

# RETHINKING SUCCESS

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*Eight Essential Practices for  
Finding Meaning in Work and Life*

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J. Douglas Holladay

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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Learning Your Own Story*

**We are all born into someone else's story.**

—PETER BUFFETT, SON OF FINANCIER WARREN BUFFETT

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *Write out your story in at least three pages as it comes to your mind; include the good, the bad, and the ugly. Don't overthink this exercise; let the thoughts flow freely.*
- *Now read over what you wrote. Are there parts of your story you are ashamed of?*
- *Write out a brief outline of your parents' (or caregivers') stories. If possible, ask each of your parents (or caregivers) about their story and what shaped their own journey. What was their relationship with their parents like? How does it compare with your relationship to your parents?*
- *Did you feel shame or embarrassment about your parents or caregivers when you were growing up? In what way?*
- *Write down ten positive traits of each parent or*

*caregiver. Now record ten negative qualities that you experienced firsthand. Finally, circle those specific traits from both lists that you brought into your story and experience.*

- *Who is your audience and how does this impact how you live your life?*
  - *What would you do differently if you weren't afraid of disappointing your audience?*
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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Developing and Maintaining  
Your Relationships*

**Americans are lonely. Across the country almost one out of every two adults—no matter their race or gender—say they sometimes or always feel alone or left out.**

—DAVID M. CORDANI,  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, CIGNA

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *What is a friend? Did your parents have friends?*
- *Why is it important to cultivate friendships? Can successful people have trusted friends?*
- *Do you feel isolated? And if so, what contributed to that?*
- *What scares you about being vulnerable in a relationship? Who have you been vulnerable with in your life? How did those experiences go?*
- *Do you trust easily? Have you been betrayed by a friend? How do your experiences of trust affect you today?*

- *Describe the ideal friendship. Do you have any friendships that come close to that ideal? Who are you an ideal friend to?*
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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Making Gratitude a Regular Practice*

**Want to be happy? Be grateful.**

—DAVID STEINDL-RAST, BENEDICTINE MONK

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *Write down ten specific things, large or small, for which you are grateful.*
- *Were your parents or caregivers grateful people? Who do you know who is grateful? How do these role models influence your practice of gratitude?*
- *For five consecutive days, record daily two to five things for which you are thankful. Small things are just fine.*
- *Write a handwritten note or letter to someone thanking them for the role they have played in your life or for something specific they did for you in the past.*
- *Notice a colleague's specific work product or attitude and let that person know how it affected you.*
- *Catch your child or other family member doing something right, acknowledge it, and perhaps celebrate it.*

- *Think of some service provider in your life—a checkout clerk, plumber, house cleaner, etc.—and write them a note thanking them for what they do for you; enclose a monetary gift.*
  - *Write a thank-you note weekly for one month, thanking special people in your life.*
  - *Name five things you have noticed from the above exercises about the practical benefits of practicing gratitude.*
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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Learning to Forgive and Serve*

**The metric by which God will assess my life isn't dollars  
but the individual people whose lives I've touched.**

—CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN,  
PROFESSOR, HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *Were your parents or caregivers forgiving people?*
- *Are you a forgiving person? Write down examples of times you forgave someone. Describe how those experiences have influenced you.*
- *Do you keep score of your grievances against others? How is that working?*
- *Have there been times when others have forgiven you? Describe those experiences.*
- *Are there some things you think should never be forgiven?*
- *List at least five times you have cared for or served others outside of your family. How have those experiences affected you?*
- *Are you able to give to others even when it is not reciprocated? Why or why not?*

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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Determining Your Definitions  
of Success and Failure*

**You can get all As and still flunk life.**

—WALKER PERCY, AUTHOR

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *How did your family define success? How was this celebrated?*
- *What messages from the broader culture have you received regarding success? How has this influenced your view?*
- *How do you define success? Are you a success?*
- *Do you have a specific measure for success? How much is enough?*
- *When did you fail? What did you feel afterward? What did you learn from it?*
- *Describe two experiences you have had in which you have shown resilience. What motivated you to persevere in these situations?*
- *What would your children say is most important to you? What would you like them to say?*

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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Determining the Place of Risk in Your Life*

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

—H. JACKSON BROWN JR.

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *Do you consider risk-taking positive or negative? Why?*
- *Which risk-taker do you admire? Why?*
- *On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates being totally risk-adverse and 5 means embracing risk fully, where are you? Where would you like to be?*
- *How did your family raise you to think about risk? How does it influence you today?*
- *What are some particular fears that your family instilled in you?*
- *What specific risk did you take as a child? How did it feel?*

- *What small shift would make a difference in the quality of your life? What holds you back from making it?*
  - *Write down three things that would be out of your comfort zone yet would benefit your life. Consider doing one, and then reflect on how it felt.*
  - *Over the course of the next seven days, take three small risks and reflect on these experiences.*
  - *Describe both a good risk and a bad risk you took. What were the ramifications of each?*
  - *Do you know someone who is reckless? Have you ever been reckless? How have these experiences influenced you?*
  - *What holds you back from taking an action that you know you should take?*
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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Living an Integrated Life*

Surveys confirm that meaning is the top thing millennials say they want from a job. . . . What they fail . . . to realize is that work can be meaningful even if you don't think of it as a calling.

—EMILY ESFAHANI SMITH,  
AUTHOR OF *THE POWER OF MEANING*

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *Do you compartmentalize your life between the professional and the personal? How do you do that? List three small shifts you might make to reintegrate.*
- *Consider the purpose of your work, and write a short statement expressing it.*
- *Who do you know who is a good model of a person integrating life and work?*
- *Can business be a “high” calling?*
- *Do you think we overly emphasize finding a passion for young people? Does this set them up for failure and false expectations, or do you think it important for the good life?*

- *Is there a “perfect” job that you think would make you come alive?*
  - *Is your life integrated? How so? What’s lacking? How would friends answer this question about you?*
  - *Is it too idealistic to think that a business can have a purpose beyond profits?*
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**TAKE ACTION:**  
*Choosing and Working on Your Legacy*

**Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.**

—HOWARD THURMAN

In your journal reflect on these questions and exercises:

- *Whose legacy do you admire? How does their contribution inspire you?*
- *What was the legacy of your parents? Do you believe they felt they made a difference? In what way?*
- *In two paragraphs write the ideal eulogy for yourself, one that you would be proud to have read at your funeral. How does that eulogy serve as a measure of the life you are living now?*
- *Gather a few friends and have them write the ideal eulogy they would want read at their funerals. Read them aloud to each other and discuss.*
- *On a sheet of paper list your passions in one column and your modes of earning a living in another. Do the lists have any overlap? Are you keeping the passions*

*alive even if you don't get paid for them? Commit at least ten minutes per week to express one passion.*

- *Make another list of your passions and then list your obligations. Is there a passion that you have been neglecting? Take two small steps this week to make this passion a priority.*
  - *Do you feel pressure to do something “grand” or “significant” with your life? Are you placing pressure on your children to do the same?*
  - *Is our legacy something we can shape, or is it for others to determine?*
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