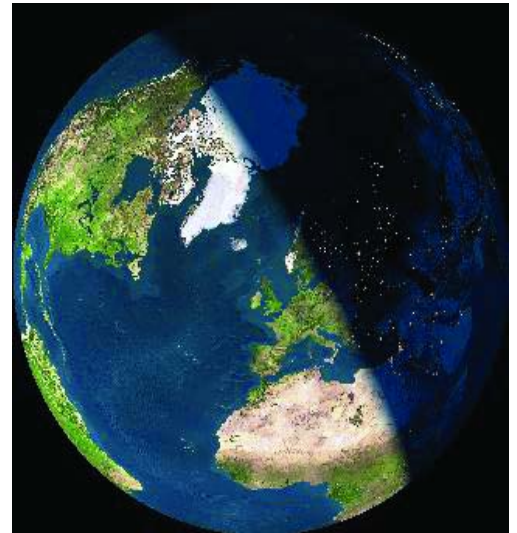


Exploring Success

- from Outer Space to Inner Vision

Christine Miller

What does success really mean to you? Could it be having more of something, being better at something or doing a great deed? And is it also making the most of every moment and learning to accept yourself as you are - whilst keeping open to possibilities of becoming even more....



"Well we're going to space. Today is an historic day - for it will bring the dream of space travel for many millions closer to reality."

On September 27th 2004, Richard Branson announced his Virgin Galactic venture,

"with a sole purpose of making space travel more and more affordable to people throughout the world.....Those privileged space pioneers who can afford to take our first flights will not only have the most awesome experience of their lives, but by stepping up to the plate first will bring the dream of space travel for many millions closer to reality.Like so many others, for years I have dreamt of seeing the beauty of our planet from space, experiencing true weightlessness and fully appreciating for the first time that our tiny planet is part of something so much bigger."

Richard Branson will experience the successful fulfillment of a goal, a dream, when he steps onto that first flight as an astronaut. For him, it will be another manifestation of his success in creating the life he wants.

The privilege of exploring space on one of these first flights will be an indicator of the material wealth of the participants, and the success which is traditionally implied from being wealthy. Money and possessions are one measure of success. But what is success, really? There are many unhappy rich people, we see and hear about their traumas regularly on TV and in the press. They get to be miserable in comfort, and to buy distractions from their inner turmoil, but they never seem to have enough. So, are they truly successful? There are also many unhappy poor people, for whom the temporary escapism of retail therapy and external signs of material success are not available. Are they therefore unsuccessful?

And there are plenty of poor, struggling, just-coping, middling and comfortably-off people who are leading lives that fulfil them, most of the time.

Are they successful? We know intellectually that material wealth is not a true indicator of success, and that spiritual and emotional riches are ultimately of greater importance in living a balanced life than external shows of worth. However, there are values attached to wealth that underpin society's perceptions, and power and influence still undoubtedly accrue to those with money - whether their lives are successfully in balance or not.

Defining Success

Perhaps we can define success as reaching a goal, fulfilling an intention or purpose. In that case, you are successful on a moment-by-moment basis, because in the normal run of things, your body and brain work together constantly to ensure that you stay alive. Constantly correcting and adjusting, altering pressure, balance, intake and output, the sophisticated system automatically works harmoniously to ensure survival and is, when fully-functioning, the ultimate goal-orientated success mechanism. Your drives and urges when correctly directed and

interpreted, lead unremittingly to your continued existence - and that of the species. If you have given up smoking, for example, then each cigarette you refuse is evidence of your success - ongoing proof that you are able to succeed, which translated into your conscious awareness can give you a powerful "success memory" and serve to support you if you are tempted. It's when the drives are misdirected and the "wiring" misroutes that the system can begin to malfunction. Because you have a response mechanism that does exactly and literally what it is told, sometimes the messages get scrambled, and although acting for your ultimate wellbeing and safety, the misroute causes you to act in ways that rather than enhancing your wellbeing end up sabotaging your perfect system. So uncovering the silent saboteurs can be a key step in achieving success, should it be an elusive element in your life.

Success also results from identifying something (or many things) you really want in your life, which you believe are missing, and taking the steps to attain and achieve those things.

Looking within, and being honest with yourself about what you can improve in your life, then setting your own agenda and taking action to make the necessary changes. Being and becoming more conscious of your choices, and making definite moves to bring them about, whether it's to own a home, to learn to meditate or to have a close loving relationship.

