

SESSION 3. A WORTHY DESTINATION

Audio Transcript

The stories of people achieving unusual success despite all manner of handicaps never fail to capture our attention. They're inspirational, to be sure. But if we study them closely, we find they're much more than that.

The boy whose legs were terribly burned and who was told he'd be lucky to walk again becomes a champion track star. The woman who was blind and deaf from early childhood becomes one of the most inspirational figures of the century. And the poor children who rise to fame and fortune have nearly become commonplace.

In this age of unprecedented immigration, we read and see on television examples of people who arrived in this country without any money and without knowing a word of English and who, within a surprisingly short time, have become wonderfully successful. In fact, the typical Korean family that has immigrated to the United States during the past 20 years has a higher average income than the average American family that was born and went to school here. How does that happen?

Freedom, personal liberty, is the most precious thing on earth. It's also one of the rarest – hence, its great value. People who manage to get to America, despite mountainous problems and miles of red tape, often find themselves free for the first time in their lives. It's a joyous, wonderful experience for them. And in this newfound freedom, they set to work to find a place for themselves; they go to work serving their new country and its people. Time means nothing to them. But being free to pursue their own ends in the richest, freest country on the planet is everything. They all go to work, and they work hard. Their work is excellent, first-class, as good as they can do it, and it's priced fairly. You don't see them marching, demanding higher pay or shorter hours. All they want is the opportunity, and once it's theirs, they make the most of it.

In New York City, a Korean family managed to buy a small convenience grocery store in midtown Manhattan. The first thing they did was clean it. The store sparkled with cleanliness. Then they stocked it with all the grocery items they felt the people in their area wanted. They were open early in the morning. They stayed open late at night. They never failed to give a friendly greeting to their customers. Naturally, they became wonderfully successful.

They were open seven days a week. One day, customers coming to the store found it closed. On the door was a note explaining the reason why. It read, "We have gone to Yale University to watch our son graduate."

That's an American story, the true story of people who found joy in freedom and in the opportunity to serve their fellowman – and who made the most of it.

What drives these people with such vast handicaps, such as not knowing the language, not knowing the right people, not having any money? Or the boy with the burned legs who becomes the champion runner? Or a Helen Keller, blind and deaf from early childhood? What in the world is the answer?

The answer, if fully understood, will bring you and me anything and everything we truly want. And it's deceptively simple. We touched on it in our last message. Perhaps it's too simple.

The people we have talked about here, and the thousands currently doing the same thing all over the country, possess something the average American doesn't have: They have *goals*. They have a burning desire to succeed despite all handicaps. They know exactly what they want. They think about it every day of their lives. It gets them up in the morning, and it keeps them giving their very best all day long. It's the last thing they think about before dropping off to sleep at night. They have a vision of exactly what they want to do, and that vision carries them over every obstacle.

This vision, this dream, this goal – invisible to all the world except the person holding it – is responsible for perhaps every great advance and achievement of humankind. It's the underlying motive for just about everything we see about us. Everything worthwhile that has been achieved by men and women is a dream come true, a goal reached.

It's been said that what the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve. It's the fine building where before there was an empty lot or an ancient eyesore. It's the bridge spanning the bay. It's landing on the moon. It's that little convenience store in midtown Manhattan. It's the lovely home on a tree-shaded street, and the young person accepting the diploma. It's the new baby in it's mother's arms. It's a low golf handicap, and a position reached in the world of business. It's a certain income attained or amount of money invested. What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.

We become what we think about. And when we're possessed by an exciting goal, we reach it. That's why it's been said, "Be choosy, therefore, what you set your heart upon. For if you want it strongly enough, you'll get it." Amen to that.

It's been said that Americans can have anything they want; the trouble is that they don't know what they want. Oh, they want little things. They want a new car, and they get it. They want a new home, and they get it. The system never fails to work for them. But they don't seem to understand that it is a system, and that if it will work for a new refrigerator or a new car, it will work just as well for anything else they want very much....

Once a person fully understands that the goals that are important to him can become real in his life, well, it's like opening a jack-in-the-box: All sorts of interesting and exciting things begin to happen. Quite often, we become truly alive for the first time in our lives. We look back at our former lives and realize we were shuffling along in a kind of lockstep; that we were actually taking our cues from those about us, in the unspoken assumption that we're all alike, when nothing could be farther from the truth. We are not all alike. Each of us is quite different, with different abilities, different genetic profiles, different wants in life. What would wonderfully satisfy one family, and represent complete success for them, would be considered failure by another family – all because of their different aspirations, their different plateaus in life, the differences in their life-styles, up-bringsings, educations.

