

1 WHAT DOES
AMBITION
MEAN TO YOU?

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CHAPTER 1

REDEFINING AMBITION AND SUCCESS

REAL AMBITION

The meaning of ambition and success is something that varies from person to person. What success means to you or what you want to see for yourself in the future might be completely different to someone else's interpretation. Perhaps you dream of making it in a highly competitive arts and entertainment field like Hollywood, the music charts, the *New York Times* bestseller list. You might want to escape a dreary no-status job for an exciting high-level career. You might be determined to make so much money you don't have to ever worry about it. Or you might have decided to totally change your life by moving to a different city or even another country.

Before we help you learn how to achieve your ambitions and create success in your life, you need to be clear about what ambition and success mean. If your definitions are simply the opposite of terms like unsuccessful, failure, mediocre or boring, you won't be clear about what exactly you are aiming to create. So what do ambition and success mean generally – and what do they mean to you?

ARE DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS RIGHT?

We're starting with dictionary definitions of ambition and success because we want to strip them down from all the associations you may have made about both words. Think of a house that someone has painted over again and again, and that needs to be stripped back to a shell and rebuilt to achieve a home that's redesigned and redecorated properly as well as beautifully. The same has happened to these big concepts of ambition and success. They have become overloaded with the meanings you've absorbed around you. One of the things we're aiming to do is to help you redefine ambition and success on your terms.

So let's get to the basics. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* ambition is:

*A strong desire to do or achieve something
Desire and determination to achieve success*

On the online Dictionary.com we find ambition described as:

An earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as power, honor, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment

In the Oxford Dictionary there are various definitions of success:

The accomplishment of an aim or purpose
The attainment of fame, wealth, or social status
A person or thing that achieves desired aims or attains fame, wealth

All the above definitions are food for thought aren't they? It's evident that the classic definitions of ambition are about wanting to accomplish an aim that is connected to success, and that the overall definitions of success are based on accomplishing goals that are invariably connected to wealth and status.

By flagging up these definitions we may have depressed you a teeny bit. There may be a thought at the back of your mind that there are people who have a knack of rising to the top and making money and having everything, but you're not that type. But you don't have to be that or any type.

“A definition of ambition based on seeking and aspiring to *something* gives each of us the opportunity to choose what we want to achieve.”

Kele Baker, mind-body-movement coach

Who says we have to accept dictionary definitions? Think of all those modern words that only in recent years have entered

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dictionaries, like Google, text and smartphone. Who says ambition has to go hand in hand with success, or that success is dependent on a certain type of ambition? If ambition is the desire to achieve a goal and that goal is happiness, or fulfilment, isn't that success? How about if you substitute the word 'wealth' with 'prosperity', and the word 'fame' with 'recognition'? Think about this and it will click: you have an approachable vision of success that relates to *you*.

So let's look at how you can reformulate ambition and success in a way that works for you.

REAL AMBITION ISN'T RUTHLESS

Over the decades, ambition has come to be associated with a type of ruthless, overconfident person who will stop at nothing to achieve what they're after. Ambition is associated with dog-eats-dog environments where people are hard-nosed and heartless, self-obsessed and egocentric.

But why should a desire to make a dream come true mean having to be a caricature of ambition? We're certainly not going to give you the secrets of ruthless successful people that work while leaving out the bad bits, because this book is about developing a holistic approach. When your ambition nurtures you, we believe that the rest follows.

Old-style ambition has simply fallen flat on its face. We know that thanks to one word: recession. The most ambitious people, those who were the most ruthless and the wealthiest, wiped out entire economies. We don't propose to get into a discussion on economics and politics here. But we hope the brief reminder of this period in our history will help to show that you don't need the traits traditionally associated with ambition. Being ruthless, cut-throat and hard won't serve you as a person or your wellbeing, and won't benefit humanity.

“Ambition is often seen as achieving things at the expense of others.”

