery Act in 2007, which permits New York farms to establish distilleries and sell their agricultural spirits on site. Tuthilltown Spirits is a founding member of the American Craft Spirits Association, for which Ralph sits on the board of directors, and is chairman of the legislative committee, which works at the federal level to support the craft distilling industry nationwide.

1. How do you define success?

A satisfactory outcome in one's effort at some goal, which is not always the same as the specific goal a person starts with. Happiness with an outcome.

2. What is the key to success?

It's a key ring: persistence, flexibility, gumption.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I always wanted to achieve success in something, but not always the same or one single thing.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

Belief in a concept or goal, and the willingness to get up when knocked down and continue the struggle.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

Changing a plan is not the same as giving up. Things change, plans change, but still have forward momentum. Quitting is an end.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spare time? Reading, driving.

7. What makes a great leader?

Again, "gumption" (the ability to see a need and the temerity to believe you can do something about it). Also, the willingness to sublimate personal, specific desires for the benefit of an overall goal of those being led.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Success, most often, takes time. Be alert to opportunity. Your education gave you a valuable framework upon which to build your future, but the world fills out and colors the final result. Expect change, use it, and never give up.

Chris Jones



Chris Jones is the president of Plant Therapy, the fastest-growing essential oils company in the nation. He founded the company in 2011 after identifying a need for high-quality, direct-to-consumer essential oils and aromatherapy products. The results have been astoundingly successful, and in 2015, Plant Therapy earned a spot on *Inc. Magazine's* "Inc. 500" list as the 31st fastest-growing private company in America.

Yet, the essential oils industry is a far cry from where Chris once saw his life heading. As a young man, he was en route to pursuing a career as an airline pilot when his father became terminally ill. His college education cut short, Chris went home to care for his family and led his father's fertilizer business.

Since that time, Chris has been a self-employed entrepreneur. He ran several businesses before buying a small beauty products company from his mother-in-law, an aromatherapist. Chris found it challenging to find quality, essential oils for use in the products. Many were overpriced or of low-quality, and most companies sold the oils through multi-level marketing.

Chris was certain there was an increasingly strong market for high-quality essential oils at affordable prices, and in 2011, he launched Plant Therapy. Under Chris's stewardship, the company has experienced a three-year growth of nearly 8,000% and now has around 35

employees. Plant Therapy has outgrown four commercial spaces and is now planning to have a 40,000-square-foot facility by the end of 2015.

1. How do you define success?

There are lots of different kinds of successes, so such a broad question is hard. I think my ultimate goal is the same as most other people: To find joy. I don't think success is a destination, but rather a journey. If I am finding true joy (or peace of mind) in my current situation, I would say I am being successful. For financial success, I would say when my passive (investment) income exceeds my living expenses, I am successful.

2. What is the key to success?

I think for both personal and professional success, most of the answers are the same: Treat others how you would like to be treated. Don't cheat. If you screw up, fess up to it and learn from it. Play fair. Don't quit just because it's hard. Be honest. Don't cut. Try your hardest. Be respectful. It's okay to fail.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I actually never really thought about it. I never really had a "plan." I have always just lived my life based on instinct and what was currently going on. When I went to college, I was never a very good student but planned to become an airline pilot (now I am so glad that didn't pan out). While in school, my self-employed father got sick. We didn't know what was wrong, but I was the only one that knew anything about his business. I moved home to help him run it while we figured it out. He died of cancer within a couple of months, and I did my best to keep his business afloat. I learned way more about business and life in the next year than I had in my previous 20+ years combined.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I have 3 daughters (soon to be 4) and an incredible wife. They are really my motivation. I have a fear of failure, but it is more of a fear of letting them down, rather than a fear of judgment from others.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

That it is okay to be me, flaws and all. I don't have to try to impress others or live within their confines. As individuals, we have unlimited potential, and once we stop trying to please others all the time or try to keep up with others, life becomes much more enjoyable and fulfilling.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

What spare time? Just kidding. My daughters are still young, so they get most of my off work time. We spend the nights and weekends as a family. We enjoy camping and swimming. We spend many winter evenings in the hot tub. I also enjoy golfing and boating, but don't make as much time for it as I would like.

7. What makes a great leader?

Being able to inspire others. I think it is the leader's responsibility to make his people feel good about themselves and also help them to find joy in their lives. The vast majority of lessons taught and learned are done strictly through example. People need to talk less and do more.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Be open-minded and teachable. I have owned multiple successful businesses, and every single one came as a result of different circumstances in life, not a conscious decision to get into that business. When I got into the essential oil business, it was because I was presented with the opportunity to purchase a very small beauty products company with a minimal investment. I saw an opportunity for growth and jumped on it. You can learn important life lessons from everyone. Don't discount someone just because you don't see them as successful.

Dawn Kelley



As president & CEO of Barney & Co. California, maker of Barney Almond Butters and other California almond products, Dawn focuses on expanding Barney's growth (both domestically and internationally) in the nut butter and almond products categories, while leading the company's day-to-day business and manufacturing operations.

Dawn has adopted the three bottom line approach of Profit, People, and Purpose, and is using these filters in short-term and long-term planning and strategies. Through vertical integration of processes, Dawn is evolving Barney to consistently be the category leader and most conscientious, quality-focused, best-valued brand on the market. Dawn is simultaneously leading the way through a transition to an organic, fair-trade, sustainable ingredient profile and supply chain (where possible).

Innovation within the almond space is an on-going focus for Dawn and the promise to deliver peanut-free (no cross contamination) almond products to consumers everywhere is at the

forefront of this innovation. Dawn joined Barney in 2010 as president & CEO after overseeing the sale of her previous company, United Tote, to Churchill Downs. Dawn served as president of United Tote, a technology company and subsidiary of YouBet.com, a publicly-traded e-commerce company, and previously held senior executive/leadership positions at Orbitz.com and Careerbuilder.com.

Dawn holds a B.A. degree in Political Science from the University of Kentucky and currently resides in Maine, where she lives with her husband, three stepchildren, and two dogs.

1. How do you define success?

Being true to your own values and sleeping well at night, with a clear conscience.

2. What is the key to success?

"80% of success is showing up." – Woody Allen. And by showing up, I also mean not being led by fear, taking on challenges, as well as the day to day.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

When I was growing up, my mom was a successful, working, single mother. She was a good role model for believing, from an early age, I could do and be anything I want. I never thought otherwise. Having said, I'm also pretty conservative financially and have a bit of bag-lady syndrome. I think that keeps me on my toes.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

One of my favorite sayings is "there's a solution for every problem," and my mind usually doesn't shut down until it's been found. There are obviously situations where you just need to let go. Figuring out those times is key.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

If you mess up, fess up. If you are dealing with good people, it will build trust. Take accountability and own your decisions and actions.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Yoga, reading, hunting through antique and flea markets for special treasures, and doing home improvements. Working with my hands is my form of meditation.

7. What makes a great leader?

A good leader manages by influence vs. authority. Your authority leaves the room when you do; Your influence does not.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Let go of ego and look for opportunities to learn from the best. Then work harder, longer, and faster than you ever have before.

Ron Rudzin



Ron Rudzin, the entrepreneur behind the luxury mattress brand Saatva, spent most of his life investing and managing businesses in the home furnishings industry. In 2007, Ron had a simple idea: Make the most luxurious and comfortable mattress possible, make it in America, and sell it directly to the customer with no retail markups. Ron quickly realized this as a truly unique opportunity to combine old-fashioned customer service with the modern efficiencies of the e-commerce world, and Saatva was born in 2009.

Saatva has since grown to be the largest online-only luxury mattress company in the country. Today, Saatva has 15 American partnering factories building our proprietary product and 103 fulfillment centers delivering throughout the continental U.S. Saatva is the original online disrupter of the mattress industry, ranked as the "7th Fastest-Growing Online Retailer" by *Inc. Magazine* and named to *Forbes* "Top 100 Companies to Watch."

During Saatva's tremendous growth, Ron began to notice a big difference between memory foam and innerspring shoppers. Memory foam shoppers self-identified themselves and were looking for a very specific bedding experience. Ron put the leading memory foam brand in his sightline and spent a year and a half figuring out how to bring the Saatva model to the memory foam space. Loom & Leaf by Saatva was launched in February 2015.

What Ron has cultivated in both brands is a culture of transparency and happiness, where each customer gets a great product at a great price, and with great service. This is the secret to Ron's ongoing success.

1. How do you define success?

I'm never defined by one characteristic, so I wouldn't describe success as achieving any particular asset. Instead, I believe in total life success, from my career to my home. This means feeling positive about what I do, appreciating the important people in my life, and sleeping well with my accomplishments and how I accomplished them.

