



Defining Success



American poet Christopher Morley once said, “There is only one success – to be able to spend your life in your own way.” But George Bernard Shaw had a different view. “I dread success. To have succeeded is to have finished one’s business on earth.” The definition of success is a personal thing. Here, five successful people give us their perspective.



Walking away from one of the only guaranteed-for-life jobs in the country. Learning to think like a player, then a coach, then a manager. Changing the world through public service. Having the money to splurge without regret. Running a major entertainment company.

Success can come in many forms, and the happiness it can inspire isn’t necessarily only about being the richest or most famous. We asked five people from different industries about how they gauge success, how they achieved it and how it’s changed for them over the years.

Tom Morris **Philosopher**

When Tom Morris reached what could arguably be called the high point of his career — serving for 15 years as one of the most popular professors at the University of Notre Dame, teaching one-eighth of the student body each year — he did what few academics who had spent a lifetime working their way up the educational ladder would do: He quit.

For roughly five years, Morris had been splitting his time between his Notre Dame job and his part-time lecturing profession, traveling to corporations and businesses around the world to share his take on philosophy and modern life.

“I was living two lives at the same time — the business talks just by word of mouth were generating a huge amount of activity,” he says.

So Morris, whose 18th book, “If Harry Potter Ran GE,” is due out next year, retired from teaching 10 years ago to become what he calls a “public philosopher,” speaking to factory workers, CEOs and other audiences ranging from 10 people to 1,000.

“I really wanted to bring practical wisdom to people of every age,” he says. “It’s been a completely unexpected adventure to serve as a philosopher in this way.”

It was also a huge risk — but to Morris, that’s part of the process. “If you’re not willing to take risks, you’re not going to get the kind

of rewards you want in your life,” he says. “I gave up the only job in America that is guaranteed for life, my kids’ education being paid for ... so to speak. I had a couple of nights when I thought, ‘Gee, am I doing the right thing? What if six months from now the business world isn’t interested in philosophy?’”

But it was. Morris’ second-year speaking salary was nearly equal to 20 years of his former teaching salary, and, he says, had a greater payoff. “All I could do while teaching was give my time and energy,” says Morris, relaxing just a few hours after taking a walk on the beach outside his Wilmington, N.C. home. “Serving as a pipeline to the wisdom of the ages for people of all ages — it’s such a noble



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— Tom Morris, Public Philosopher

endeavor, and I have so much fun doing it that I’ve always felt successful at it.”

As a philosopher Morris doesn’t measure his success by a dollar amount. “Feeling successful is not the same thing as feeling so utterly content you don’t want to accomplish more,” he says. “We all need to feel fulfillment in what we’re doing now and build a better future as well. Success should be more tied to happiness, contentment and fulfillment than the money, fame and status that we’ve tied it to for the past 50 years. Sometimes those are side effects of success, but not always.”

With some of his clients inviting him back as many as 16 times a year for talks, Morris has achieved a considerable level of success.

“It’s all about discovering our talents, developing them, and deploying them into the world for the good of other people and ourselves,” he says. “I think of success as evolving — setting goals that are right for you and building great relationships. Aristotle believed that without friendships, life isn’t worth living. Too much of the success literature in the past 60 years has been only about individual goal setting.”

Morris rarely finds himself alone these days — and he couldn’t be happier about it. “You grow up at least subliminally equating success with income, but I’ve really come to understand that what’s important is your personal impact on the world,” Morris says. “Will you leave the world better than it was when you got here? Stuff like income, that’s just ancillary — it’s almost inconsequential. It’s just another tool for doing good.”

Michelle Nunn CEO, the Hands On Network

When Michelle Nunn, the daughter of a senator, graduated from college, she knew she wanted to do something in the public service arena.

So she thought about volunteering. She considered the Peace Corps. And then she heard about a new organization, Hands On Atlanta, a nonprofit organization that helps individuals, families, and corporate and community groups find flexible volunteer opportunities at more than 400 service organizations and schools. Nunn joined the group as intern/director — and a phenomenal career in the public service sector was begun.

“I have found real passion and love for that work,” Nunn says. There are now 52 Hands On branches around the country, and although many contribute the organization’s phenomenal success to Nunn’s leadership, she is quick to give credit to her counterparts.

“The great thing about my work is that it is really a collective enterprise,” Nunn says. “Any success I’ve had is directly attributable to working in a team with hundreds of extraordinary volunteers and staff.”

Nunn’s not just being humble; her attitude is at the very core of what she hopes to accomplish with Hands On.

“Given the work I do, for me success is being involved in something that is larger than yourself and being given an opportunity to contribute to something meaningful,” she says. “Throughout my entire career I feel like I’ve been striving toward that goal, but it’s one you are always working toward. You’re on the path to achieving it. I have achieved [success] but I haven’t ever reached the horizon. It’s a constantly receding horizon.”