So whilst it may be a remarkable and exciting prospect to be one of the first space tourists, it doesn't necessarily follow that those able to take up the offer will be living successful lives in the fullest sense. Only if they are also on the journey through their own inner space, as well as the journey towards outer space, will they truly be experiencing success.

Exploring success - the inner space

"Success" - a perfect life, that indefinable quality of "total happiness" - is sometimes peddled as an absolute right for everyone, and the assured outcome of whichever personal development ideas are most prominent at the time. Expectations run high that if you read the right books, listen to the right CDs and tapes, and attend the right seminars then your life will be filled with miraculous and easily achieved success, endless sunshine, health, sex and wonderfully fulfilling relationships.

Hmm, okay, so you've followed the plan, and invested in the programme, both emotionally and financially - yet sometimes you still find yourself feeling inexplicably down or lonely, you still get angry and shout at the kids, have rows with your spouse, don't get

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the raise you want or feel as if there's something missing. You can be progressing in so many areas of your life, when a disturbance arrives unannounced. These disturbances seem to hit you like an unexpected UFO from outer space, a swift flashing comet undetected until it breaks through the atmosphere of your life with resounding effect, leaving you wondering what else you can do. Why do these eruptions happen, why do you feel such strong emotions which don't feature on that "A" list that's deemed to make up the perfect life? And where's the braking parachute to assist you to a gentler landing?

Well, stop and think for a moment. Right now, what is it you have in com-

mon with everyone else on the planet? Might it be your humanity? Is it simply that you're not meant to be perfect? That you're a human being, a human becoming....And what's more, it really is okay; you have permission to be flawed. "Success" doesn't equal "perfection". Those emotions that surface are normal, and natural and human. They are also necessary. This doesn't mean you have an excuse to stop growing, perpetuate your less than constructive habits of thought and action, and allow rampant negativity to rule your life. It does mean that you have the opportunity to learn a little about how you can regulate the pressure to be perfect, and allow the blips of life to slide in and out more elegantly, rather than exploding in chaos.

I'd like now to explore two aspects of these unexpected emotional events, the surprises that can leave us reeling with

shock that our smoothly successful development seems to have gone into reverse. The first aspect is the influences from childhood which can cause us to mask our true emotions and express only those we believe to be safe. There is

sometimes an expectation from adults that children should have happy sunny dispositions and a life of innocent joy and pleasure, but their parents and loved ones can inadvertently create conditions which frustrate their growth. One view of child development, based on the theories and philosophy of Carl Jung and Carl Rogers, is that parents can and do place conditions of worth on their children. This means that there is a tacit, or sometimes explicit, condition within the family that certain emotions are acceptable for open expression, but others are unacceptable, and if displayed, may lead to a withdrawal of affection, care or love.

Philip Larkin, (1922 - 1985), the renowned poet, summed up his view of

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parental contributions to child development in his 1974 poem called "This Be the Verse":

*They f*** you up, your mum and dad.*

They may not mean to, but they do.

They fill you with the faults they had

And add some extra, just for you.

I recently encountered a child client who came to me manifesting anger - tantrums, aggression, breaking things at home, and striking out at classmates at school. After several weeks of exploring, through stories, metaphor, watching, and listening, I discovered that a large part of his "anger" was an inauthentic emotion, and that this child was actually deeply sad. His mother was unable to witness sadness without believing that she must be responsible for the feeling in that person, and her child had absorbed the unacceptability of this emotion in his mother's model. Noticing that anger was okay, he had substituted inauthentic anger for his true sadness. We worked to give him an inner place where he could be safely sad, and his anger subsided; when it did emerge on occasion, it was as a healthier expression of a controlled and more appropriate emotion which did not overwhelm him.

Conditions of Worth

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Experiencing "unconditional positive regard", to quote Rogers, from a coach, mentor or therapist can start a change process not only in the child, but also

in the family system, which has far-reaching beneficial results for all concerned. There are strong indications for successful development in a child who can authentically bear witness to all of their emotions and accept them as valid when they are appropriately expressed. Additionally, learning that it's alright to be "good enough" and that perfection isn't really possible or necessary are valuable lessons in self-acceptance.