2. What is the key to success?

I've found success by doing the extras and paying attention to detail. I'm always in search of my next idea or the next thing to inspire me. I've found that the knowledge and information that has contributed to my success tends to manifest itself outside of my working hours, often through reading or thoughtful conversations with friends, family, and business associates.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I have always been confident in my ability to achieve success in all facets of my life because I have always been willing to work hard. I was aware of this from a very young age, so developing a strong work ethic has been an integral part of my roadmap from the beginning, particularly in its application to building a business.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

We all face adversity, both in professional and personal contexts. That's inevitable. The key to overcoming adversity is being prepared and possessing an internal protocol. I try to maintain an even perspective, recognizing that hardships or hurdles will occur, but remaining calm and reorienting myself to create a new vision when that does happen.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

My father taught me to be very humble, and his advice has stayed with me. He would tell me, "if you're great at something, everyone will know, and you don't have to keep telling them."

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love the beach, playing basketball and softball, reading a hardcopy newspaper, and laughing and enjoying life with my friends and family.

7. What makes a great leader?

The most effective leaders never rely on their titles or credentials to convince others to follow them. I strive to demonstrate my vision, so my colleagues look up to me because it's smart and effective, and ultimately because they believe in what I'm doing.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Don't think about money for the first two years. Instead, put your head down, work hard, and learn from everyone. Also, learn to be a productive team member and make impactful contributions to group collaborations.

Shawn Hansson



Shawn Hansson is the founder and CEO of Logic Integration Inc., a Lone Tree, Colorado audiovisual and automation firm specializing in the design and installation of easy-to-use technology for homeowners and business professionals.

Since the company's inception in 2004, Logic Integration has been recognized for numerous accolades under Shawn's leadership. This includes recognition as a multi-year honoree of the *Inc. Magazine's* "Fastest Growing Private Companies in America," "Colorado Companies to Watch," "Integrator of the Year" by CEA, in addition to many others. Logic Integration's clients include Comcast, Dish Network, Lockheed Martin, U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, and TW Telecom, along with many "Fortune 100" companies.

With more than 20 years of audiovisual industry experience, Shawn is recognized as a young leader with a strong vision. He was awarded the "Top 25 GenXYZ Influential Leaders" by *ColoradoBiz* magazine and "Top 40 under 40" by *Commercial Integrator*. He is a frequent presenter & panelist at conferences such as CEDIA, Pro Source, CES Vegas, and the Bard Center for Entrepreneurship Council's "Business Survival Series," and has also been a panel speaker at events throughout the A/V industry. Shawn received a B.A. in Sound Engineering from San Jose State University.

1. How do you define success?

I would define success as taking the honed skills that I have learned over the years and passing them onto others. The moment of success, when you see them get it, embrace it and then flourish with their gifts in the area that you taught them.

2. What is the key to success?

I think the key to success is striving for the best of what you do and by doing all of it with humility and the ability to listen to others.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I have always been driven and had a heavy interest in technology, even as a kid. When I was younger, I used to take apart my dad's nice speakers and try to put them back together by the time he got home. He was always into audio and music, and therefore, had different kinds of speakers around the house. I was always curious of how they worked and what made them sound different. I eventually started buying parts at RadioShack and building my own boxes. I was also a musician pianist and a drummer. This musical background also really helped me in my career. I was working at Office Depot selling cell phones and computers. I loved meeting new people and helping them make technology easier to use. One day, a businessman asked me to fix his office computers after work. It turned out that he also owned an A/V company, and I've been in this industry ever since. I'm now able to take my passions and gifts and put them to use in the residential and commercial markets. I also get to take technology and put it in large homes and office buildings. Every system we install must be easy to use and reliable, which is what makes my job fun.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I read the Bible and do devotionals in the mornings. I truly believe I would not be able to run my company like this without knowing the hope and love of Jesus Christ. I also have very good mentors surrounding me that know business really well. Over the years, through different growth periods, I have had different mentors who helped me immensely. I'm also involved in a couple of different business leaders groups.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

Processes and procedures must be in stone and everyone must follow them in order to grow and be successful.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Going four-wheeling in the Colorado Rockies with my family and friends.

7. What makes a great leader?

Being able to recognize people's gifts and talents, and then fueling and embracing them. Also, being able to delegate and trust others, and then letting them do their own thing.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Give whatever job you take 110%, put others before yourself, and surround yourself with good friends and community.

Tom Deierlein



Tom Deierlein is a West Point graduate, successful serial entrepreneur, Airborne Ranger, combat-wounded military veteran, and philanthropist who co-founded the TD Foundation. He is passionate about leadership development, business ethics, sales, overcoming adversity, and helping others less fortunate, both locally and globally.

Tom was recently named "EY Entrepreneur of the Year" and is the co-founder and CEO of ThunderCat Technology, a systems integrator that specializes in data center solutions for the Federal government. Founded only 7 years ago, ThunderCat is already ranked #60 on the "VAR 500" and was named by *Forbes* as one of "America's Most Promising Companies."

Tom has been a single digit employee and C-level executive at many successful startup and early-stage companies, including as chief operating officer of Dynamic Logic, a digital media startup he helped to bring from a 7-person operation with less than \$1M in revenues into a 125 person, clear market leader. He helped lead the acquisition of DL by WPP in 2005. Previously, he was the NYC branch manager for NetGravity (IPO in 1998 and now a part of Google).

Tom started his career in sales working for Johnson & Johnson and Parametric Technology Corporation in the mid-90s. Tom is also a partner in a real estate investment firm, Bull Run Properties, LLC, based in Kansas City, Missouri. A Bronze Star and Purple Heart recipient, Tom is a retired U.S. Army major and "Operation Iraqi Freedom" veteran. Graduating from USMA,

West Point in 1989, Tom spent nearly five years in the military, first earning his Airborne Ranger qualification and then onto various leadership positions with the Berlin Brigade. In late 2005, Tom was recalled to active duty serving as a civil affairs officer in East Baghdad. After graduating from the JFK Special Warfare Center at Ft. Bragg, he helped manage over \$290 million in reconstruction and economic development projects.

In September 2006, he was shot by a sniper and critically wounded. After 8 months of intensive care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the VA Polytrauma Spinal Cord Rehab Center in Tampa, Florida, Tom returned to the business world in June 2007. He has been quoted and featured in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Parade*, *FOX News*, *MSNBC.com*, *SmartCEO*, and *NBC Nightly News*.

In Fall 2006, a foundation was started by Tom and others to assist children impacted by war Iraqi and Afghan Children. This includes the children of wounded warriors and fallen heroes. To date, they have provided more than 50 life-saving surgeries, more than \$200,000 in school supplies, and more than \$25,000 in vitamins. Additionally, Tom is a certified peer mentor with the Wounded Warrior Project, and mentor with Care Coalition. He coaches other severely wounded and disabled Special Operations Command soldiers. Tom is also a founding board of advisors member of Troops First Foundation. Lastly, Tom serves on the board of directors for The Joseph Rivero Foundation, a scholarship fund for student athletes named in memory of his elementary and high school friend who lost his life on 9/11.

Tom earned an M.S. in Systems Management from the University of Southern California in 1993, and an M.B.A. from NYU Stern School of Business in 2000. He lives with his wife Mary Beth and three boys in Garden City, NY.

1. How do you define success?

At its core, the definition of success is simple: It is setting, then achieving goals. For many people, that may equate to professional successes or financial successes. For others, success is being the best possible mom or dad. It could be a high school student trying to make the basketball team sophomore year after getting cut as a freshman, or a nonprofit trying to prevent veteran homelessness. The goals and objectives are vastly different, and they can be personal and silly (solve the Rubik's Cube in under 5 minutes), professional (have my own business), or financial (pay for my three childrens' college education).

Whenever I think about success or become too narrow-minded and focus on financial or professional goals, I also come back to this poem that hung on my refrigerator in NYC for about a decade. This poem is often misattributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson but written by Bessie A. Stanley around 1904:

“To laugh often and love much;
to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children;
to earn the approbation of honest citizens and endure the betrayal of false friends;
to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self;

to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;
to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation;
to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived – this is to have succeeded”

There is a new movement afoot to get Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary to change their definition to include “happiness.” So, for anyone reading this, I would simply encourage them to come up with their own definition of success. Then, set up a series of goals and interim milestones to achieve your vision for your own success.

2. What is the key to success?

To me, the key to success is in the definition itself: setting goals. If success is goal achievement, success starts with setting realistic and meaningful goals. When I was a 13-year-old, I set my first real goal: I wanted to go to West Point. I spent the next 3.5 years focused on that goal. That led to a series of shorter goals to make that happen, everything from getting an “A” on an exam or a class, to becoming captain of the track team or president of the Ski Club – all of the little things I knew I needed along the way to hit the big goal.

But if I had to point to one single trait or characteristic, the one “key” of successful people, it would be grit. To be successful, you must be resilient and persistent. A Ph.D. at Wharton, Angela Duckworth, has studied uber achievement and developed a grit scale. It is a bigger determinant than IQ and EQ and all other factors at predicting success. She defines grit as “sticking with things over the very long-term until you master them.” In a paper, she writes that “the gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina.”