When we're youngsters, every facet of our environment has an effect upon us and helps to set our course in life. The youngster who knew poverty as a child might aspire to be rich – he might overcompensate because of the desolation of his youth – while another young person, who was raised in an upper-middle-class family and who always had just about everything he wanted, might settle for a very middle-class adulthood. Things we've always had aren't as important to us as they are to those who have been without them.

On the preceding message, we talked about freedom and about how dear it is to those who never had it, while most Americans take it for granted and never even think about it. If you asked most Americans what the most important thing in the world is for a human being, chances are they would seldom come up with freedom – the freedom to set their own goals in life. Yet, as Archibald MacLeish wrote in his fine play *The Secret of Freedom*, “The secret of happiness is freedom; and the secret of freedom, courage.”

To understand the subject, and the importance of goal setting, we have to realize that it is the very basis of any success. It is, in fact, the very definition of success.

The best definition of success I've ever found goes like this: “Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal,” or, in some cases, “. . .the pursuit of a worthy ideal.”

If you'll give this definition some thought, I think you'll agree with me: Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal. That's a beautiful definition of success. It means that anyone who's on course toward the fulfillment of a goal is successful now. Success does not lie in the achievement of a goal, although that's what the world considers success; it lies in the journey toward the goal. We're successful as long as we're working toward something we want to bring about in our lives. That's when the human being is at his best. That's what Cervantes meant when he wrote, “The road is better than the inn.”

Quite often, romantic stories end with the loving couple getting married. That's just the beginning of the story. When the young person stands before his school's president or principal and receives the diploma, that's called commencement. That's the beginning. It's an important milestone, to be sure, and congratulations are certainly in order. But where is he going from there?

Once a person has realized the goal for which he has so assiduously toiled, that's wonderful. It's time for a rest and some self-congratulations – time to savor the achievement. But by my definition, we're no longer successful until we set a new, higher goal toward which to work. We're at our best when we're climbing, thinking, planning, working – when we're on the road to something we want to bring about.

By this, I don't mean that we should become workaholics – far from it. In fact, it's been well-established that the most successful men and women manage to live in a wonderful state of balance. They have lots of recreation, and they get lots of rest. The mind works best when we're properly rested, and the mind is the best and most important part of us, regardless of what we choose to do.

Have you heard an athlete say, “It's about 90 percent mental”? Whatever the percentage really is in a good game of golf or tennis, it's very large. As we pointed out in “The Magic Word,” our mental attitude can make all the difference between winning and losing.

With our definition of success as the progressive realization of a worthy goal, we cover all the bases. The young person working to finish school is as successful as any person on earth. The person working toward a particular position with his company is just as successful.

If you have a goal that you find worthy of you as a person – a goal that fills you with joy at the thought of it – believe me, you’ll reach it. But as you draw near and see that the goal will soon be achieved, begin to think ahead to the next goal you’re going to set. It often happens that halfway through a book, a writer will hit upon the idea for his next one and begin making notes, or come up with ideas for a title – even while he’s finishing work on the book in progress. That’s the way it should be.

One of my favorite poems is by Rabindranath Tagore, the distinguished poet from Calcutta, India, and it goes like this: “I slept and dreamt / That life was joy / I woke and saw / That life was duty / I acted, and behold! / Duty was joy.”

We are at our very best, and we are happiest, when we are fully engaged in work we enjoy on the journey toward the goal we’ve established for ourselves. It gives meaning to our time off and comfort to our sleep. It makes everything else in life so wonderful, so worthwhile.

When they think of the word *success*, most people tend to equate it with lots of money. Sometimes that’s a natural by-product of the goal, and it tells us how well we’re doing. But not always, by any means. Success is whatever we want it to be that’s worthy of us. That’s why I commented earlier that success may also be defined as the pursuit of a worthy ideal. For example, I can’t imagine anyone more successful than an outstanding teacher who is striving to know more about the art of teaching and the subject matter that will catch the interest of his pupils, who understands that every student is different and learns at a different speed.

Joy and satisfaction come to us from serving others, and there are literally millions of ways of doing that. For those whose goals involve the serving of great numbers of people, chances are they will be richly rewarded, indeed. In fact, for many, a goal is a certain level of income, or a certain amount of money in an investment account.