Empty Spaces

At about the same time, I was working with an adult client who was experiencing extreme anxiety and distress because her children were growing up



and moving away. Suffering a type of "empty nest syndrome" she would weep frequently, wherever she was, and couldn't get the thought of her children in danger out of her mind. This greatly affected her health and her relationships, both at home and at work. Exploration of the underlying feelings revealed that she was suppressing and translating anger, which had not previously been an admissible emotion in her girlhood, nor in her marriage, into anxiety. She was also using distress to mask a fear in herself, of herself - a

fear of her own ageing process, which had been brought into sharp focus by the changing roles and perceived loss of status as her children departed and became independent. Admitting to her fear, using that awareness to gain greater self-worth, and acknowledging anger as an emotion which was valid for her to express, helped to evaporate the anxiety and distress, and she was able to process her feelings, own them and let them go. She became aware that she could express appropriate anger, overcome fear - and that they were true, authentic feelings that were part of her richness of being, not emotions acceptable to someone else, which had been part of an elaborate masquerade.

Spotting the congruence of an emotional expression, noticing when words don't seem to match behaviour, is helped by keen observation of a client's physical demeanour. My young client placed his hands on his heart and was in a low-energy state and posture when he described his anger to me. What I noticed was that it didn't look, sound or feel like "anger" to me - and by carefully eliciting responses through clean questions, we explored his meaning and he was able to identify that he was really sad. For me, knowledge and experience of Taoism and Reiki Healing, and awareness of energy centres (Chakras) in the human body add an important element to the information gathering which is so crucial to facilitating exploration of the inner space.

Owning Your Space

The second aspect of exploring unexpected emotional events relates to owning and valuing everything about ourselves. It's easy to like the likeable - obvious, and natural. It's harder to embrace the less ideal, darker parts of ourselves. We all have them, though. Exploring what's known as the "shadow" side is one of the most valuable and beneficial parts of training in therapy, leading not only to self-understanding but the ability to be compassionate and empathic with and for clients, and in our other relationships. Successful counsellors and therapists provide a safe space for their clients to explore

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that which they'd initially rather keep hidden - and I like to use the term "owning up" here.

As a child, "owning up" to a wrongdoing was the noble thing to do, even if the consequences of punishment were undesirable. As adults, owning up to our weaknesses is possibly an even nobler act. Even though there is not the risk of externally administered punishment, (unless that's what you choose!) we can be pretty good at inflicting forty lashes on ourselves for our perceived shortcomings, and not giving ourselves the option to be human and forgiven. We are accustomed to pushing down and denying what are considered to be negative emotions, and don't want to admit that we still get angry, sad, afraid, jealous...whatever the feeling may be. Having the courage to bring out those turbulent emotions that disturb the surface does not threaten our successful development, but enhances and even secures it. Once you bring them out into the light, examine them, learn from them - you tend to find they dissipate and disappear....You can ask yourself what purpose they serve now, what they may have meant in the past, and if they are redundant, let them go. If they have new and more appropriate meaning, then use them to be a fully expressive, aware and

authentic individual, in command of your inner space.

Inner Vision: Your Ultimate Success

Being in command of your inner space is your ultimate success. It's the only place where you can have total control, and this allows you to have greater positive influence in your world - in your relationships, your career, your education, your family. **The more you can learn about yourself, and the more self-aware you become, the fewer the unexpected disturbances that can surprise you. So take time to be quiet within, develop your inner strengths, and claim all your emotions as authentically yours. Your childlike qualities of playfulness, imagination, curiosity - they enable you to explore your inner world, that constellation within, and find undreamt of riches. Those riches will multiply with use, and you will find that the inevitable emotional challenges of being and becoming are easier to assimilate and work through. It's no great secret, it simply needs some dedicated time - but the benefits are waiting for those who care to embrace their inner space, and experience the true meaning of success.**

I leave you with the words of Piero Ferrucci, in "What We May Be":

"As the Gods created the universe they discussed where they should hide Truth so that human beings would not find it right away. They wanted to prolong the adventure of the search.

"Let's put Truth on top of the highest mountain," said one of the gods.

"Certainly it will be hard to find there."

"Let's put it on the farthest star," said another.

"Let's hide it in the darkest and deepest of abysses."

"Let's conceal it on the secret side of the moon."

At the end, the wisest and most ancient god said, "No, we will hide Truth inside the very heart of human beings. In this way they will look for it all over the Universe, without being aware of having it inside themselves all the time."

Piero Ferrucci, 1982

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