In my opinion, anyone studying success or looking for one single key, must also study the work of Angela Duckworth and the concept of GRIT. If allowed to give “keys” plural to success, and I do believe there are a few vs. one, then I will mention them as well. As mentioned already, successful people set (and write down) S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Aligned, Realistic and Timed) goals, and are persistent. Here are a few other traits and behaviors I found in my research, that have worked for me over the years, and I think worth emulating:

- Be positive and surround yourself with success-oriented people. I definitely feed off quotes and motivational phrases. Sign up for a few of those newsletters or follow them on Twitter. If you're having a bad day, reflect on a quote.
- Educate yourself. Constant learning and voracious reading on your chosen topic. Put down the TV remote and pick up a book, article, or white paper.
- Find a mentor or coach to develop, advise, help and encourage you.
- Maintain a to-do list to prioritize and focus. This makes it easier to say "no" to distractions.
- Volunteer and help others. It will help them, and trust me, help you even more.

- Network physically and digitally. My mom loved the phrase “no man is an island.” You are going to need plenty of friends and connections to help you along the way.

- Eliminate the words “luck” and “unlucky” from your dictionary. Luck is preparation meeting opportunity.

- Seems self-evident, but there are no shortcuts. You must work hard and stay focused. I remember at West Point during my first summer of basic training, we did road marches, and there were various quotes along the way posted on poles and trees. One of my favorites, 30 years later, remains “the only place where success comes before work is the dictionary.”

- Sacrifice. You must have the willingness to sacrifice in order to succeed. Say “no” to short-term pleasures and distractions. Some people call this self-discipline or self-restraint. The reality is that if you focus on long-term, meaningful goals, it will require sacrifice and hard work along the way.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

As I get close to 50, I am thinking more about having an overall successful life vs. some of the goals and successes I may have had in life. So, this interview comes at an interesting time as I have been reflecting quite a bit the past month.

I think it is arrogant to say you “always knew” you would be successful. I can say that during my life when I set certain life goals, I certainly have had it in mind that “I always knew” I would be successful. At age 13, I decided to go to West Point, and plenty of people thought it was foolhardy, but I knew I would do it. At 17, when I decided to become an elite Airborne Ranger, plenty of people didn’t think I could do it. However, I knew I would. It took me three tries, but I did it. When I decided to get an M.B.A. part-time, there were plenty of reasons to stop or quit, but I knew I would do it. I am not a good swimmer, but I always wanted to do a triathlon. I waited a long time to try, but once I signed up and started training, I knew I would finish. In the end, I have failed many, many more times than I have won in life. But being successful does start with a mentality that winning or being successful comes with many false starts and many setbacks along the way. You must be resilient and bounce back from them. Even the profession I chose, sales, comes with many more no’s than yes’s. Someone closing 10-20% of all the sales cycles they start is at the top of their company. A baseball player hitting 30% of the time is an all-star. It is all a matter of perspective and, as pointed out earlier, it is important to view success in the long-term and be unphased by short-term setbacks along the way to achieving goals and objectives.

Albert Einstein once said, “I think and think for months, for years; 99 times the conclusion is false, but the hundredth time I am right.” General Patton said, “Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom.” So, maybe this is a long way of me saying that I think only quitting is not being successful. I know that I will never quit something important that I put my mind to, so, therefore, maybe I do know that I will successful on important goals since I never quit.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

Focusing on the original goal itself again becomes the key factor. If you took the time, energy, and effort to set a S.M.A.R.T. goal, then you must go in realizing that two things are true. First, there will be roadblocks and obstacles along the way. Second, if it were easy and simple, everyone would do it. Negative thoughts and self-doubt are a cancer. If you let them start, they will grow exponentially and kill your dreams. They are inevitable, but catch them early and stamp them out quickly. They will creep back, so kill them again. They will keep coming back. Kill them, over and over. Do not let them win. We all get shots against our self-confidence, ego and belief in our goal. That is natural. Just don't let them bring you down or keep you down. I almost got kicked out of West Point after being arrested plebe year and I, then, thought about quitting myself, and a few times cried myself to sleep. But I didn't quit. At Ranger School, you need to be in the top 1% just to be selected to attend, and then only 1/3 complete the course. I failed twice but kept trying. While in the course, I thought about quitting every day. On the second day of climbing Mt. Ranier, I literally thought about quitting with every single step. After being shot by a sniper in Baghdad and lying in a hospital bed at Walter Reed for 8 months, I certainly had some dark days. But in each case throughout my life, my focus on the long-term goals and reading motivational quotes kept me from quitting or giving in to negative thoughts.

People call it many things like drive, ambition, focus, competitiveness, mental toughness, or intestinal fortitude. But it is actually simple – don't quit. 99% of people do, and if you want to be in the top 1%, don't. I can't explain it any clearer terms than that. Grit.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

My parents taught me to have values, integrity, and to work hard. From an early age, I had chores and jobs including delivering newspapers, caddying, and babysitting. Those chores were inspected and repeated, if not done to standard. Those jobs in elementary school taught me to work hard, be dependable, and rely on myself to get things done. My parents expected A's in school, and for me to put in the effort to earn them. There is a difference between support and helping. My parents supported me, but didn't help me with my goals. They supported, encouraged, and made me believe in myself and my abilities, but they didn't actively help. I had to do it on my own.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I have three young boys – ages 5, 3 and 1. I enjoy spending time with my wife and family. I also enjoy traveling, and I have been to 46 states and 52 countries. I also enjoy playing (or attempting to play) golf.

I don't know if this counts as "spare time," but I also run a small non-profit, The TD Foundation, which "provides aid to children directly affected by war in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to children of wounded warriors and fallen heroes here in the U.S."

7. What makes a great leader?

I feel it breaks down into three major areas:

1. Values and character: People want a leader they trust and who makes the right choices, regardless of the consequences.
2. Concern for your people: Genuine concern and desire to help them be their absolute best, personally and professionally.
3. Decisions: Willingness to make decisions, including the hard ones, and be held accountable for them.
4. Results: Without success, the other three don't matter.

I also believe that great leaders exhibit 11 principles. Back in the summer of 1985, when I first entered West Point, there were many pieces of "knowledge" that the new cadets (incoming freshmen or plebes) were required to learn and repeat verbatim, on demand, by any upperclassmen that inquired. It required hours of studying and memorization. It took self-discipline to remember them word-for-word, and then confidence to repeat them under pressure, when asked. During the first week, these bits of knowledge included some fundamentals like "The Mission of The United States Military Academy," "The Code of Conduct," "The Honor Code," "The Corps" and "11 Principles of Leadership."

The "11 Principles of Leadership" were first developed in 1948 and published in an Army field manual on leadership, in 1951, more than 60 years ago. What's fascinating is that they are still taught, basically unmodified, ever since. Today, they are still used by all the U.S. Armed Forces, at all levels in basic training, including the Marines, Air Force, and Navy.

I enjoy going back to these principles frequently when I reflect on my own performance and look for areas of improvement:

1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement
2. Be technically and tactically proficient
3. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions
4. Set the example
5. Know your people and look out for their welfare
6. Keep your people informed
7. Ensure the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished
8. Develop a sense of responsibility among your people
9. Train your people as a team
10. Make sound and timely decisions
11. Employ your work unit in accordance with its capabilities

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Nothing takes the place of good, old-fashioned integrity and hard work. But I guess it goes back to the advice I give for someone to be successful in any life endeavor. Successful people set (and write down) S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Aligned, Realistic, and Timed) goals, and

are persistent and have the grit to complete those goals. Here are a few other traits and behaviors I found in my research, worked for me over the years, and I think worth emulating:

- Be positive and surround yourself with success-oriented people. I definitely feed off quotes and motivational phrases. Sign up for a few of those newsletters or follow them on Twitter. If you're having a bad day, reflect on a quote.
- Educate yourself. Constant learning and voracious reading on your chosen topic. Put down the TV remote and pick up a book, article, or white paper.
- Find a mentor or coach to develop, advise, help and encourage you.
- Maintain a to-do list to prioritize and focus. This makes it easier to say "no" to distractions.
- Volunteer and help others. It will help them, and trust me, help you even more.
- Network physically and digitally. My mom loved the phrase "no man is an island." You are going to need plenty of friends and connections to help you along the way.
- Eliminate the words "luck" and "unlucky" from your dictionary. Luck is preparation meeting opportunity.
- Seems self-evident, but there are no shortcuts. You must work hard and stay focused. I remember at West Point during my first summer of basic training, we did road marches, and there were various quotes along the way posted on poles and trees. One of my favorites, 30 years later, remains "the only place where success comes before work is the dictionary."
- Sacrifice. You must have the willingness to sacrifice to succeed. Say "no" to short-term pleasures and distractions. Some people call this self-discipline or self-restraint. The reality is that if you focus on long-term, meaningful goals, it will require sacrifice and hard work along the way.