John Purkiss, headhunter and coach

Whether you have a specific dream or you're looking for a way to create a specific life, you may be wondering whether you need a watered-down version of ruthless, some sort of healthy go-go-go. The problem with old-style ambition is that any form of go-go-go can lead to imbalance. Think of workaholics and anyone you know who works relentlessly and doesn't have a life and you'll get the picture.

One of the blocks stopping you might even be a fear that to make your dreams happen you'll have to give up friends and hobbies and isolate yourself. This certainly isn't the kind of success we have in mind.

OLD-STYLE AMBITION IS BURNOUT – REAL AMBITION IS BALANCE

If you believe that success is either down to luck or working at your goals non-stop that's not surprising. This is the society we live in. Our TV is dominated by reality TV stars who've become famous for not really doing anything, the media is full of overnight success stories, yet all around us we see people working hard to find jobs or keep their jobs.

“We live in a dynamic, forceful, moving, active society. We have to constantly *do* and *achieve*. Yet this is a burnt out and stressed society.”

Kele Baker, mind-body-movement coach

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As somebody now working to help people find inner peace and maintain this peace in their outer lives, mind-body-movement coach Kele Baker is acutely aware of how stressed people are in modern lives. Her long-time interest in Chinese medicine and philosophy helped her deal with her own stress and breakdown as a young actress in New York and she maintained this interest through moving on to different occupations as a ballroom dance teacher, Alexander Technique practitioner, co-director of a dance school business, as a choreographer and working on one of the UK's most popular TV programmes.

Baker believes that our Western lives need ancient wisdom to realign them. 'We need balance, rest and rejuvenation.' It might seem odd to talk about resting in a book about achieving success. After all, shouldn't that come later? Might rest not turn into laziness? Does rest really fit in with ambition?

That's the thing about real ambition: you can evaluate what you want. If there's a way to achieve your dreams without burning out from exhaustion, wouldn't you rather do that?

“Ambition needs balance and it might take a while to get there.”

Dannie-Lu Carr, creativity specialist, communications consultant & creative practitioner

There's no doubt that the pace of our modern lives, especially in cities, is fast and demanding. It's also inevitable that one of your desires, more often than not work, will become all consuming,

particularly in a competitive field or an economic climate where jobs aren't easy to find. But if you only feed that strand in your life, what will happen to the other areas? If you had a garden and only looked after the roses and ignored the rest, it wouldn't be a very pretty sight would it?



BOOST YOUR BRAIN

Recent research by the National Institute of Mental Health¹ in the USA showed that the more successful people are, the more key parts of the brain tend to 'talk' with each other during a resting state. In other words, success and satisfaction with life boosts the brain and makes it stronger.

You can start thinking success and boosting your brain right now. Can you learn something new? Can you improve your finances by striking new deals for your utilities? Can you give yourself a new mental challenge like learning some basics in a new language so you can speak when you're on holiday? Can you make a simple lifestyle change that will make your days even marginally better?

As a coach working both in business and the arts, Dannie-Lu Carr observes people exhausting themselves hoping this will lead to what they want. Yet she's adamant that 'over-focusing' is counterproductive and working to the point of exhaustion is *not* what gets you from ambition to success. 'It could take time to achieve your main dream, so you need balance in your life in order

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to keep going and not give up. Things have to be in balance: love, self-respect, leisure, self-nurturing, friends.'

Anyone who has made the transition from unhealthy to healthy probably recognizes that balance is far from easy. Getting into the habit of shopping for fresh food, learning to make wholesome food, finding a fitness routine that doesn't feel like a regime, resisting anything digital before sleeping – none of this is easy when it's new. On a larger scale, a balanced life requires thinking, planning, trying, doing. The process can feel a little sticky to begin with, but then this is what you will want to embrace all the time.

By addressing all areas in your life, what you are effectively building is a sound foundation that will boost the bit that might be toughest to achieve. In other words, you are creating an inner support system that nurtures you.

Are we really saying that ambition can be nurturing?

REAL AMBITION IS NURTURING

Old-style ambition doesn't nurture us as individuals, nor does it nurture a healthy work environment, community or the world at large. *Real* ambition, however, can not only sustain our dreams, it can sustain our wellbeing *and* the wellbeing of others.