A horizon, of course, that has seen its share of dawns.



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"[There have been] lots of milestones," Nunn says. "We had our first Hands On Atlanta Day in 1991 — our first signature event we created for the city around service. It was all volunteer run: We created 200 different service projects coordinated by volunteers. We gathered that morning when it was still dark, and it was one of those unnerving things that as the sun came up, we weren't sure if anyone would come to the party — but we had more than 2,000 people come. It was a pivotal point for the organization's growth, for us to build something big and have it realized."

That also means taking chances, such as investing in new software, manpower or other tools to get your organization to the next level.

Within the next decade, she hopes to step down so that new leadership can take hold of Hands On. As the organization grows, Nunn plans to as well.

"I would envision being in public service but not in same position," Nunn says. "It could be in not-for-profit sector or political or public arena — somewhere I could make a meaningful contribution."

Jim Lefebvre Baseball Legend

In each baseball game, there is a winner and a loser; in each World Series, the best of each league face off, and only one team can walk away with the title. That kind of competition can be fierce, but it's the lifeblood many players thrive on that helps propel

that sense of competition, and all those things were fundamentals to get to different levels in life."

"The one thing that I learned at a very early age was competition," he says. "That's what the big leagues are all about. That's one thing that's so great about baseball — we play every day, and it becomes part of your life, your fiber, what drives you and pushes you."

"We're competing against the best in the biggest stage in the major leagues," he says. "The thing you learn over the years is that it's not all about one game, it's about the season. Some days, you walk on to the field and you'll be successful. Some days, things won't go your way. It's the persistence of going out there every single day



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"The not-for-profit world entails taking leaps of faith and risks that sometimes pay off and sometimes don't," she says. "We are doing that now. We're hoping to double the number of affiliates, but there is a degree of calculated risk."

Nunn, who has two children, ages 2½ and 6 months, has also slightly redefined her views on personal success in recent years.

"My definition of success is making a meaningful contribution to the world and having that be something that's at a transformational level," Nunn says. "I'm still striving toward that. I have two children and my success is also measured by having some life balance and being able to have time to spend with them."

them throughout their careers. And it is no new concept to Jim Lefebvre, whose highly successful baseball career began in his childhood backyard.

Although the stakes were higher when Lefebvre later played in the major leagues, he says his principal motivation has stayed the same.

"That competition between brothers about who gets bragging rights at the table meant a lot to us," he says. "The bottom line is bragging rights were just as valuable as the prize for the world championship — the prize just got bigger. The point is the game never changed; the stage did. That competing was special. As a kid, you start to develop

and competing that puts you in a unique situation. Life isn't built around one opportunity — it's many. You have to keep pushing and grinding."

Lefebvre's career is a stellar example of that intense work ethic. The former Seattle Mariners and Chicago Cubs manager played in two World Series and was named 1965 Rookie of the Year while with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"There is a big difference between achievements and achieving," he says. "When you're achieving things, you're successful. When I got into managing, it was about setting goals for the team and working toward those goals. The endless pursuit



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— Gail Ludewig, CEO and president, TotalWorks

of that, day in and day out, that to me is being successful in my life.”

Now serving as the director of player development for MLB International, Lefebvre is working to develop baseball in China, Southeast Asia and Europe. “It’s been really challenging, but a lot of fun,” he says. “We go to these countries and focus in on athleticism and learning to play the game right — it’s a very complex program and they’re responding dramatically.”

As his career has moved forward and changed, Lefebvre says his perception of success has changed.

“When you’re player, it’s all about batting averages and getting numbers up and doing your job,” he says. “Now, in management, it’s based on winning. If the team wins, you’re successful. When you’re a manager, the big picture perspective is more what it’s about. As a kid I never thought I’d be a coach or dreamed I’d be a manager. But the most significant factor you can say about teamwork is that we all need it. Being the manager of a Major League Baseball team is no different than being a CEO. The manager has to make every person on the team feel like they’re part of the dream. That’s when you’ve really reached success — when the team feels like they’re part of it.”

Gail Ludewig **CEO and president, TotalWorks**

For the past 20 years, Gail Ludewig has been happily running her family business, TotalWorks, a Chicago-based publishing

production company that has provided services for clients looking to outsource their internal publishing operations since 1927.

Ludewig had spent years carving out a successful career in finance when, in the mid-1980s, she suddenly received a new job offer: Come home and run the family business.

“My father had some plans to change what he was doing,” Ludewig says. “He sold the company to two employees and at the last minute, the transaction for the sale of the business fell through.” Despite having no experience with the family business outside of a summer job, she took the reigns at TotalWorks.

“I was separated from my first husband so my ability to take a career and business risk and change on one hand was easy — and on one hand, hard — but I decided to do it,” Ludewig says.

