

1 Strive

What is the real key to success that ties together the most famous winners in history? To become successful, you must pursue challenges that are tremendously uncomfortable and outside your comfort zone. Only this type of stretching beyond what you are comfortable with will allow you to achieve success.

Writers often embody the key aspects of Strive: Despite the odds, they frequently step outside of their comfort zone to become more than they dreamed possible. There are powerful risks involved with writing, and financial ruin is only one.

Take one of the most famous writers, J. K. Rowling, the mastermind behind the Harry Potter series. While growing up, Rowling exhibited a talent for storytelling, but did not pursue writing in college. She actually majored in French, since it was seen as a “safer” way to obtain gainful employment. Rowling’s idea for the Harry Potter stories went unwritten for some time. As a matter of fact, when she first conceived of the idea, she had nothing to write with and was too timid to even ask for a pen. So one of the best-selling children’s series in modern memory almost went unnoticed, a passing thought on a train, left behind on the platform like so many other great ideas.

But then Rowling’s life was flipped upside down. She found herself alone with a child to raise and no job. Most people would have sought out any job to pay the bills. Rowling was, after all, an

educated individual with a strong drive to succeed. However, she chose the uncomfortable path instead. She accepted the stigma of obtaining government aid for herself and her child, and threw herself into finally drawing out the story that had been bubbling over in her mind for so long.

Rowling was striving for success. She embraced the uncomfortable to obtain her goal. But she still didn't have it. Simply writing the book *The Philosopher's Stone* was not enough to lift her from the poorhouse. Getting it published was another struggle that she tackled with a dogged determination: The publishing world is a Wild West shootout with many actors but extremely few stars. As the Internet has risen, traditional publishing venues have fallen, making the print publication of any one writer's work difficult. Rowling did not have fantastic luck—she had terrible luck. The rejections for her book piled up, one after another. Twelve publishing houses ended up rejecting her work. When she finally did find a small publishing house that accepted the manuscript, she was advised to get a day job—after all, writers don't make much. That was in 1997, when Rowling's net worth was somewhere around zero. In 2015, the Motley Fool estimated that Rowling's brand was worth an estimated \$15 billion. (Her personal net worth, however, was a mere \$1 billion. She is still the wealthiest writer of all time. She beats out horror monarch Stephen King, who, with all his books combined, is worth an estimated \$400 million.)

Rowling is not the only writer to embody the concept of Strive. The Grand Dame of Mystery herself, Agatha Christie, knew a thing about it. Her first manuscript was rejected by many publishers, and Christie had to wait five years before her book would see print. Perhaps the king of perseverance is Louis

L'Amour, who suffered 200 rejections before going on to be one of the most recognized authors in the world. Perseverance is an important part of Strive, because embracing the unknown can be challenging.

Popular Beliefs About Success Are Profoundly Wrong

Of course, there is no denying that talented, hard-working people can become successful—but there are millions of them, and most of them do not achieve real, lasting success in their lives. Real, lasting success often occurs as a result of intentionality that often requires doing “the uncomfortable” to stretch that individual to obtain new capabilities and new opportunities.

There is nothing mystifying about this striving to get outside of your comfort zone. One look at a da Vinci painting can convince anyone that the man was an astounding student of the human form. What no one sees, however, is the profoundly uncomfortable steps da Vinci took to finally achieve those incredible results. The Renaissance brought about an increased hunger for truth, and achieving accurate depictions of the human form was highly prized. This led some artists to go well beyond sketching nude models. Artists such as Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni and Antonio Pollaiuolo were known to have used their studies of dissected cadavers to improve their own work. Da Vinci himself is thought to have dissected 30 bodies. Uncomfortable indeed.

It's clear that the greatest successes came to people who pushed themselves outside their comfort zones. This striving to be more influences our ultimate success—and leads to even greater accomplishments. As you succeed in large and small ways, you will begin

to find that there simply are more opportunities and people who will help you move upward toward the next level of your goal.

Successful people do not begin as “outliers” or masters. They are people who are subject to society, health, and class, just as you and I. They also had problems and struggles that seemed impossible to surmount. Da Vinci was born out of wedlock to a mother who did not acknowledge him; it was even thought that his mother was an Arab servant that da Vinci’s father eventually “gave” to another man in the village. Elizabeth I was born to one of her father’s many doomed wives and feared for her life since she did not follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. Thomas Edison was told that he was “too stupid to learn anything.” Isaac Newton, whose *Principia Mathematica* became the foundation for all modern math and science, failed miserably as a farmer. In modern times, star actress Michele Yeoh trained hard until she was 16 to become a ballerina, when she suffered irreparable damage to her back. Young George Soros was one of the survivors of the Siege of Budapest. All these people suffered hardships just like you and I; they also show that success comes from striving to do better through uncomfortable challenges and risks. Some people may start out well, and others may have more money or talent; but what really differentiates the winners is the way they embrace change and risk to improve their lives and achieve their dreams.