Gary Garth



As the CEO and co-founder of White Shark Media, I'm responsible for guiding the company's strategy and growth. I have over 15 years of experience in online marketing, sales management, and executive leadership.

My early day projects, where I acquired my skills within sales and business development, include establishing several B2B call centers in Denmark and specializing in telecommunication sales for providers such as: Orange, Telia Sonara, and Hi3G. The call center projects involved managing hundreds of agents, and gaining over 100,000 new B2B customers.

My marketing experience comes from being director of agency sales for the Danish division of Europe's largest radio station: Radio NRJ, where I developed the entire media agency program, managed a staff of 40, and tripled the overall advertising revenue over a 5-year period.

Given the nature of my profession, I'm, of course, a Google AdWords Certified Individual in Advanced Search and Display Advertising. I'm also a Bing Ads Accredited Professional and Google Analytics Certified, but my true passion is sales and business development, where I currently channel most of my energy towards these areas of White Shark Media.

After only 3 years of existence, our rapid growth has resulted in White Shark Media being awarded the Google AdWords™ Premier SMB Partnership, as of July 2014. Since Google AdWords™ Premier SMB Partners are a hand-picked group of strategic partners that meet Google's most stringent eligibility and training requirements, very few agencies have this privileged recognition.

Similarly, Microsoft recognized our proven track record and success with marketing campaigns for small businesses. As a result, we engaged in an alliance to become part of their selective Bing Ads Authorized Reseller program.

1. How do you define success?

First and foremost then, success is a definition of what one wants to accomplish, i.e. what is your greater purpose, what drives you, and what are you really passionate about? If you manage to fulfill these personal aspirations, then you're a success in my book. It doesn't matter if society thinks otherwise.

2. What is the key to success?

I've practically read all books possible on the subject, from Tony Robbins to Napoleon Hill. What I've learned and experienced, first hand, is that success is a composition of multiple behaviors (and sacrifices). More specifically, here are the 6 steps that I consider relevant to attain success:

Step 1: It's not sufficient to only desire, want, or strive for success. These are just words or empty promises. Instead, you must understand WHY you want success and how important it is for you.

Step 2: You must truly understand your current position and acknowledge that a change in actions/behaviors are required for you to produce a different outcome.

Step 3: You must change your conditions and surround yourself with people who share your notion (if not possibly physically/geographically, then via books, videos, blogs, etc.) As the saying goes, "Birds of a feather, flock together." Make sure to get the right influencers in your life.

Step 4: Study and duplicate the mental syntax of someone who's already successful within your field. Then replicate all of their values, actions, habits, behaviors, etc., when they're operating to discover their "blueprint for success." And remember that, often, the devil is in the detail, which is why you must go all in with the approach, with almost surgical precision, in order to anticipate an equal or greater outcome.

Step 5: Consistency! Don't commit to the goal or your dream. Instead commit, religiously, to the daily activities and sacrifices needed for you to, over time, reach your B.H.A.G. (Big Hairy Audacious Goal). People often fail with the activities when meeting adversity, but that's when the real growth and progress happens for you, why continued efforts without pause are a requisite for your success. Remember that people are often rewarded in public for what they've practiced for years in private!

Step 6: Be humble and work harder. Don't give up just because you're ahead of the curve or you've met your target/goal. Great leaders are "productively paranoid" and always work as if they were in second place. There's always some college graduate or startup out there who

wants to have your seat at the table.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I actually don't consider myself successful (yet). I'm a long way from meeting my personal/professional goals, at the current point. With that being said, then I always appreciate the progress I've made over the recent years, of which only fuels me with the confidence and energy needed to continue the progress.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

My WHY and reminding myself daily of the goals, steps and reality of my situation, e.g. I read out loud a personal commitment letter that I wrote to myself every morning when I get up, and every night before I go to bed.

Furthermore, reading about other leaders inspires me daily with new thoughts, different perspectives, and strategies to move forward.

Lastly, I'm also a sucker for motivational books, videos, and movies. Every day, usually at the gym in the morning, I listen to motivational speakers in my headphones (favorites are Les Brown and Tony Robbins) of which unconsciously helps me drive the right decisions throughout the day.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

That the best way to succeed in life is by helping other people. If you genuinely want to help people, whether it's your customers, partners, employees, managers, or any other, you'll eventually be recognized for your efforts and good things will come your way.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

For me, my work is also my hobby and passion, and I, therefore, spend a great deal of time on it. However, I always find time to go to the gym daily (usually 5am in the morning), and I normally crunch 2 books every month. Lastly, I always prioritize, making time to spend some quality time with my 3-year-old daughter. I rarely watch TV, but if I do, then there's usually an NBA game or tennis match in action!

7. What makes a great leader?

A great leader always leads by example, communicates to his/her team effectively without criticism, but rather as coaching.

Furthermore, it's absolutely pivotal that a leader always ties initiatives and strategies back to the WHY, i.e. Why are you/we doing this, and how does it benefit our stakeholders?

Equally important is that a leader masters the art of delegation and empowers his/her team with the right resources and support for them to meet their KPI's and objectives.

This, of course, all falls back to the overarching quality of a great leader: To onboard the right team of diversified professionals who all share the vision of the company or organization.

As one of my favorite authors, Jim Collins, says: “Great leaders always start with getting the right people on the bus, and the wrong people of the bus.”

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Take a lot of different jobs/projects early on in your career, in order to discover what you’re really passionate about. Don’t start a career in a certain field because you’re guided in such direction by parents, friends or counselors.

For the sake of living a happy life and becoming successful in your profession, it’s crucial that you work in an arena that motivates you to do better, make a difference, and challenges yourself at a daily level.

As Laszlo Bock (from Google) says in his book *Work Rules!*, you’ll spend more time working than doing anything else in your life. Therefore, make sure you’re operating in a field that you’re passionate about, and work for an organization that values your contribution!

Seth Streeter



Seth Streeter is co-founder and chief executive officer of Mission Wealth, a leading wealth management company that specializes in comprehensive financial planning and investment advisory services for high net worth clients across the country. Seth has over 23 years of experience in the financial services industry.

He obtained an M.S. in Financial Planning from the College for Financial Planning, as well as his Certified Financial Planner™ (CFP®), Certified Estate Advisor (CEA®), and Certified Divorce Financial Analyst (CDFA™) designations. Seth graduated with honors from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) with a B.A. in Communication and Sociology.

Seth has contributed to many national industry and local publications, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *CNBC.com*, *Financial Planning*, *Money*, *Investment News*, *Montecito Journal*, and *Ventura Star*. He co-authored two weekly columns for *The Daily Sound* and *The Montecito Messenger*. He has been frequently featured as a financial resource on news programs for KEYT, an ABC affiliate. Seth was also ranked as one of the nation's top wealth managers by *Worth* in 2008, and has been recognized in *Pacific Coast Business Times* "Who's Who in Banking & Finance" special edition in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Seth is the thought-leader behind the Inspired Wealth Management movement, helping people to reframe their perspective of wealth beyond just the financial to lead more balanced, impactful, and fulfilling lives. He was recognized by *Real Leaders* magazine, in 2015, as one of the "Top 100 Visionary Leaders Who Strive to Create a Better World."

Seth served as the 2014-2015 Global Chair of the Young Presidents' Organization's (YPO) Financial Services Network with over 2,000 members. He is an active member of Social Venture Partners (SVP) and was the leader in bringing Fast Pitch SB to Santa Barbara, California. He is on the advisory council for the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County and is an advisory member of the Music Academy of the West. In addition, Seth is the founder of the Inspire Santa Barbara community group.

1. How do you define success?

Inner contentment: realizing that my joy is not dependent upon external circumstances.
Awareness and full utilization of my unique gifts, even when I'm going "against the herd."
Helping others and doing what I can to make a difference in the world.

2. What is the key to success?

Knowing that vulnerability is a strength. Optimism. Surrounding myself with people who "think big," yet are humble and who support my growth, and who are open to me supporting their growth.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

No. When I was young, I worked hard to fit in. And then in my teens, I accepted my differences and embraced them, and soon found the world was mine to go for.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I trust that things will work out as they are supposed to. I know I can always keep going, even if just for 5 more minutes or for 50 more yards, and then I tell myself that again and again, and keep going.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

That there is no external circumstance or achievement required for me to be happy. My peace and contentment are, quite simply, an inside game.

As a very goal-oriented person and high achiever, this completely changed the game for me. I could let go of pressure I put on myself, have more fun, and actually accomplish more.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Taking beach walks with inspiring people. Playing with my kids. Watching a TED talk. Napping with my cat. Physical activity such as swimming, running or yoga. Traveling. Meditation. Falling in love.

7. What makes a great leader?

Someone who cares about people and naturally curious about their passions and interests.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Life is too short to follow any path but your own. Set all parental or societal pressures aside and reflect on what lights you up. What do you love to do that comes easily to you? What would you do if you had all the money and time in the world? And then go do that thing!