The change proved both challenging — immediately pitting Ludewig’s company against a new competitor and facing a technological overhaul — and rewarding. Not only has the company seen significant financial success in Ludewig’s era, employee satisfaction has also soared, with an average employee tenure today of 15 years.

As time passes, Ludewig’s focus is shifting to also increasingly include her personal goals. Although she doesn’t have a specific date in mind, Ludewig is working to prepare the company for her exit, transferring responsibility and authority whenever she can, constantly aware that her life’s work and the work in her life need to be equally weighted.

But at the age most people would be starting to daydream about upcoming retirement leisure activities, Ludewig is using her current career success to gear up for her second career change — which she hopes will begin when she retires in the next 10 years.

“I am attuned to the importance of balance,” she says. “My second career will be to work for societal changes. My retirement age is not 80.”

Ludewig hopes to dedicate her post-retirement time to working on solutions for issues facing women and girls today; it’s a subject matter that she holds as dear as she does the family business she will be retiring from. “The idea of balance [in life is important to me] partly because women are not as closely identified with their work life [as men],” Ludewig says. “Most women don’t get asked, ‘What do you do?’ Happiness and success [are] really more gender-based [in that way].”

“My success in business allows me to support philanthropic causes and vacation much more,” she says. “I have high expectations for myself. I always want to improve and do better, but not because of [business] competition.”

Although she has, over time, guided TotalWorks through a competitive crisis and seen it through a technological overhaul, Ludewig’s perception of her success has less to do with work goals and more to do with personal contentment.

“I don’t think I ever didn’t feel successful, since I’ve always supported myself,” she

says. “I’ve never wanted for anything. Your financial point is [reaching a] comfort level. It’s not an amount. If you want to spend \$1,000 on something, you don’t have to worry. It’s the little extravagances. Success now is more related to happiness to me.”

Debra Lee CEO, BET

There have been many days Black Entertainment Television CEO Debra Lee felt successful.

“Having my first child was an amazing experience, the fact that you’re able to bring another being into the world,” she says. “The day I made my first six-figure salary. The day I became president and COO, that was a huge accomplishment in my life, with the recognition that I had a true leadership role in this company, and that I was its heir-apparent. The day we went public on the New York Stock Exchange.”

And now, a month into her job as the new CEO for BET, Lee is already facing the challenge of prioritizing the *next* round of challenges that will take her to a new level of success.

“Bob Johnson, the founder, is in the process of leaving the company, so my immediate challenge is taking over the absolute helm of this company and growing the company in terms of original programming and things I want to provide,” she says. “And being an African-American woman, you always feel like there’s added pressure, that you have to show that you can do it.”

And there’s more. “Then I have a son, who’s about to graduate from high school in two years, so getting him into a great college is a big challenge,” she says. “Looking at my desk right now, it’s a challenge to prioritize and to figure out what’s important to me.”

Lee’s responsibilities may all be clamoring to be on the top of her to-do list, but the truth is, the former corporate lawyer, who began working for BET 20 years ago, figured out what was important to her years ago: succeeding. And she accepts nothing less.

“I was raised by parents who really instilled in me a great work ethic and that your goal in life is to be successful, however you define it,” she says. “I grew up in the segregated South, but I was able to apply to and get into Brown University because my father pushed me. Then you go to Harvard Law School, and the feeling among the students there is, ‘We’re the best and the brightest and whatever we do should be something that changes the world.’ [The drive to succeed] just sort of snowballed as I progressed in my educational career, and that transferred over into my business career.”

Her passion — and a little healthy competition from other stations — has helped BET, the first African-American company to be publicly traded, prosper.

“Overall, [with] any company — especially if you’re the CEO — you want it to do well, and to earn its revenue goals, so

there is a lot of pressure to succeed all around,” Lee says. “Personally, it’s helped me. It’s nice to have a goal every day and to care about the company that I run and to really want it to succeed. [Doing what I love and care about] really motivates me every day and keeps me working hard.”

For Lee, success has come to mean meeting both individual and societal goals. “[Success] for me personally is being able to provide a service, whether it’s entertainment or not-for-profit, to have the ability to change other people’s lives — not just your own and your family’s,” Lee says. “When my days are done, I hope I look back on my life and have really had an impact. I’m very fortunate that I can do it through my career, with the cause-related things we do on air and with our charitable causes.”

With a demanding job, a 12- and a 16-year-old, and positions on the Eastman Kodak, Marriott International and Washington Gas Company boards, Lee’s days are busy. However, in typical fashion, she’s already looking ahead and moving full-throttle toward the future — whatever that holds.

“Ten years from now I’ll be 60 years old, which I’m very sensitive to,” Lee says. “At that point I assume I’ll be wrapping my career up, at BET at least, and figuring out what I want to dedicate the rest of my life to. I can’t imagine, but I know there will be a new definition of success.” ■



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