

## Success: The Myth

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### *Student Essay*

Do you know someone rich and famous? Is he confident, popular, and joyful all of the time—the epitome of mainstream success? Or, on the other hand, is he stressed, having second thoughts about his life choices, and unsure about the meaning of his life? I am willing to bet that it is the second one. Mainstream marketing and media have effectively brainwashed our society into accepting a false, even potentially dangerous definition of success. Marketers want us to believe that having lots of money, living in a big house, and owning all of the latest cars, fashions, and technology is the key to happiness, and hence, success. This overstated, falsely advertised myth is hardly ever the case in real life. True success requires respect, appreciation, integrity, and patience—all of which are traits that by human nature are genuinely difficult to attain—especially in the face of modern marketers who relentlessly deceive us, control our thoughts, and usurp our independence in order to increase their bottom line.

Marketers *want* us to believe that living a selfish life, involving nothing but the pursuit of money and fame will bring success and happiness. Sadly, this is not true. Money is comparable to the often-mentioned new toy—fun while it is brand new and fresh, but terribly boring and unexciting after a few hours of play. Though money can buy conveniences and comforts, one needs much more than superficial luxuries to live a successful, well-balanced life. Money *does* make life easier—but it does not necessarily make it *better*. For example, money can not make one knowledgeable or wise – that only comes with hard work and committed study. And money can not help one forge a long-term relationship with husband or wife – that only comes through love, commitment, and sacrifice. All the money in the world cannot teach respect or courtesy – that only comes with a good upbringing and a strong concern for the feelings of others. Can money give one the gift of patience or leadership or appreciation or courage or friendship or even generosity? *I don't think so*. All of these traits—knowledge, wisdom, love, respect, patience—are essential aspects of a successful person's life. Money can not assist in the attainment of any of these vital traits! Money merely detracts from the pursuit of success by providing distraction, temptation, and corruption. Therefore the marketer's illegitimate claim that money is tantamount to success can be easily disproved. There is no elevator to success – you have to take the stairs.

Similarly, popularity and fame are hardly ever synonymous with success. Mind-numbing advertisements that are incessantly flaunted to Americans have become ingrained into memory and habit, altering the accepted definition of success into something shame-worthy. "Success" has been sadly commercialized to represent fame and popularity. Ironically, the most well-liked and popular people often have less confidence, talent, and freedom than those who choose to follow the compass of their hearts instead of the mainstream culture. In the words of Tony Long, a journalist for Wired News, "What is a hipster, after all, other than a successful slave to the dictates of the pop culture police?" A "hipster" is merely a mindless conformist locked in a hopeless struggle to keep up with the current fads. This commercialized vision of success has already extinguished the originality in most Americans and turned us into a nation of allegorical sheep. Contrary to the popular myth, money does not buy happiness or make a successful person.

When a person allows his mind to be restrained by mainstream television, magazines, and the internet, becoming successful is an impossible task. Fortunately, there is a way to stop this disgraceful masquerade before all Americans end up deprived of their wool—or worse—sent to the slaughterhouse. In order to return to the traditional definition of success, Americans must cast off the lifestyle that they have been force-fed and build a better one! Rather than using money and popularity as the method to achieve the ever-so elusive success, Americans should seek simpler, more effective solutions that might not be obvious at first glance. Ralph Waldo Emerson gave priceless insight when he wrote:

To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;

To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.

This is to have succeeded.

Emerson's quote provides a paradigm of success—a model to be admired and strived for. Emerson teaches that learning to appreciate the subtleties in life can make it that much more enjoyable and interesting. In addition, volunteering time and energy to good causes, like helping the community, not only benefits others, but brings happiness and satisfaction. Furthermore, learning how to act respectably and admirably in difficult situations can make life smoother by helping to avoid unnecessary conflicts and spark lifelong friendships. Moreover, learning patience and developing leadership skills can help one to gain a better understanding of life, make well-informed decisions, and form healthy opinions – all of which are essential to becoming a successful person. In the words of Bill FitzPatrick, founder of the American Success Institute, a successful person is “strong when toughness is required and, at the same time, patient when understanding is needed.” It is this kind of sound judgment and reasoning that sets the exceptionally successful people apart from the mediocre.

At this point, a reader may be thinking “Wow! It takes all *that* to be truly successful? Maybe I'm not meant to be successful.” or “This ‘success’ thing is just too much work. Is it worth it?” Well, to answer these questions in brief: yes. It is not easy to become successful and hardly anyone is *truly* successful – but it is a noble goal to strive for. Just like everything else in life, becoming successful takes practice; no one becomes a success overnight. With courage and hope our society can forget the marketer's inadequate definition of success and work to attain *true* success by modeling respect, appreciation, integrity, and patience – the keys to happiness and success.