Before you wonder whether we're getting all abstract and New-Agey, bear with us a little. Have you ever done any of the following?

- Made an effort to recycle
- Sponsored someone who was raising money for a cause
- Taken care of a sick relative or friend
- Donated goods to a charity
- Taught somebody something you know

- Made somebody a birthday cake
- Treated a friend to a night out.

What we're getting at is that it's likely that you're already doing something nurturing. You're already not selfish. As Baker puts it, we're aware that we're 'over-taking from ourselves and the environment'. We know we have to put something back in to ourselves as individuals – and to the planet as a whole.

“Ambition is having drive and enthusiasm towards a clear goal for a positive purpose.”

Dannie-Lu Carr, creativity specialist, communications consultant & creative practitioner

We live in very difficult times politically and economically. We watch the news and more often than not it's gruesome. But we also live in very exciting times of change. Carr points to the new wave of 'social-preneurs' like former jewellery business couple John and Cynthia Hardy who set up the eco-friendly and holistic Green School² in Bali, Indonesia: 'Social preneurs are creating new paradigms for success in business on an individual level and community level, so it's a win-win for everyone.'

One of the reasons we felt it was the right to time to write about ambition is because of these new paradigms that are emerging. Ambition might not be new, but it's not static. It's ever-changing.

AMBITION IS HUMAN – AND HUMANS EVOLVE

We know from anthropology that wherever there are communities of human beings, there will always be humans who want more. In a *Time Magazine* cover story on ambition in 2005,³ anthropologist Edward Lowe at Soka University of America was quoted as saying

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that ‘Ambition is an evolutionary product’. What’s more it has always differed. ‘No matter how social status is defined, there are certain people in every community who aggressively pursue it and others who aren’t so aggressive.’ Lowe spelt out for the magazine that people want more than the basics. ‘It’s fundamentally human to be prestige conscious,’ he said.

In an article we published in 2012,⁴ ‘Is ambition a dirty word?’, our big question was whether conflicted attitudes were holding women back. What our journalist Anita Chaudhuri found through her research was that both men and women want to achieve recognition. However, whereas men don’t have a problem owning up to being ambitious and thrive on competitiveness, women shy away from being seen as ego-driven. Men tend to focus on one ambition, while women have more of a variety of goals.

A central question in this article was why there were fewer women at boardroom level. Fewer women seemed driven to succeed in male-dominated worlds like finance; instead they seemed drawn to more ‘caring’ or ‘female’ areas like charities or fashion. Yet the piece concluded by pointing to a change in attitudes as a result of the recession, with a younger female generation feeling more comfortable about ambition and older generations of men realizing that old-style ambition comes at a price

“Success for me now is about hanging out with my kids (aged 8 and 10) when they come home from school. I know that when I’m stressed I don’t switch off and so I don’t engage with them.”

Chris Baréz-Brown, creative and business beatnik

In just four years since we ran this piece, we believe the meaning of ambition has shifted and changed even more for both men and women. Both genders are seeking ambition that is acceptable, natural and positive.

PROFESSOR FORTLOUIS WOOD'S DEFINITION OF REAL AMBITION

- *'Having the creative drive to go beyond what is currently visible or available*
- *Seeing something new rather than playing it safe*
- *Finding new goals, and then striving to realize them*
- *Striving to create something new, and taking risks to do so*
- *Wanting to learn and wanting to grow; it's tenacity plus drive.*

Ambition is:

*I have an idea that is worth pursuing and it matters to me.
I want to see how my idea turns out – even if it needs
revision or is wrong.
How will my idea work and what can I learn by testing it?
What can I do with my new idea? What will my new
idea do?'*

If you were curious about ambition and success we hope we've sparked in you a desire to formulate your own definitions for your own unique visions. You don't have to become that stereotypical, outdated ambitious person who could risk becoming unlikeable or unhealthy or unhappy, or all three.