David Moritz



Entrepreneur David Moritz is the founder and CEO of three successful businesses: Society Awards, Viceroy Creative, and Ambition Beverages. Equipped with a Bachelor's degree from NYU and a J.D. from Cardozo School of Law, Moritz turned his passion for luxury and design into a thriving businesses empire. His first company, Society Awards, was founded in 2007 and grows by over 50% every year. Under his leadership, the company was included on *Inc. Magazine's* prestigious 500/5000 list of the "Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America." A testament to his business savvy, David identified a need within the custom award market and, in just a few short years, has made Society Awards the premiere company for high-end award design and creation.

David followed up this successful business by launching a sister company, Viceroy Creative. Viceroy is a full-service design firm specializing in brand strategy, brand innovation, and package design. The concept was derived from the obscure and sometimes overlooked field of package design, which is a vital component of many businesses, but is not always done correctly. With David at the helm, Viceroy has transformed the standard for design studios, securing high profile clients including Pepsi, Lipton, Playboy, Marc Jacobs, Patrón, Skyy, and Colgate, amongst others.

Never one to miss a business opportunity, David quickly realized the profitable marriage between his two companies and set out to create his own luxury products which include a vodka, sparkling wine and champagne. A nightlife aficionado who enjoys parties all over the world, David always wanted to create his own high-quality spirits that would surpass the brands already on the market. He opened Ambition Beverages and launched the American-made Vision Vodka, which quickly became the darling of NYC nightlife. He then released Gabrielle Wine, a sparkler made in New York State at the oldest winery in America. David completed his trifecta with Noblesse Champagne, a luxury French champagne that is 100% cuvee and 100% estate, and one of the finest champagnes on the market today. All three products are award-winning and sold at upscale restaurants, nightclubs and bars in New York City.

1. How do you define success?

My idiosyncratic definition of success, as I apply to it myself and others, is a mixture of professional and personal development and attainment that evolves over time. At its most basic, the common meaning applies: achieving an intended outcome with satisfactory results. To do that, I require some notion of what I want in life and business, and I need to accomplish that in a given period of time. What success is, at one stage of my life, is certainly not the same thing it would be at a later stage. At this point in my life, my goal is to try to figure out what I do want out of life, under what optimized circumstances I would be happy and content, what I want to achieve, and then to set myself up in the greatest position to achieve those things for the most part. If I could identify what I really want and get it, that would have to be a success.

I have to keep redefining success, to make sure that I can't tell myself I've attained it and stop striving to be better and do more. But at some point, I certainly would love to find that place where I feel that I've done enough and can rest.

2. What is the key to success?

Above all else, steady, productive, unrelenting perseverance. Just be "The Terminator" – never stop, never give up, never relent. You might get lucky, and why not leverage that good fortune into something even bigger through the application of productive hard work? Some degree of wheel spinning for some length of time at the outset in all new ventures or new projects should be acceptable. However, pretty soon the initial approach needs to be tinkered so that the effort is yielding improving results over time, no matter if slowly. If you keep at it and keep trying to improve the system, you will get traction eventually, and you can then leverage that traction again to a better method and better results. If you combine this with everything else – natural talent, timing, resources, everything else at your disposal – then you will at least know that you did everything possible regardless of the outcome, but practically speaking, you cannot fail if you never give up. Most people can acquire an expert level at most things with enough practice. I'm talking about the kind of practice and dedication that comes with years of effort. You should be thinking about personal and professional development on year-long timescales. If you've only got the stamina to keep trying for a shorter period of time, then you don't have the right motivation in place to start. I've found that if you are prepared for the long haul and you cover every possible base, you will not really need the long haul to see results. Whatever your strategy is, its chances of success can be improved by looking at this way.

Along these lines, if you find that your path to success relies heavily on the attainment of a very specific singular goal, which itself is depending upon the success of a single strategy, do everything you can to diversify that approach. Find other pathways to the goal, or find other goals that would suit the purpose, and find additional strategies to accomplish all of them so that you are never just “letting it ride” on one effort, no matter how carefully planned that single effort to a single goal is. There are many caveats, such as not spreading yourself too thin or getting distracted, but the point is that if you want a “key” that will yield “success,” minimally have identified the possibilities to diversify your efforts, to give “success” more room to emerge eventually. This kind of planning generally ensures that things go more or less the way you want them to in the first place, and with backups already mapped out, the progression to “success” becomes more fluid.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

Using a more broadly applicable definition of “success” such as professional esteem, financial independence, and familial contentment – yes. Different potential career choices necessarily have to yield different definitions of success, and I believe, as a society, we should learn to celebrate all the small steps that are generated by the private sector. For example, if you’re going to be a scientist, a career path that we need to further encourage and celebrate, then you may spend your entire career in a lab attempting to marginally improve a small link in a greater chain, and a lifetime spent in that pursuit must be considered a form of success because advancing scientific knowledge is never fruitless. There is no “failure” in carefully conducted science, as every path is explored, and the general knowledge is increased. Your work could lead to other people making a breakthrough that improves the world in ways that no one could have imagined at the time.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

When I read this question, it seems to me that the answer is stated in the question. I could reformulate it as a statement: Adversity pushes you to keep moving forward. I imagine the question along these lines, “When faced with a charging lion, what pushes you to keep trying to attain safety?” For me, adversity itself is the motivation. It’s what perks me up and gets me fired to reach my real potential. I’ve always said that I’m, at my best, in a crisis. However, you cannot successfully plan for the long-term future in crisis mode, and it certainly is not a healthy way to live. So regardless of your adroitness when faced with adversity, I believe the goal is to anticipate potential pitfalls and be prepared for them. Nevertheless, you simply cannot plan for or imagine everything.

There’s something in adversity that makes us strain every muscle and use every part of our brain – stress, unhelpful emotional responses, limited options and unclear thinking, due to time constraints that come with crises – to work to counteract these benefits. What if we could take the positive attributes, induced by “adversity,” and apply that state of being to a “normal” situation in business, devoid of stress, counterproductive emotional responses, and with the panoply of options that exists in the absence of strictly imposed time constraints? Certainly, people cannot live like this all the time. However, if you can periodically strive in this way, in the

absence of adversity in order to hit the nitro boost from time to time, I believe you will learn to react optimally in the presence of adversity.

As to what I personally use as motivating factors to “push” myself forward (beyond the motivation that a lion provides)? All of the usual human motivations, from competition to reputation, family to obligations.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

A gem that I return to is the notion that “You cannot change others; you can only change yourself.” This applies across the board, but in order to effectuate a change in another, if that is the goal, don’t directly try to change them because that’s clearly impossible. However, you do have complete control over yourself, and you can try changing how you interact with others. On one end of the spectrum, a change in your behavior could lead to a change in their behavior. On the other end, there may be nothing you do which can change someone’s behavior but at least you can change how you yourself react to it or allow it to affect you. Moving away from trying to change others, the basic premise holds true: You can change yourself. Whatever you want to be, however you want to be, you can become. Even personalities are not immutable. The brain is an adaptable organ and you can be, at least, a strongly similar version of the person you wish yourself to be. I don’t mean portraying; I mean changing and adapting. If you believe that you can learn a new skill, then why can’t you also learn to be more thoughtful, more polite, more debonair or outgoing, if that’s what you want? Maybe you want to be more/less trusting, or maybe both in different areas. You can be nearly your fantasy version of yourself.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Principally, at this point in my life, I enjoy reading. I’ve always enjoyed reading, but when you go out less, you can read more. Imagine that. A nice decade of international parties and popping bottles has transitioned to heating up bottles for my baby girl. Actually, my wife does that, but I supervise. At home, “Princess 1” (my wife) and “Princess 2” (my daughter) help provide me with new definitions of success. I still like to travel, and I’ve taken up a diet-fitness lifestyle that I’m very content with, currently. I collect whiskeys and unique spirits, and I’m very into fashion and, of course, design. I have a very close group of friends, like an extended family, and I cherish the times that we can all get together.

7. What makes a great leader?

Being a leader isn’t the same as being in charge. To be a leader, you have to have people who follow you. The greatness of your leadership has to be reflected by the efficacy with which you get people to follow you. It’s certainly conceivable that you could have a great number of people following you extremely effectively without being in charge of any of them. What makes a leader great is not about the orders he/she can give, it’s about the inspiration he/she can generate. The desire that he/she can create in others to want to follow his/her vision and to be excited and motivated to see where it will take everyone. To have a feeling that we’re on a journey together and the leader is bringing us somewhere great, where greatness is to be attained both along the way and in the outcome. To make people feel that the effort itself is worthwhile, and to motivate people to do their utmost of their own accord. That’s what makes a leader great.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Understand how our government's monetary policy directly impacts your life and future. The current expansion of credit and printing of dollars serves as a direct tax most harshly on savings and salaries, and the current environment encourages acquisition of debt that can be repaid in cheaper future dollars. Do not fall into the trap of spending with abandon. Instead, seek to find inflation-resistant assets that you can secure with fixed, low-interest rate debt. Starting to do that now can put you in an amazing position later when interest rates rise. Keep in mind that you will not be protected by a steady income, unless there are huge changes in monetary policy. In order to prosper, you will need to be able to greatly advance your income. Buck this "casual" everywhere trend. It's sloppy, juvenile and shows a lack of self-respect. You don't have to wear a suit everywhere you go but pay attention to the way you present yourself, regardless of whatever everyone else does or doesn't do. Do not wear a sock cap unless it's snowing, or you are skiing, and you are outdoors.

