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ESSENTIAL  
QUALITIES

FOR A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Integrity	8
Living in Integrity in an Imperfect World	10
Courage	14
Everyday Courage	16
Perseverance	20
Resilience	27
Internal versus External Locus of Control	27
Balance	32
Practices that Lead to a Successful Life	35



Books, podcasts and blogs abound with recipes for successful leaders, entrepreneurs, self-help gurus, and millionaires. The ingredients usually include organizational skills, delegation, clear communication, good follow-through, and so on.

And all those things are required if you want to be an entrepreneur, leader, guru, or millionaire. But many people don't want that. They have a different calling.

However, most people do want to be successful at whatever they do.

Whether your calling is to be a good parent, caregiver, delivery driver, or dog walker, doing it well depends on the same actions and thinking.

If you don't communicate well with your children, there will be confusion, mixed messages, and ultimately negative consequences. It's the same with delivering packages, walking dogs, and caring for children or elderly people.

There are other traits that are highly related to success, too:

- Integrity
- Perseverance
- Courage
- Resilience
- Balance

These qualities are essential to maintain our responsibilities, relationships, and personal wellbeing.

As with many things in life, these traits exist on a continuum - low/average/high or good/better/best. The majority of us fall within the center of the bell curve, in the average range. The outliers are less common and often get there through extreme circumstances.

Most of us will waiver in some way during times of high or extended periods of stress and uncertainty. That is to be expected. So, these keys to success are fluid, but consistent.

Even the most committed among us may find it hard to persevere in the face of extreme adversity. Those who are genuinely courageous may find it difficult to take on some of the challenges presented.

Despite that, those who demonstrate these traits most of the time or in most situations are usually the most successful.



# 1

## Integrity

The standard definition and interpretation of integrity is about honesty. That is part of the story. The other part has to do with consistency and authenticity.

Being honest in word and deed consistently is not easy to do for anyone. This means that your actions, choices, and decisions are aligned with the values you profess.

To illustrate this concept, consider these ideas:

- The CEO who professes family values but regularly requires parents to work weekends and after business hours isn't showing integrity.



- The director of an agency committed to empowering women, but paying wages so low that the all-female staff live below the poverty line, is out of integrity.
- A social worker helping families stay together who is rarely home to care for her own children is not in integrity.

But, what if...

If circumstances are such that the pro-family values CEO only has parents working there and would lose money resulting in closing the business?

If the women's agency director has only enough money in the budget of the nonprofit to pay minimum wage and still operate the shelter?

If the social worker stays in a job that requires her to be away from home a lot because it is the best paying job she can find?

Nothing is black and white.

## Living in Integrity in an Imperfect World

So, since our world is imperfect, how can you live in integrity?

Try these strategies:

1. Explain your decisions and available options. To foster understanding and acceptance, help others understand why decisions are made or things are done a specific way.
2. Research all options and choose the one most aligned with your values. Think of things from the perspective of those affected by your decision or action. Ask for their input and best case scenarios.
3. See how others are handling similar situations. Check with like-minded associates or friends to see how they handle similar situations. Identify best practices in your area. Explore professional resources to see what they

recommend.

4. Think outside the box. Be creative. Consider things like resource-sharing and allow staff (or children) to come up with new ideas. Gather input from every level. Brainstorm.
5. Give people choices as much as possible. In the final analysis, the more ownership of the problem and solution you can share with those affected, the better the outcome. Ensure they understand the parameters and have realistic expectations but give them a voice.
6. Vote and shop with your heart. Don't be afraid to take a stand. It may not always be popular, but values are a personal choice. Many corporations pull their advertising dollars when television, radio, or social media accounts violate their basic values.
  - You don't have to make a political statement about everything, but if you are anti-violence and a

publication in which you've paid for advertising exploits violence, stay in integrity. Pull out, if possible.

7. Lead by example. Whether you're a CEO of a corporation or parent of a child, others are watching everything you do. They'll follow your example, not your advice or instructions. Not only does this apply to the way you interact with a child or staff, but also to how they see you interact with yourself and others.



# Courage

“Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking.

Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.”

~ STEVE JOBS

Jobs had ideas that went against the tide of the status quo. And he had the courage of his convictions to push through when things got difficult.

Stepping out into the unknown is frightening. It is risky. It requires a belief in yourself that not everyone shares.

The courage to keep going when things don't go as planned is particularly difficult. Many people lack the fortitude necessary to face criticism and ridicule associated with a perceived failure.

Those with courage have the grit to try it again - make a change - do it differently this time. It is yet another step in the direction of attaining the desired outcome. Ignoring the naysayers takes courage.

Some of the most successful people of all time have talked about the road to their greatness being littered with unsuccessful attempts, including Michael Jordan, Thomas Edison, and Albert Einstein.

But what about the rest of us?

## Everyday Courage

You don't have to be a superstar, world leader, or genius to be courageous. They put their pants on one leg at a time, like the rest of us.

Many of us who get up every morning to face whatever the day brings our way show courage to rival the Jobs and Jordans of the world.