Think about it: The ability to succeed is within your grasp. It doesn’t depend on money, background, or even talent. (Think of how many people are famous for being . . . well, famous.)

You can be successful, but why stop there? Once you help yourself achieve wonderful things, just think of how you can impact the world. Imagine we can create a repeatable process for success to help all people from all walks of life. This would

completely revolutionize our world. The World Bank estimated that 10% of the world's population lives in extreme poverty. (About 50% of the world is considered poor.) About half of the poor in the world are children. How many lives could be changed by lifting these people from poverty into the middle class?

Society would suddenly become less polarized. Much of the current rise in populism around the world is related to globalization and the sharply rising income inequality. Take France, for example. French farmers need government assistance to survive, because the cheap agricultural products from EU heavyweight Germany are flooding their markets. The average French farmer works extremely hard—but despite talent and drive, he cannot survive in the new global economy. It is not only in France that those who are working hard cannot make ends meet. Americans are struggling, too. The loss of well-paying factory jobs has really been only one more nail in the middle class's coffin, destroying not only the underpinnings of the middle class, but also marriages and family structures. Tech companies large and small, once seen as the saviors of middle class jobs, are replacing existing American engineers with cheaper labor from other countries (in some cases, American engineers are actually training their offshore replacements to take their jobs), cloud services, and automation. It can feel like the situation is hopeless.

But it's not. And I am confident that by showing you that Strive works, you can not only improve your life, but help others improve theirs.

Strive for Real, Lasting Success

The secret to success is embracing uncomfortable change and risk to reach your goals. Throughout history, this principle has often

been proven to be true. It accounts for the wild successes of some and the sad failures of others. The amazing thing about Strive is that anyone can do it, regardless of background, upbringing, talent, time, or education.

Those who reach outside their comfort zone are those who succeed. However, reaching outside your comfort zone does not mean just doing anything. To Strive is to pursue the right kind of risk while taking care of yourself and your loved ones. It involves a balanced approach to life that helps you focus clearly on what you want and how to achieve it. I have used the letters from STRIVE to help create a simple approach to embracing change and risk in your life.

(S)—Set a Goal

What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.

—*Zig Ziglar, American author and motivational speaker,
1926–2012*

The first step to achieving wild success is to know what it will look like for you. Believe it or not, one of the reasons many people fail is because they do not set a clear and achievable goal. Being rich is not a goal, and neither is being famous. These can be the natural outcomes of pursuing your goal, but they are not goals by themselves. This is because they do not follow the ideal of Strive, which is to pursue and attain success that leads to your improvement and, hopefully, the enrichment of those around you. If being rich could be a goal, you would only need to marry a rich man or woman to achieve that, but you would experience no personal growth. The same is true for fame: You can put silly

videos of yourself on YouTube so the world laughs at you, but will experience no lasting, personal growth from it. (Later, we will look at how easy money and fame can actually destroy people.) A real goal is something that takes you from what you are and where you are right now to a better place and becoming a better person. Some research has shown that having a clear goal is correlated with a more positive outlook.

(T)—Think About How to Get There and Plan for Success

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

—*Solomon, Israelite king, ruled ~ 970–931*

Thinking about what you need to do to accomplish your goal helps you understand what information you need to find out about it. Research your goal using the Internet and your local library. Talk to people who are connected with it. Let others know that you are interested in this goal and find out as much as you can about it. Now, what do you need to reach your goal? This will likely involve some uncomfortable change and risk. For example, becoming a professional singer involves more than just putting videos on YouTube. This is because you control the situation by using YouTube as a medium; you sing when you want, where you want, and how long you want. Professional singers are typically in front of a live audience—which means that your comfort level may take a resounding hit. You may also need to take singing lessons, build relationships with other recording artists and companies, and hire a coach or tutor. If you are naturally shy or find that you react poorly to rejection, these types of challenges will involve you getting outside your comfort zone.

(R)—Risk: Embrace It, Expect It

The desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise.