No one is going to give anything to you, and you are not entitled to anything, except the opportunity to work hard. First you work hard, and then you are rewarded. It's never the other way around. If you want to advance, make yourself indispensable. Never be afraid to ask questions – lots of questions. Don't assume anything, always double check professionally, or keep your supervisors informed of your thinking and what you're doing. Actually learn things, don't just assume that you know things that you never actually learned. Learning never ends, and it has little to do with school. You will learn until you die. Take diligent notes all the time, as the best memories are unreliable.

Interviewing is a skill, like any other. If you are getting interviews but not landing jobs, find friends who do land jobs in their interviews and go into detail with them about how they answer questions, the responses they give, and their demeanor.

Cindi Brown



As president and chief operating officer, Cindi has overall strategic and operational responsibility for INNOVIM, a leading innovator in the fields of science, engineering and data management. She provides experienced leadership, management and vision necessary to ensure INNOVIM has the effective operational controls and personnel in place to bring about new growth and ensure financial strength and operational efficiency.

Prior to joining INNOVIM, Cindi worked at Integral Systems, enabling civil and military satellite mission planning and operations and providing program management over large U.S. Air Force programs. She also managed the Landsat 7 Mission Operations Center as program manager for Computer Sciences Corporation. Cindi has 30+ years of experience in software development, satellite operations ground system support, proposal and program management.

Cindi holds a B.S. in Computer Science and Statistics from George Washington University. She is also a member of the National Association of Professional Women.

1. How do you define success?

Success is defined as reaching your goals, whatever they may be.

2. What is the key to success?

The key to success is hard work, self-confidence, willingness to change, ability to communicate, and more hard work.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

Yes, but not necessarily in a business sense. I have always had the ability to listen to what people are saying, and help them through their concerns or problems by just talking it through. My children refer to me as their "voice of reason." In fact, I started my college education with the intention of majoring in psychology, but I changed to computer science once I realized how much I enjoyed solving problems via computer programs. So, I learned how to combine my

ability to relate to people with my problem solving abilities, and the synergy of the two has definitely helped me become successful.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

What pushes me forward is knowing that many successful people had to overcome significant adversities before they succeeded. People such as Albert Einstein, Oprah Winfrey, Beethoven, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Benjamin Franklin all learned from their adversities and then used their life-learning lessons to become successful contributors to society.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

To really enjoy something, you first have to experience how it feels to not have what you are enjoying. For instance, the only way you can really enjoy winning a sporting event is if you have already experienced the pain of losing that sporting event. Or to really enjoy a beautiful day of weather, you first have to experience a really bad day of weather.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love spending time with my family and friends, and I love taking pictures of our get-togethers. I refer to it as "capturing memories," and plan on someday writing a book about the importance of capturing memories with pictures and stories. I want my children and grandchildren to be able to experience my experiences, not just see pictures of them.

7. What makes a great leader?

A great leader must be a good communicator, a good decision maker, and be able to make the difficult decisions while keeping perspective on what is really important.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Don't be afraid to show initiative and express your ideas in a respectful, but convincing way. But most important, remember that your way of providing a solution should not be presented as the only way to solve the problem, but rather presented as a way to solve the problem.

Greg Schaefer



Greg Schaefer, founder of SEI New York, has been licensed in the insurance field for over 15 years. He holds licenses in Property & Casualty, Life & Health and has obtained distinguished designations as a Certified Insurance Counselor (CIC) and a Certified Professional Insurance Agent (CPIA).

Greg founded SEI New York to help business owners save money on insurance without compromising coverage or customer service. His business model has always been successful because it is based on a deep understanding of the needs of customers, both personal and commercial. This is true from the initial inquiry to long-term relationships.

1. How do you define success?

I have a tremendous drive to achieve whatever I set my sights on. As a young person, I remember observing my dad and his reactions to people, as well as to situations around him. In doing so, I learned all I could about the world at large, including business etiquette, what it meant to be a man, a father, and a worker among workers. Success, for me, is about being content, having fun, following my dreams, being responsible, and not hurting others while making my place in the world.

2. What is the key to success?

To always keep moving forward and to learn from every setback. The greatest entrepreneurs did not become successful overnight. I like to dream big!

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I always knew that I “wanted” to be successful, that I was willing to work at being successful and that when I want something, I am willing to stay the course, no matter how arduous the road toward attaining the desired objective becomes.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I love the “chase” and I also love strategizing about how to achieve my goals. For me, it is similar to solving a puzzle. As I build on each success, I can see the entire picture taking shape. At that point, I know what I must do to achieve the success I am longing to acquire.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

In 1998, my father gave me a secretarial job at our family’s insurance agency. He paid me a very nominal salary and encouraged me to learn the business from the ground up. Once I garnered an understanding of the value of our products, I started quietly selling policies on my own. When my father saw what I was doing, he became my greatest supporter. He promoted me to the role of producer and paid me a commission on all my sales. He encouraged me to open my own business. In 1999, on the premise that it would broaden our family’s sphere of influence in the insurance industry, I opened Schaefer Enterprises, Inc. Never once did my father worry that I might become his biggest competitor. To his credit, and my hard work, within five years my organization created a \$5 million book of business, much of which I have managed to maintain despite the ever-changing and challenging insurance marketplace. We also have been recognized for the last two years (back to back) by *Inc. Magazine*, in 2014 and 2015, as one of the "Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America."

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time with my wife and family, watching my boys grow and develop, working out at the gym, socializing with my friends, bantering with my staff, laughing, and generally enjoying life!

7. What makes a great leader?

Someone who never asks anyone else to do what they, themselves, wouldn’t do. Someone who is loyal, has integrity, and recognizes these traits in others.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Take your time, do a lot of different things before you settle on your choice of a profession and make very sure that whatever you do, you love doing it!

Ryan Harwood



Ryan Harwood is the CEO of PureWow, a digital media company that specializes in women's lifestyle content. Harwood founded PureWow in 2010 after noticing a void in the digital landscape for the Upper Millennial and Gen X female. PureWow publishes original content that provides unique, under-the-radar discoveries related to fashion & beauty, food & travel, home decor, technology, recipes, health, and more.

Prior to starting PureWow, Ryan worked for Goldman Sachs for five years and was instrumental in the development of the newly formed Goldman Sachs Private Bank. He is a graduate of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. Ryan was a two-time captain of the men's varsity tennis team at Penn and also played professional tennis during the 2003-2004 season.

1. **How do you define success?**

Happiness. Everyone gets there in different ways, but if you're happy, then you're successful.

2. **What is the key to success?**

Understanding what makes you happy. Self-awareness and a deep understanding of who you truly are.

3. **Did you always know you would be successful?**

I knew that I would die trying. Never giving up is something that makes me happy. Grit. Hustle. Compassion. Integrity. I knew that if I stayed true to myself and those principles, I could hold my head high and sleep well at night.

4. **When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?**

Everything that was taught to me by my parents at a young age. It's in my DNA to never give up. Time and time again, it's proven to be fruitful. When things seem most bleak, go head down

and continue working hard. Your defining moment may arrive when you feel surrounded by adversity.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

You can't control everything that happens to you, but you can control how you react to it. I try not to let obstacles affect me for long periods of time. Sulk about it for a few minutes and then forget about it and move on. Also, the fact that indecision is the worst decision. Don't mull for too long. Gather facts and opinions, go with your gut, and make a decision. You can always learn from your mistakes.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love the NBA. Going to Knicks games is my home away from home. All stress disappears when I am at MSG. Playing tennis, the gym, making playlists on my 1996 iPod, and spending time with my family and my friends.

7. What makes a great leader?

Confidence, conviction, honesty, and a very high emotional IQ.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

You're not supposed to know what you want to do forever, yet. Try something you think you may like and go from there. The process of elimination is sometimes the best way to the answer. I started my career in one area of finance, quickly moved to another area of finance, and now work in media and technology. Work hard and be nice to everyone, and it all works out the way it should.

Adnan Derrani



Adnan Derrani is the founder and CEO of American Halal Co, Inc., which markets the Saffron Road brand line of all-natural and antibiotic-free halal cuisines. Saffron Road is the first halal product to be sold nationally in the U.S.A. Whole Foods, the #7 ranked U.S. food retailer with over \$14 billion in sales, has noted Saffron Road as one of the most successful brand launches, nationally, in their 30-year history. Saffron Road is now sold in over 12,000 retail food stores. According to A.C. Nielson/SPINS Scantrak, Saffron Road is the fastest-growing natural frozen entrée brand in the U.S.A. and nationally ranked #2.