A goal is an individual thing – as individual as the person himself. Since no two people are exactly alike, it stands to reason that no two of us will have exactly the same goals.

One thing a goal must do, however, is fill us with positive emotion when we think about it; it must be something we want very much to bring about. The more intensely we feel about an idea or a goal, the more assuredly the idea, buried deep in our subconscious, will direct us along the path to its fulfillment.

I once used the quotation, “No one gets rich without enriching others.” I received a letter from a man in Utah who wrote: “How about those who get rich in the drug trade, or those who produce and sell pornography? How do they enrich others?”

It was a good question, especially in these times. I wrote back to him and told him that my definition of success is the progressive realization of a *worthy* goal. Certainly, people in the drug and pornography business would not qualify as successful. What they're doing is counterproductive, destructive. And in the case of drugs, it involves the enslavement and death of thousands.

I went on to say that while our needs are few, and relatively simple, our wants, in this incredibly affluent society, are virtually endless. By meeting those wants, whatever they may be, we serve others – but not always to their benefit or to our own. I wouldn't call those in drugs and pornography successful, and their riches won't amount to much if they're apprehended and sent to prison.

But I did not stop using the quotation. It's possible to get rich without enriching others, but for most of us, it's not the way we want to go. It's nothing to take pride in. Why bother when there are so many positive, excellent, and productive ways to serve others?

But whatever our goal happens to be, if we stay with it, if we're fully committed to it, we will reach it. That's the way it works.

It's estimated that about 5 percent of the population achieves unusual success. For the rest, averages seem to be good enough. Most seem to just drift along, taking circumstances as they come, and perhaps hoping from time to time that things will get better.

I like to compare human beings to ships, as Carlyle used to do. It's estimated that about 95 percent can be compared to ships without rudders. Subject to every shift of wind and tide, they're helplessly adrift. And while they fondly hope that they will one day drift into some rich and bustling port, you and I know that for every narrow harbor entrance, there are a thousand miles of rocky coastline. The chances of their drifting into port are a thousand to one against them.

Our state lotteries wax rich on such people. So do the slot machines in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. These people look to luck, but they don't seem to realize how steeply the odds are stacked against them. Someone wins from time to time, to be sure, but the odds are still there.

But the 5 percent who have taken the time and exercised the discipline to climb into the driver's seat of their lives, who have decided upon a challenging goal to reach and fully committed themselves to reaching it, sail straight and far across the deep oceans of life, reaching one port after another, and accomplishing more in just a few years than the rest accomplish in a lifetime.

If you should visit a ship in port and ask the captain for his next port of call, he'll tell you in a single sentence. Even though the captain cannot see his port, his destination, for fully 99 percent of the voyage, he knows that it's there, and that barring an unforeseen and highly unlikely catastrophe, he'll reach it. All he has to do is keep doing certain things every day.

If someone asked you for your next port of call, your current goal, could you tell him? Is your goal clear and concise in your mind? Have you written it down? It's a good idea. We need reminding, reinforcement. If you can get a picture of your goal and stick it to your bathroom mirror, it's an excellent idea to do so. Thousands of successful people write down their goal on a card and carry it in their wallet or purse.

When we ask people what they're working for, chances are they'll answer in vague generalities. They might say good health or happiness or lots of money. That's not good. Good health should be a universal goal; we all want that and do our best to achieve and maintain it. Happiness is a by-product of something else. And lots of money is much too vague. It might work, but I think it's better to choose a particular sum of money. The better, the more clearly, our goal is defined, the more real it becomes to us – and, before long, the more attainable.

Happiness comes from the direction in which we're moving. For example, children are happier on Christmas morning before they open their presents than they are on Christmas afternoon. No matter how wonderful their presents may be, the anticipation is over. They will enjoy their gifts, to be sure, but we often find them querulous and irritable on Christmas afternoon.

We are happier on our way out to dinner than we are on the way home. We are happier preparing to leave on vacation than we are coming home from it. And, believe it or not, we are happier moving toward our goals than we are after they've been accomplished. That's why it's so important to set a new goal as soon as the current one is realized. And we should never stop this process. All the days of our lives, we should be engaged in moving toward – earning and looking forward to – a new plateau on which to stand, a new goal to accomplish.