—*Tacitus, Roman senator, 56–177*

Living is risky, but many of us prefer to stay with what is known and comfortable. This usually leads us to stagnate. We prefer the monotony of the everyday, even when it keeps us in low-paying jobs, unhappy workplaces, or stressful relationships. Risk is a part of life, and you will never achieve your dreams if you don't come to see risk as a natural part of your success. The key to success with taking risk is to identify "smart" risk. It is, of course, risky to jump off a bridge because all your friends are doing it – but it is a foolish risk that does not yield any improvement. (Yes, Mom was right.) "Smart" risk involves looking carefully at your options and choosing a risky venture that can help you move forward on your journey to your ultimate goal. For our YouTube sensation, this might mean singing in front of a live audience at a new club. Uncomfortable change may be somewhat more challenging. It might mean giving up eating chips every day so you have enough energy to work and attend classes. It might also mean you need to regularly engage in challenges that push you beyond your normal abilities. For example, I am an extremely private, quiet person; I prefer to let others shine. However, since I wanted to help people understand the power of technology and how it can really help them change their lives for the better, I needed to get up in front of a live audience and explain those ideas. I now do that regularly. For me, that was powerfully uncomfortable, but necessary to achieve my goal.

(I)—Insights, or What Did You Learn from Your Uncomfortable Change or Risk?

Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.

—*Henry Ford, American businessman, 1863–1947*

You have probably taken many tests in your life. When you received the graded test paper, did you always go over the problems that were wrong to see what you missed? Strive involves the evaluation of your progress. How can you use the new insights you gained to help you build more connections and build on your success? Insights from your past experiences help you achieve your goal. What did you learn in your class? What did you learn from your last failure? What did you learn from your last success? What did you do to get outside your comfort zone? Do you think that you can reach even further?

(V)—Verify Progress

The unexamined life is not worth living.

—*Socrates, Greek philosopher, ~399 BC*

Examine your progress to make sure you are on the right track. As you succeed and fail on your path to success, periodically check to make sure you are where you want to be. Have you gotten that interview and first job? Are you now just coasting in that position or actively building connections to move yourself up the ladder? It's important to periodically verify that you are still moving toward your ultimate goal because human nature likes its comforts. It is very easy to think we are still pursuing our goals while coasting along at a safe level.

(E)—Enhance Yourself, Mentally and Physically, with Safe Biohacking

If you think taking care of yourself is selfish, change your mind. If you don't, you're simply ducking your responsibilities.

—*Anne Richards, American politician, 1933–2006*

Success is pointless without good mental clarity and health. That's why every step of your journey must be paired with realistic self-care—not popping pills to stay up late, eating junk because you have no time to cook, or regularly skipping your morning yoga because of endless stress-filled deadlines. Some people might be able to achieve their goals while destroying themselves, but it is self-defeating. You want to enjoy your success. Eating well, exercising, and even sleeping enough are all important to achieving your dreams. Arianna Huffington learned the hard way when she passed out from exhaustion and woke up in a pool of blood, with a broken cheekbone and a cut over her eye.

Technology is helping us reach our goals. This is where self-quantification can help you. I will discuss self-quantification in detail in later chapters, but for right now, imagine the power you would have in your hands if you could understand what your own body was telling you. What if you knew when your level of stress is unhealthy and you were prompted to reduce stress through techniques tailored for you? How about tracking your optimal mental state so you can schedule your brain-intensive work effectively? Putting this understanding into the hands of people could help each person reach their own peak performance to help them achieve their wildest dreams.

This Guidebook Can Help You Strive

Strive is a concept that has been proven throughout the ages. But don't take my word for it—examine the evidence and decide for yourself. In the pages that follow, I will show you how traditional approaches to success may come close but fail to explain how the winners have actually gotten to the top of the mountain and planted their flag. Risk and uncomfortable change have written the names of many men and women into the annals of our shared history. By striving, you too can achieve greater success than you ever imagined. I know, because I have lived out its principles. Just like you, I started with a dream. I then began to stretch myself in ways I never believed possible, getting outside of my comfort zone to meet new people and explore novel opportunities. Some of my failures were quite painful, but I kept my eye on my ultimate goal. I have achieved success far beyond my greatest hopes—and I am not done yet.

A word of caution: Doing what makes you uncomfortable does not feel great. We are creatures of habit and we like routine, even if it means that we suffer through the same cycles of failure day in and day out. But you can break that cycle by embracing real, positive change. This book can help.