In its Spring 2015 issue, *Profile Magazine* featured Adnan on its cover story regarding CEO leadership, and how he is delivering record growth in the, otherwise challenged, frozen foods category. In January 2015, The Specialty Food Association (the largest trade group globally of specialty and gourmet food brands, with over 50,000 attendees at its Fancy Food Show in San Francisco, California) awarded Adnan with its coveted “Business Leadership Award.” In April 2014, Social Venture Network awarded Adnan with a “Lifetime Service Award” for his 30 years of devotion to socially responsible business and giving back to the community. In December 2013, at the Global Islamic Economy Summit in Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Al-Maktoum gave American Halal an award as the “Best Halal Company in the World.” And in 2012, at the World Halal Forum, His Excellency, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, gave Saffron Road the award as the “Best Halal Product in the World.” Adnan and Saffron Road have been featured in numerous publications, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *The New York Times*, *Fortune*, and *CNN.com*.

Adnan has been an entrepreneur and investment professional for almost 30 years and is president of Condor Ventures, Inc., a venture firm devoted to strategic investing in natural food companies. His entrepreneurial ventures have resulted in a successful track record of scaling

and growing niche beverage and natural food product lines into mainstream-branded companies that also deliver disruptive social impact.

Adnan founded Vermont Pure in 1991. Today, Vermont Pure/Crystal Rock is the 2nd largest bottled water company in the northeast. Adnan was also a partner in Stonyfield Farms, Inc., which was sold to Groupe Danone in 2001. Stonyfield, today, generates almost \$400 million in sales annually. He was also a principal of Delicious Brands, Inc., which he scaled, with the financial backing of Carl Icahn, to become the 5th largest cookie brand in the U.S.

Adnan has been recognized by BBMG and SVN as one of the entrepreneurs who engineered, “20 Ideas that Changed the Way the World Does Business.” The select list of inductees includes Ben Cohen (Ben & Jerry’s), Gary Hirshberg (Stonyfield Farms), Muhammad Yunus (Nobel Peace Prize, Grameen Bank), and Steve Case (AOL). He has also been hosted by the Vatican, Pope Benedict, and the White House, as one of only two American Muslims to be a speaker on “Interfaith in Business” in October 2010, at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. Adnan is a graduate of Columbia University’s School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, where he is the chairman of the board of visitors and is also chairman of Columbia’s SEAS entrepreneurship advisory board. Adnan is also a trustee and on the board of directors of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California.

1. How do you define success?

I think startup entrepreneurs have to be very careful not to define success in the classic one-dimensional terms taught in business schools – solely by profits, sales, or scale. I define success as creating a viable, yet, disruptive enterprise that adheres to a triple bottom line philosophy – i.e. delivers on a mission of social responsibility, has a positive & measurable impact on meeting a critical need for humanity, a disenfranchised community, or the environment, as well as, meeting traditional Proforma sales or profits goals.

2. What is the key to success?

This is a very broad question and, unfortunately, there is no one answer. Over the decades, what I have personally observed is that the most successful entrepreneurs I know had grit (resilience, staying power) in the face of enormous obstacles, and against all odds, they never gave up. They are a breed of irrationally, passionate leaders who believed undeniably in their idea or enterprise. The biggest mistake young entrepreneurs make (indeed, I did in my first venture as well), is to not believe in themselves or waver in their conviction due to being young, inexperienced and told by alleged “experts” (e.g. investors, executives at large companies, competitors, or by business consultants) that their idea or venture was doomed to failure or impossible. Albert Einstein famously once said, “If any idea is not at first absurd, then it has no chance of success.” Also, it helps to really do your own research. Be skeptical of the status quo or conventional thinking out there, but back up your ideas with new, exceptional original sources and your own insightful marketing, demographic insights. Big companies, consultants, investors (Wall Street), and venture funds sometimes miss the boat by looking through the rearview mirror and using stale knowledge. Especially with the Internet and social media, today’s disruptive entrepreneurs have amazing opportunities to do astute original research like never before and

click the refresh button. So the keys to success, to me, are having both "street smarts" and "book smarts," and then having unwavering conviction to believe in yourself, regardless of the odds, to never give up.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

No, of course not. In fact, I have had many more failures along the way than successes. Indeed, I did always have an unhealthy dose of overconfidence. But what has changed over the decades, as I got more successful with each venture, is that my mindset was transformed from a fear of failure (most common among almost all entrepreneurs) to a methodical confidence about setting reasonable and achievable goals that lead to ultimate success.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

Goes back to question #2.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

To believe in myself and the conviction of my ideas, in spite of negative voices all around me to the contrary, and to make sure I don't follow conventional thinking, but rather stay true to my values. It's also critical to surround yourself with good mentors that believe in you, from your board to your advisors (lawyers, consultants, investors, etc.), and to seek out business communities as support groups, where you can benefit from the best practices or learn from colleagues (CEOs or entrepreneurs) in a safe environment.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love to spend time with my family, golf, skiing, deep sea fishing (including freshwater fly fishing in Vermont), as well as connecting deeper with Muslims or other religious groups on community or faith-based initiatives. I also mentor a number of young, socially conscious entrepreneurs and am active with a number of nonprofits that share my values.

7. What makes a great leader?

Being able to set discipline among the company's team and employees, being accountable to all employees and all stakeholders, as well as being able to recognize your own weaknesses and readily admit when mistakes are made (learning to live in the solution, not just harboring on the problems). And hiring stellar managers, team members, and collaboratively delegating authority and key decision powers to them. Vision and strategy are also critical, and it is up to the leader to always keep these in focus. Of course, the key to leadership is also recognizing what motivates your employees or partners and inspiring them to excel to new levels of achievement in pushing those interests that are also passionately aligned with the company's interests.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

There is a huge movement among college students today to jump ship and not complete their degrees, or even if they are graduates, to just leap cold into being an entrepreneur. This has now become very trendy in today's era, and I want to caution this millennial generation to not follow the herd here. Stay in college, finish your degrees, and then seek full-time employment opportunities. Only after you have had meaningful employment for a couple of years, either at a

large corporation, venture capital or finance firm, consulting company, or in a business that has a skillset you want to master, then if you still want to pursue being an entrepreneur, make the leap, assuming you have done all your original research for your idea and that you have gained some work experience in the field you want to delve in.

Nick Kovacevich



Nick Kovacevich is a former college athlete who now excels at the entrepreneurship game. After graduating summa cum laude from Southwest Baptist University in 2009, Nick connected with former high school teammate and fellow entrepreneur, Dallas Imbimbo. After buying into Imbimbo's PackMyDorm, a college moving and storage solutions company he founded in his dorm room, Nick helped secure an exit by selling to a California-based moving company. The pair then moved to southern California to embark on the next venture, Kush Bottles, a packaging solutions company targeting the emerging legal cannabis industry. In 2012, the pair was introduced to Steve Jesson, who needed some work space to launch a new venture that sourced construction equipment rentals from rental yards nationwide, all under one roof. The Travelocity-like venture grew from 2 employees to 25 in just over a year, and Dallas Imbimbo left to run the re-branded BigRentz.com in its new Irvine, California headquarters. Nick took the helm as CEO at Kush Bottles shortly afterward and has been instrumental in the company's rapid growth, which includes doubling in revenue from 2014 to 2015 and earning the highest ranking of any marijuana-related organization on *Inc. Magazine's* "Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America" list. Nick still sits on the board at BigRentz.com, a company with over 120+ employees that was voted "The Fastest Growing Private Company in Orange County" by the *Orange County Business Journal* in 2014.

Today, Nick runs Kush Bottles and is considered an expert in the legal marijuana industry. He received an "Excellence in Entrepreneurship" award in 2015 for his innovation in the compliant marijuana packaging industry. A true entrepreneur, Nick is passionate about all things business,

from founding successful companies in various spaces to investing and managing residential and commercial real estate, to consulting and mentoring.

1. How do you define success?

I believe that success is reached when all the important aspects of a person's life are working well. This includes relationships, financial matters, health, intellectual pursuits, leisure time and recreational activities, and goal achievement. Only when all those pieces of the puzzle are aligned and tuned, can one be successful.

2. What is the key to success?

As alluded to above, I believe that the key to success is to have balance. You may have the greatest company (or bank account) in the world, but if your relationships with those most important to you are suffering, then you are not a success. Or, if you don't take the time to pursue healthy activities, then you won't have the stamina or longevity to reach other goals. Accordingly, balance in all things is the key to a successful life.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I believe I did always know I would be successful, and I attribute that to my parents, both of whom amassed a wonderful balance of achieving personal, financial, and spiritual goals.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I remind myself that the journey to success is more important than the ultimate result. Adversity is part of the journey, and it should be expected and embraced. Using that mindset, I can take on challenges with excitement, instead of fear. Although easier said than done, this tactic of shifting one's mentality usually results in better outcomes.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

There is no such thing as "perfect," and if you wait for perfect in business, you'll be waiting forever. The way it was shared with me is, "Today's good plan is better than tomorrow's perfect plan." In other words, taking action is better than waiting for the "perfect" opportunity. The fluidity of business makes it impossible to "perfect" something. It is the constant execution, in the best way possible, that will build something excellent.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I enjoy playing basketball and spending time with my wife.