Courage looks different for everyone:

- For kids, courage may look like facing down the bullies and harsh judgments of their peers.
- For struggling parents, courage may look like holding your head up and looking the clerk in the eye when using food assistance cards in the grocery checkout line.
- For people with mental illness, courage may be getting out of bed.



- For single people, courage may be going on a first date.
- For the middle-class family, courage may not be conforming to the norms of the community.

With all the decisions come the inevitable consequences. The choice may be the wrong one - we must live with that. Taking the risk to act on your desires does not guarantee success.

Courage really shows up when you are unsuccessful. What do you do? How do you handle failure? Will you keep trying or give up?

Eleanor Roosevelt famously said “You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You can say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'”

Successfully overcoming or facing something scary builds confidence and develops courage.

But sometimes giving up is as courageous as keeping at it.

Michael Jordan tried his hand at baseball after a successful career in basketball. He gave it up pretty quickly - it was not his thing after all.

Knowing when to keep going and when to call it quits is an individual decision that has to be made based on circumstances.

With giving up comes a sense of loss (or relief), but it does not have to include a loss of confidence or self-worth. Feel disappointment and then regroup.

It's important to separate the failure of a project or undertaking from failure as a person. Failing at something you took a risk on does not make you a failure as a person.

Shame is the result of internalizing a failure. Experience is the result of learning from your mistakes and failures.



# Perseverance

Stick-to-it-ness. Grit. Tenacity. Determination. Dedication. Persistence. Stamina. Follow-through.

Whatever you call it - perseverance is required to lead a successful life. It's the next step in the courage sequence. It's the hard part in the middle - and the reason many people, projects and businesses are unsuccessful.

Starting something new and exciting creates a buzz. It's a time of good energy and big dreams.

When the excitement subsides and the day-to-day, mundane tasks are what you have to look forward to each morning, it becomes much harder to stay goal directed.

This is true whether you're starting a diet or exercise program, launching a product, beginning a new relationship, or caring for a puppy.

Perseverance requires focus, consistency, attention to detail, and motivation.

Motivation may come from within - drive, purpose, passion - or externally - a reward or payoff, like money or fame.

The feeling of joy you get when your work results in something you believe in and value can motivate you. So can the guilt you may feel when you don't work toward your goals or honor your values.

For those lacking intrinsic motivation - a need to achieve, compete and win, make more and do better - the extrinsic motivators are very important. Short- and long-term rewards and both negative and positive consequences are also important.

Here are some ideas on how to persevere when excitement and motivation are waning:

1. Structure. Checklists, to-do lists, alarms, reminders, mandatory breaks, and

decent work hours. Trying to do it all at one time or in marathon work sessions is not sustainable.

2. Checks and balances. What needs to be done daily, weekly, monthly? How will you measure your progress and right the course when you are off track?
3. Accountability. It really helps to have someone to report to, and get support and feedback from, on your progress. It does not have to be a supervisor. Think mentor or coach instead.
  - For those who work at home alone, just bouncing ideas around can make a huge difference.
  - And if you're stuck, free up some creativity with perspective and support.
4. Short and long-term benchmarks. Project managers are fond of saying the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. The same is true for any big

project - do what is right in front of you until you finish.

- Avoid getting overwhelmed by the big picture. Ask for help if you need it. Consider whether the project and timeline are doable. Talk to your mentor or coach if you lose perspective or feel too overwhelmed.

5. Positive and negative motivators and consequences. Positive psychology would have you focus on the payoff, what you can control, incorporating positive habits and looking for the good stuff in life. Indeed, it isn't productive to dwell on the what-ifs, mistakes, or roads not taken.

- However, knowing that you won't be able to pay the mortgage is a motivator. So is the fact that your pain will increase if you stop exercising.

- Knowing the consequences can help you focus on what you can do to avoid many challenges.
6. Celebrate the small successes. Avoid waiting until the whole project is finished to celebrate. Landed a new client? Celebrate! Finished the website? Celebrate! Finally got an important call back. Celebrate!
- Get a massage, go to a game, take a ride in the country, play pinball, golf, or poker. Do what you enjoy and then get back to work!
7. Make the ultimate result as real as possible. When your project is long-term or on-going work, find a way to experience the reward.
- For example, if you're developing a video game for kids with learning problems, visit a classroom and get to know the kids. If you're building a house, go



to open houses or visit models to  
get ideas and keep the vision  
alive.

Keep in mind that things often take longer than  
we expect, and cost more than we budget.  
Prepare for that when you can to avoid major  
setbacks.



# Resilience

The ability to recover. Adaptability. Flexibility. Hardiness.

Resilience is both learned and innate. It can be related to temperament, but learning how to think about and cope with life is learned at an early age.

People who are resilient bounce back more easily than others. They also seem to weather the storms of life with less disruption.

## Internal versus External Locus of Control

Some people see things as happening to them by someone else or an outside force. They often believe that they have bad luck, got a raw deal, the devil is out to get them, or others are doing them wrong. They may lack insight into the role they may have played in the incident.

This external locus of control means they believe that things are happening *to* them, and they have little or no control over their lives. Sometimes this is true, but not all the time. Think about patterns, consistent thoughts, and beliefs rather than isolated incidents.