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Although you might have one overriding dream, you don't have to limit yourself. It's healthier to think about all areas of one's life because a balanced life is a healthy, fulfilled life.








Real success is living a life that is based on your values and your values alone, not what everybody else wants. You may have grown up with your family influencing your view of success, but remember that was based on their circumstances. Your friends might be following a similar path, whether it's working in a particular sector or getting married, but that's not a reason to do the same. You might get the impression from social media and the media at large that success is about wanting certain things, but you don't have to choose them too. You can choose something else.

Remember, it's your life, your way. That means there's no need to compare and compete. When you're true to being you, you won't need to. Once you click into what you really desire, you'll be excited about getting there, and that will make you a happier person to be with – so you'll attract new people, new opportunities and, of course, success.

“My ambition is to live each day well. If I achieve that, I am a very happy boy.”

Chris Baréz-Brown, creative and business beatnik

ASK YOURSELF

-  What do you associate ambition with?
-  Who do you associate ambition with – what sort of person is this? What do you have in common with this person?
-  What did ambition mean to you when you bought this book? What does it mean to you now?
-  Do you have one central ambition? What is it?
-  Can you begin to formulate what you desire in different areas of your life?
-  What does achieving success mean to you?
-  If you could rewrite the definitions of ambition and success to suit you, how would these definitions reflect who you are?

TAKE THE TEST

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS? Find out what really matters to you now

Sometimes we can lose sight of what really matters to us, especially when we're on the receiving end of other people's ideas of success, whether from the media (40,000 followers on Instagram anyone?) or our parents (a steady job, a nice house and savings in the bank sound familiar?). Then there's our peers – when a friend announces they've been promoted to the next rung on the corporate ladder, are setting up their own business or giving up their job to volunteer abroad, it's hard not to think 'should I be doing that too?' But identifying and shaping your *own* definition of success is like having a Sat Nav for your ambition – instead of setting off and hoping you're going in the right direction, you can steadily journey towards your destination.

The following test will help you get in touch with your genuine ambitions by working out what success means to you. With this and the other quizzes in this book, you'll get the most out of it by selecting the answer that reflects how you usually feel or react, rather than ticking what you think is the 'right' answer (there is no right answer!). Some questions may be about situations that don't apply to you. In that case, take time to consider how you would feel or react in that situation, and select the answer which reflects that most closely.

Test by Sally Brown

QUESTION 1

A magic genie appears and offers you four options. Which would you choose?

- A. CEO of an innovative start-up that makes a significant difference to the lives of vulnerable people in your community.
 - B. A promotion that comes with prestigious job title reflecting your skills and achievements.
 - C. A part-time job you enjoy but that makes you enough money to live comfortably.
 - D. A big break in a creative field such as writing or performing.
-

QUESTION 2

You're asked to represent your company at an international conference in LA. How do you react?

- A. You jump at the chance. It's an opportunity to raise your profile both inside and outside your company.
 - B. You wonder if there'll be time to do a creative retreat or workshop while you're out there.
 - C. You scan the agenda to see if there will be any speakers talking about social change.
 - D. You're pleased to be asked but worry about the time away from home.
-

QUESTION 3

Whose autobiography are you most likely to read?

- A. Someone who's rethinking the work-life balance, like Tim Ferriss or Ariana Huffington.
 - B. A human rights campaigner like Malala Yousafzai or Nelson Mandela.
 - C. A film director like Steven Spielberg or novelist like JK Rowling.
 - D. A high-profile business success like Mark Zuckerberg or Sheryl Sandberg.
-

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

QUESTION 4

What worry is most likely to keep you up at night?

- A. Not spending enough quality time with your family.
 - B. A colleague at work being promoted above you.
 - C. A shocking story of injustice or poverty that you've watched on the news.
 - D. Getting a really bad review of a performance or piece of work.
-

QUESTION 5

Which of these descriptions would you be most pleased to see in your obituary?