If you, like so many millions of Americans, don't know what it is you want sufficiently to name as your primary goal, I recommend you make out a "want list." Take a notepad, go off by yourself, and write down the things you would really like to have or to do. Your list might include a beautiful new home, or a trip around the world, or a visit to some special country or place. You might be yearning for a sailboat or a motor yacht. Or, if you're an avid fisherman, you might want to go salmon fishing in Alaska or trout fishing in New Zealand. It might be a business of your own, or a particular position with your company. It might be a certain income that will permit you to live in the way you would like to live, or, as I said earlier, a certain amount of money in good investments or in a savings account. How about a special make of car, or an addition to your present home?

Just write down everything you can think of that you would really like to see come about in your life. Then, when you've exhausted your wants, go over the list again and number the items in their order of importance. Then, make number one your present goal.

Listen to this message often, as I hope you will listen to all the messages in this program, until the suggestions become a habit-knit way of thinking and doing things. Believe me, the system works. It works every time. Life plays no favorites. Anyone can succeed – and millions do. So can you.

Of one thing you can be sure: You will become what you think about. If your thinking is circular and chaotic, your life will reflect that chaos. But if your thinking is orderly and clear, if you have a goal that is important for you to reach, then reach it you will.

One goal at a time – that's important. That's where most people unwittingly make their mistake. They don't concentrate on a single goal long enough to reach it before they're off on another track, then another, with the result that they achieve nothing – nothing but confusion – and make excuses.

I started looking for the so-called secret of success when I was 12 years old. I read every book I could find on the subject; I studied psychology and sociology; I studied the great religions of the world; I read the world's greatest philosophers. All of a sudden, many years later, I realized that in the hundreds of lives I'd studied, in the countless books I'd read, a plain and simple truth had kept appearing. It is believed that no one can learn anything until he is ready for it. Apparently, I was finally ready, in my late 20s, to see for the first time the secret I had searched for so long. It was, simply this: We become what we think about.

You see, you are, at this moment, the living embodiment of the sum total of your thoughts to this point in your life. You can be nothing else. Similarly, five years from now, you will be the sum total of your thoughts to that point in time. But you can control your thoughts. You can decide upon what you wish to concentrate, upon what you think about from this point forward. And you will become that. You will realize that goal as sure as anything on earth can be sure. That's why having a goal toward which to work is so very important. It gives our minds a focus and our lives a direction.

By thinking every morning, every night, and as many times during the day as we can, about the single goal we've established for ourselves, we actually begin moving toward it, and bringing it toward us. When we concentrate our thinking, it's like taking a river that's twisting and turning and meandering all over the countryside, and putting it into a straight, smooth channel. Now it has power, direction, economy, speed.

Billions of human beings would give anything they have to enjoy the freedom and personal liberty you and I take for granted; to have the right to choose their work and their goals; to enjoy our bountiful standard of living and our educational system; to know the peace and privacy of our homes; and to have laws that protect the citizen rather than persecute him.

We have it all. Yet, in the midst of our plenty, millions lead unhappy, aimless lives. They live in tiny prisons of their own fashioning. These are the people who don't know that each of us – each one of us – not the economy or fate or luck or the breaks, is in charge of his life. Each one of us is completely responsible.

As Carlyle put it, "The person without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder. Have a purpose in life, and having it, throw such strength of mind and muscle into your work as God has given you."

He also said, "A person with a half-volition goes backward and forward, and makes no way on the smoothest road; but the person with a whole volition advances on the roughest, and will reach his purpose, if there be even a little wisdom in it."

Munger said, "There is no road to success but through a clear, strong purpose. Nothing can take its place. A purpose underlies character, culture, position, attainment of every sort."

So decide upon your goal. Insist upon it. Look at your goal card every morning and night and as many times during the day as you conveniently can. By so doing, you will insinuate your goal into your subconscious mind. See yourself as having already attained your goal. Do that every day without fail, and it will become a habit before you realize it – a habit that will take you from one

success to another all the years of your life. For that is the secret of success, the door to everything you will ever have or be. You are now, and you most certainly will become, what you think about.

Exercises — Write your answers in the space provided below.

1. Make out a want list — write down everything that you would like to see come about in your life.

2. After you have completed your want list, number the items in their order of importance.

3. Make item number one as your present primary goal; use the balance of the list for later reference.

4. Write down your current goal on this commitment card, print it out, and carry it with you in your wallet or purse.

MY COMMITMENT TO MYSELF

I, _____, hereby commit to pursuing my goal of
_____.

Signature _____ Date _____

5. How will the achievement of this goal improve your life?