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Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. Its mission is to Partner with Clients for Success in Leadership Succession. For more information, contact peabody@stybelpeabody.com

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**WHEN LEADERSHIP IS ON A SPECTRUM
FROM “RESULTS-ORIENTED”
TO “SUCCESS ADDICT.”**

As retained search consultants, we have read thousands of resumes that always begin with the following two words: “Results-Oriented.”

Leaders like to be successful. But success is not a binary concept. A binary concept would be “Success is Good. Failure is Bad.”

We view success on a spectrum. At one end would be the classic “Results-Oriented” leader. At the other end of this success spectrum are success addicts.

Are You a Success Addict?

Answer this question: “If forced to choose between being happy or being special, which would you select?”

We know what you would say in public. But what do you REALLY think?

“Special” can mean any combination of wealth, task accomplishment, or admiration.

According to Harvard Business School professor and former CEO Arthur Brooks (2022), success addicts know how they would truly answer the question even if the public answer is different. According to Professor Brooks:

“(Success addicts) become successful by working more than others. They believe they have to keep up that pace to maintain their astronomical productivity.”

Results orientation morphs into success addiction when the initial positive rewards of success transition into fear of failure.

Fear of failure then crowds out relationships and outside activities. With little else, work is all that is left.

The Bad News

If fear of failure has been a driving force in your life, get ready for some unpleasant news. According to Professor Brooks, you will experience a decline in success *much* sooner than you think.

At age 50, Charles Darwin published his crowning achievement, *On the Origin of the Species*, a best-seller explaining evolution. It made him a household name and changed science forever. But he never made another breakthrough.

By the world's standards, Darwin was a success. By Charles Darwin's standards of success, he was washed up after age 50. Darwin lived another 23 years as an unhappy man.

In his 2022 book *From Strength to Strength*, Brooks states that for most of us, creative decline begins between the late 30s and early 50s. Financial professionals are most creative between 36 and 40. Physicians appear to be most creative in their 30s. For most knowledge workers, decline begins between the late 30s and early 50s.

Regardless of how hard you work, by your mid-40s, you will be acutely aware that younger professionals are surpassing you in creativity and business success.

For the leader who is results-oriented, it is a fact of life that requires management and emotional perspective.

For the leader who is a Success Addict, it feels like slow walking down the road to irrelevance.

The Good News

"What got you here won't get you there" is a common cliché. Your future success involves the ability to unlearn behavioral habits of past success and learn new habits or success.

Brooks cites Raymond Cattell's classic 1987 book, *Intelligence: Its Structure, Growth, and Action*. Cattell suggested that there are two types of intelligence. The first type is fluid intelligence: the ability to think flexibly and solve novel problems. He stated that this type of intelligence is highest relatively early in adulthood and diminishes over time.

The success addict's past success has been due to a positive combination of three factors: fluid Intelligence, hard work, and luck. As fluid intelligence declines, hard work and luck will not take up the slack.

On the other hand, Cattell states, your crystalized Intelligence rises: the ability to apply a stock of given knowledge to a novel situation. Another word for fluid intelligence is “wisdom.”

The “cure” for success addicts is accepting the decline of fluid intelligence while embracing your emerging crystalized intelligence.

Specific Action Strategies

Brooks cites research showing that the oldest college professors tend to have better teaching evaluations than younger faculty in the same departments.

Teaching is not limited to classrooms. Many business leaders make the transition from business leaders to coaches, business consulting, or board work. That aggressive litigator may eventually become a wise mentor to new legal associates. Going from the smartest person in the room to the most supportive person is the path to take.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this article, we gave you a forced choice: Would you rather be happy or be special? For success addicts, the desire for success is never satiated.

You will not be successful in the future the way you were successful in the past.

Success in your future means unlearning past habits of success as you embrace your emerging crystallized intelligence.

References

A.C. Brooks. *From Strength to Strength*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2022

R.B. Cattell. *Intelligence: Its Structure, Growth, and Action*. New York: North-Holland, 1987.

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Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. partners with companies for success in leadership succession.

Core services revolve around retained search limited to Board Directors, CEOs, CFOs, and COOs; leadership coaching at this level; and C-Suite Outplacement.

Business leaders wishing a free 30-minute consult can contact:

Maryanne Peabody

Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

peabody@stybelpeabody.com

stybelpeabody.com

boardoptions.com