- A. 'Widely recognized for his/her achievements in the field.'
 - B. 'A tireless social campaigner.'
 - C. 'A wise and calm presence who had time for all.'
 - D. 'A gifted performer/writer/artist.'
-

QUESTION 6

Imagine you won enough money so that you no longer had to work. Would you give up your job?

- A. In a heartbeat! I'd love the opportunity to simply slow down and savour life.
 - B. Yes, but I would set up my own charity or campaigning group instead.
 - C. Yes, so I could finally focus on developing my writing/creating/performing/baking skills.
 - D. Not necessarily. I couldn't imagine never working again.
-

QUESTION 7

When was the last time you experienced 'flow' (you were so immersed in what you were doing that you lost track of time)?

- A. Spending time on my latest creative project.
 - B. Going for a walk with a loved one (be it friend, family or four-legged).
 - C. Brainstorming a fundraising idea.
 - D. Preparing for an important meeting when it was crucial to make a good impression.
-

QUESTION 8

When you feel an instant connection with someone, which of these qualities are they most likely to possess?

- A. Kindness and compassion.
 - B. Determination.
 - C. A creative drive.
 - D. Calmness and self-assurance.
-

Now, add up your scores from each answer using the following table, and find out how you define success:

	A	B	C	D
Q1	3	1	2	4
Q2	1	4	3	2
Q3	2	3	4	1
Q4	2	1	3	4
Q5	1	3	2	4
Q6	2	3	4	1
Q7	4	2	3	1
Q8	3	1	4	2

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

If you scored between 8 and 13 ...

Success for you is about fulfilling your potential

You're willing to take risks and you're good at thinking big picture. You love new ideas and feel sure you have the motivation and focus to make a business or big job a success, if only you knew where you should apply your efforts.

You have an innate competitive drive that works both for and against you. It gives you the drive to keep going, but the desire to 'win' can also send you off in the wrong direction – ever wondered why victory feels hollow? Other people may already consider you successful, and express bemusement at why you seem to want more. But you have a drive to learn and grow and become your best possible self, and that means never resting on your laurels.

Your weakness is that at times there are so many ideas buzzing around your head, you don't give any of them the focus they need to get them off the ground. Working through the chapters in this book should help you crystallize your current priorities.

If you scored between 14 and 20 ...

Success for you is about great quality of life

You're conscientious and motivated, but can find it hard to say no, which takes its toll on your quality of life. You may have experienced issues with ongoing health niggles, energy levels or low mood, and come to the realization that for you, a happy life is all about balance. You know that success is about having enough money to remove financial stress, not racking up thousands in the bank. You're no longer happy just to 'get through' your working days, or live for the weekends and holidays. Sometimes, it's the death of someone close to us that brings home the 'life is short' message. Or it may be that a life-change, like becoming a parent, has made you re-evaluate what really matters to you. Working through this book will help you clarify the changes you need to make to achieve this balance.

If you scored between 21 and 27 ...

Success for you is about making a difference

For you, personal success only counts if there's a knock-on benefit for other people, whether it's your local community or the wider world. You may well have already achieved considerable personal success and been left wondering, 'Is this it?' The idea of becoming a social-preneur is very appealing, and you feel especially inspired by those who have tapped into new and innovative ways of working that help other people. You feel acutely aware of issues such as climate change, poverty and social injustice, and are no stranger to charity or voluntary work. But you may have now reached a point where you want to do more, and you're ready to shape your working life accordingly. Read on to learn how to channel this passion in the most effective way.

If you scored between 28 and 32 ...

Success for you is about being creative

Ideas and innovation are important to you, and you're searching for a way of developing your passion for creating, either in your working or personal life. Creative types are blessed with an active imagination, but the flipside is that this often comes with anxiety, and you may worry about the future and whether you're 'good enough' to make a career from your creative talents. But as you may well have already discovered, success can feel hollow if it's not an achievement we feel proud of. The good news is that you can bring creativity to most jobs and careers, as well as nurturing this side of you in your personal life. Creativity is a gift that will always be with you – read on to find out how to maximize this positive force in your life to support your ambition.