7. What makes a great leader?

I think there are many traits to a great leader, including empowering team members so they can contribute and not be micro-managed, and creating a culture so that everyone feels they are an integral part of a larger goal or vision.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Listen and learn. There are a lot of smart people around you, and you can soak up a lot of valuable life lessons if you are open to new ideas. Do not be confined to what you learn in college, as you will quickly find out, the most valuable learning takes place while on the job.

Jeff Grover



As CEO and co-founder of SkyRocket Media, Jeff Grover leads a rapidly-growing company with a mission of empowering the world to make better decisions by providing consumers clear, relevant and unbiased truth. Under the brand of BestCompanies.com, SkyRocket owns and operates in over 125 business and consumer categories. These online resources are instrumental in helping individuals and businesses to research, identify and choose the best company for their specific situation.

Jeff has an extensive history as a successful entrepreneur. In February of 2003, he launched his own marketing agency, Flashpoint Enterprises, which he led and grown for the next six years. He was then brought on by One On One Marketing as their profit center manager over education. Prior to starting SkyRocket, he helped One On One establish itself as the country's premier marketing and lead generation firm in the education industry.

1. How do you define success?

I define success as getting what you really want out of life. Often times, people don't know what they want out of life, so they don't know if they were ever successful. It's important to be very specific in your pursuit of success so not to be chasing a moving target.

2. What is the key to success?

Define your goal and create your definition of success so that you can focus! Without a clear goal or success metric, you'll never attain it because it doesn't actually exist in a concrete form in your mind. That lack of focus will lead you down random paths. A laser focus on a goal gives you definiteness and simplicity in decision making. Everything is either supporting your success goal(s) or it isn't. So you can easily say no to everything that doesn't support your goals.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

More or less, I've always believed, since being a small boy, that I could do great things. In fact, if I'm honest with myself, I have already had all of my dreams come true, but I've consciously raised the bar on myself because I'm still learning and I want to have a much larger, positive impact in this world.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I've developed an unnatural ability to see problems as learning opportunities to grow and become better. This has been a major key to my success so far.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

Failure is never as bad as you think it's going to be. More or less from my perspective, the price of success is a series of failures.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

There is no such thing as "spare" time because that implies there is time when there isn't something to do. When I'm not working at SkyRocket, I love spending time with family, reading, thinking, and working out.

7. What makes a great leader?

A deep sense of love for your organization's cause, and a deep sense of concern for the wellbeing of everyone involved in supporting the cause with you.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Your degree alone will not make you successful. You can never say to your boss, "I failed that assignment, but look, I have a degree." Your degree is, at best, a foundation of knowledge and theory that gives you a starting point. In the real world, especially in bleeding-edge technology, your value is directly connected to your ability to identify and create solutions to problems within the company and create solutions, where others only saw briars and thorns.

Greg Muzzillo



Greg Muzzillo founded Proforma in 1978 as an industry distributor. Within five years, he grew the company to several million dollars in sales, and by the mid-1980s, Proforma had been recognized as one of *Inc. Magazine's* "Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America," three years in a row.

In the late 1980s, Proforma introduced its membership program to enable distributors to retain their business ownership and independence. This allowed owners to share in sales and marketing resources, purchasing power with industry suppliers, back office support including all billing, accounting, vendor payments, cash flow, computer systems, and more.

Today, Proforma has more than 750 members with more than \$500 million in sales. Proforma has more than 100 members of its Million Dollar Club and more than 40 members of its Multi-Million Dollar Club (with sales ranging from \$2 million to over \$26 million). Eight of Proforma's members have been included in *Inc. Magazine's* "Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America" list in 2015.

1. How do you define success?

Business success is nothing without success in other phases of your life, including your marriage, family, and being a wonderful citizen of this world. Going home at night and having no friends or family because you cheated people is no way to get there.

2. What is the key to success?

Many people have big dreams and lofty goals, but there is one key ingredient for big dreams and lofty goals to become reality: getting started. No one ever accomplished anything without simply getting started. And sometimes the start of some very big things may be very simple. Check out the history of Steve Jobs and the Apple computer: a very simple start to a phenomenal success. There are more examples, including Microsoft, Facebook, and Subway.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

When I was a 3- or 4-year-old, my mother told me I went door to door trying to sell neighbors empty packets of seeds for the pictures on them. Someone eventually called my mother and told on me, so that was the end of that racket. But what I really learned from that, and jobs like snow shoveling was that I loved being an independent business owner. I can remember when a guy opened the door to pay me, and he had this big wad of cash in his hand. I thought, "Man, I want to be like that guy. I want to have that much cash in my hand."

In 1978, we started Proforma with only \$200. Within a year, we had \$250,000 in sales. We put an unbelievable amount of time and energy into building Proforma, but we were determined to be successful. Bringing those first 50 to 60 franchises on board was unbelievably difficult work, and we figured out our business model on the fly. Fortunately, we had great relationships with them, and they believed in us. Now, we have 750 member offices, 60,000 clients, and \$500 million in annual sales.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

The dreams of our family, friends, franchise owners and vendors are what inspire me. Also, knowing that my work and success have a direct impact on other people's lives.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

I live by two key lessons I learned over time. The first is that there are only two kinds of activities in business: wealth building activities, and everything else. Figure out what the wealth building activities are, focus on them, and delegate everything else. Secondly, only a few people get wealthy because everyone else gets stuck at comfortable. Most folks get stuck at comfortable because they can. No one is pushing them. They are not pushing themselves. Creating wealth requires a compelling vision to pull us past comfortable and propel us to wealth.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time with our ten children and two grandchildren.

7. What makes a great leader?

At Proforma, we believe leadership requires having a flat organization with as few layers as possible between the top leadership and the customer. The natural tendency of many leaders is to build ivory towers and fiefdoms. But ivory towers and fiefdoms create too much separation between the people at "the top" and the people that are "growing and serving customers." At Proforma, we believe that if we want more and better customers, the key is to value and listen to the people who are growing and serving customers.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Preparation and perspiration (hard work) are important, but the one thing that separates those who will go on to do amazingly average things in their lives and those who will be amazingly successful is this: inspiration. You will spend hundreds of hours preparing, studying, working hard to get your degree, and that is very important. But it will only get you so far. To be

successful beyond your wildest dreams, you first have to have big, wild dreams. So dream big, make a change, and don't be afraid to take a risk.

Joe Pulizzi



Joe Pulizzi is an entrepreneur, speaker, author, podcaster, father and lover of all things orange. He's the founder of multiple startups, including the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), the leading content marketing educational resource for enterprise brands, that has been recognized as the fastest-growing business media company by *Inc. Magazine* in 2014. CMI is responsible for producing Content Marketing World, the largest content marketing event in the world (held every September in Cleveland, Ohio), as well as the leading content marketing magazine, *Chief Content Officer*. He began using the term "content marketing" back in 2001. CMI also offers advisory services for innovative organizations such as HP, AT&T, Petco, LinkedIn, SAP, the Gates Foundation and many others.

Joe is the winner of the 2014 "John Caldwell Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Content Council. Joe's third book, *Epic Content Marketing: How to Tell a Different Story, Break through the Clutter, and Win More Customers by Marketing Less* was named one of "Five Must-Read Business Books of the Year" by *Fortune*. His fourth book, *Content Inc.*, was released in September 2015. Joe has also co-authored two other books, *Get Content Get Customers* and *Managing Content Marketing*. He has spoken at more than 400 locations in 14 countries advancing the practice of content marketing. He's delivered keynote speeches for events and organizations including SXSW, NAMM, *Fortune's* Leadership Summit, Oracle Eloqua, DuPont, SAP, HP, and Dell.

1. How do you define success?

Making a positive difference in the lives of others.

2. What is the key to success?

Setting career and personal goals, reviewing those goals consistently, and striving every minute of every day to reach and exceed those goals.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

There were times when I honestly wasn't sure. There were some low points that made the prospects unimaginable, but I always believed deep down that I could make a difference. Maybe that's what kept me going.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

"Without struggle, there is no progress." – Frederick Douglas. I think about that often. Adversity is a natural part of success.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

If you have tried something and failed, you are vastly better off than if you had tried nothing and succeeded.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time with my family and two boys. I love to read, golf, run and keep active. In addition to the business, we run a nonprofit called Orange Effect Foundation to help children with speech disorders.

7. What makes a great leader?

Lead by doing. Treat others with respect. Listen before speaking.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Don't think about the job or career you want, just do what you want, now. There are no barriers to entering literally any field today, and there is no need to wait for opportunities to open up. Make your own opportunities.



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