

Finding and defining your success

Callie D. Willingham, DVM

Prosper Trail Animal Hospital, Prosper, TX 75078

Abstract

Success is often viewed as an endpoint, a goal, or a final destination, the 1 big thing. In reality, success is more of a cycle with phases of growth that are fueled by your experiences. Failure, while uncomfortable, is an integral part of success. Google dictionary defines success as “the accomplishment of an aim or purpose; the attainment of popularity or profit; a person or thing that achieves desired aims or attains prosperity.” Ultimately, however, you must create your own definition of success, recognizing that it will likely change over time.

Key words: veterinary practice, success, personal development, food animal practice

Résumé

On voit souvent le succès comme une fin en soi, un but ou la destination finale, la grande révélation. En fait, le succès est plus comme un cycle avec des phases de croissance alimentées par votre expérience. L'échec, bien que fâcheux, fait partie essentielle du succès. Le dictionnaire Google définit le succès comme 'l'accomplissement d'un but ou d'un objectif; l'atteinte de la popularité ou du profit; une personne ou chose qui atteint ses buts ou la prospérité'. Ultiment, toutefois, vous devez créer votre propre définition du succès en reconnaissant qu'il va probablement changer avec le temps.

Introduction

As one starts in a career, it can be tempting to compare oneself with the “big names” of the profession. This is a misleading and false equivalency as we each have a unique path in life and different priorities. Because life goals can and should evolve over time, approaching one's career in a linear fashion can be frustrating or disappointing. As priorities shift, outcomes that were never imagined become our reality and in that, greater success is often found. Staying open to these possibilities broadens your potential for success.

Viewing success as a cycle can help to frame your thoughts around the steps you're taking to reach your goals. Not all successes are big, monumental achievements. Each small step is a success and can lead to new opportunities. It's okay to view these small steps as successes even as you're driven to accomplish more or continue working toward a big goal. Reassessing your goals periodically assists you in evaluating if changes need to be made, and may help you identify new goals as new and varied experiences fuel you and your career. Success is not a constant, and every one of us will have ups and downs. Seeking out feedback can accelerate this cycle, as it can help you adapt and perform even better in the future.

Failure is uncomfortable, and we tend to try to avoid it whenever possible. However, failure is a part of every success and can lead to greater success in the future. Fear is often a large part of the avoidance of failure as we tend to internalize failure and view success and failure as dichotomous. We often think 'if I'm not successful, then I'm a failure' or 'if this action/event/endeavor is not successful, then it's a failure' as if those are the only 2 options available. Removing those labels can help to evaluate what really occurred, what factors affected the undesired outcome, and what you can change or approach differently in the future. It's these learning moments that can lead to some amazing results and successes. Accepting the possibility of failure allows you to stretch yourself and reach for even greater goals.

As we navigate life, we often fall into the habit of comparing ourselves to our peers and mentors. We have to realize, though, that the part of their path to success that we see is only a small fraction of the reality of their journey. Where we see a linear trajectory, there are actually many diversions, stumbling blocks, setbacks and, potentially, failures. Learning from the paths of others in your practice or office, and in different aspects of the profession, can help you develop your own map to success. Success is a cycle, an ever-moving target, that changes as we evolve and we should periodically reevaluate and reset goals. Like the Lance Armstrong Wedu podcast The Forward's logo, an arrow with a crick in the middle, the goal is to move forward, not straight.