Someone with an internal locus of control may experience the same thing but perceive it differently.

For example: “We lost our home in a fire. It was devastating and it has taken a long time to put our lives back together.”

Some people would feel victimized by that - short-changed by life in a world where this could happen.

However, with an internal locus of control, your perspective would be that life happens and you may not deserve it or cause it, but you have to deal with it and move on.

Sometimes things happen to us through no fault of our own. Accepting that bad things may happen randomly can be hard for you if you have an internal locus of control. However,

with resilience, you regroup and figure out the next step.

Resilient people are not knocked down by life circumstances for very long.

Focusing on being wronged and having no control only leads to feeling helpless, hopeless, depressed, and victimized - the opposite of resilience. Choosing to feel the loss and then do what's next is resilience in action.

How we think and react to things in the world is learned at an early age, for the most part. But there are also some social, cultural, and intergenerational issues that play a part.

Poverty, discrimination, and marginalization are a few factors that may lead to resilience but can also result in an opposite reaction. It's a mistake to minimize the impact these experiences have on people. How others interpret and deal with these very complicated issues often determines the outcome.

Blaming the victim in these cases is not acceptable. None of us know who we would be today given the same circumstances.

Some people are born into poverty and others born to privilege. Ironically, people from both ends of this continuum are at risk for similar challenges.

The person who never had enough in life and learned to take what he wants because he deserves it is the same as the person who had everything given to him and takes what he wants because he thinks he deserves it. There may be different reasons for the behavior, but these people ultimately have the same behavior and thinking.

If you think you may have an external locus of control, working with a coach or therapist to look at your beliefs and thinking patterns can be very useful. Lasting changes in these areas can make a huge difference in your perceptions and how you deal with life.



# Balance

All work and no play - all things in moderation - clean your plate - and so on.

The reality is, we need balance in our lives to have balance in ourselves.

Our personal wellbeing is often directly related to the balance in our lives:

- Balance between work life and home life
- Balance between rest and play
- Balance between good and bad
- Balance between solitude and personal interaction

Arianna Huffington talks about working so much that she passed out in her office from exhaustion. When she passed out, she fell on the corner of the desk, which resulted in a minor head injury and stitches. She accepted it as a “wake up” call to find balance in her life.



Since then, she has become an advocate for sleep and balance in all things.

Most of us know the importance of balance in all things, but few of us practice it all the time. Those who do seem to be more at peace with the world.

Use these ideas for cultivating balance in your life:

1. Physical. Eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full. Move around 20-30 minutes most days. Sleep. Take frequent breaks at work to stretch and rest your eyes.
2. Psychological. Learn and practice ways of thinking and coping that are effective. Speak up when you have something to say. Set boundaries for yourself and enforce them. Say no. Listen more than you speak. Practice kindness and authenticity.
3. Social. Develop a network of people to play with. Do things with others regularly,

but not to avoid your life. Call people on the phone and talk for no reason. Ask for support and offer the same.

4. Spiritual. Pray. Meditate. Read. Journal. Get outside. Connect. Take time out. Color. Get a dog or cat.
5. Career. Do what you love when you can. Set reasonable limits on your time. Give it your all when you're working but leave it there when you leave. Prioritize. If work is your first priority, you may want to rethink your balance.
6. Leisure. Rest. Relax. Read. Exercise. Play. Enjoy culture, art, music.
7. Relationships. Prioritize your most important relationships. Keep the ones that nourish you and let go of those that drain you. Develop friendships. Learn to be alone, so you're not dependent on a partner. Give and take. Put your needs first.



INSPIRE OTHERS  
*everyday*

# Lead to a Successful Life

In addition to personal qualities, here are some practices that reinforce them. For example, when you take a stand about something, and others join you despite any negative consequences. Or you keep working on something important to you and it finally works out.

These skills and practices support the qualities for a successful life:

1. Set priorities. Relationships are usually near the top, after your own personal wellbeing.
2. Reflect on the day. Practice gratitude daily.
3. Quiet time. A few times throughout the day, take a moment to breathe and

connect with your inner self.

4. Enjoy something each day. Read, watch, write, draw, paint, or listen to something you enjoy.
5. Practice everyday mindfulness. Learn to focus on the present, be aware of your senses, and connect with whoever or whatever is in front of you.
6. Be consistent. Structure is beneficial, but rigidity is not. Follow through, when possible, but learn to flow when it's necessary.
7. Learn flexible thinking. If you tend to have strong emotional reactions or make impulsive decisions, spend some time with a coach or therapist to learn ways to adapt your thinking and manage your emotions.

The journey towards extraordinary success demands a foundation built upon unwavering integrity, steadfast courage, relentless perseverance, unwavering resilience, and a harmonious balance. Invest in cultivating

these essential qualities by acting with honesty and aligning with your values, embracing challenges that foster growth, remaining determined in the face of obstacles, bouncing back from setbacks with strength, and finding harmony between work, rest, and well-being.

Develop skills and practices that actively strengthen these qualities, and you'll reap the rewards of a life overflowing with greater achievement, deep personal fulfillment, and success in every endeavor you undertake.