

## **2007: SUCCESS REVISITED**

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***A happier way – live to love and you will love to live.***

2007, as a year, has been a culmination of truths that have defined my being thus far; truths so necessary that I have opted to review everything that is perceivably me in a quest to redefine my own outlook on life; which over the last decade has been nothing short of conventional. It has been a year bent on all the elements that define our existence as human beings today – irrational material gain, deplorable moral compromise and a thirst for something more even if all you get is less... This outlook has kept me on the cutting edge of nothingness. I have sought out one opportunity after the other in a quest for something that may not even exist. As I reach a turning point in my life (which I have consciously decided to impose upon myself) – where what matters most shall matter no more, I am compelled to take stock of my successes and failures...

At times, I find myself shying away from success. It's not that I would rather fail, as much as I am not always clear on whether and how I want to succeed. Without a clear understanding of what success means to me, I have often left myself exposed to failure even at times when I have actually been successful. Instead of aiming to succeed, I end up falling in the trap of aiming to just simply 'not fail', which is the equivalence of accepting mediocrity and propagating a mentality of 'anything goes'.

In effect, *most unsuccessful people do not fail at success, but rather they succeed at failure.* We specialize in defending and validating failure instead of striving and strategizing for success. As a matter of fact, we invest so much time and effort in mastering the art of failure that we are willing to even overlook appreciating how success evidences itself in our lives.

Without a doubt, not knowing what success is and still wanting to be 'successful' is at the heart of most people's dissatisfaction with life. Success in life is not simply about realization of a 'truth'; it is about knowing enough about this 'truth' to appreciate that it can actually exist. Success is as varied a topic as the characteristics of those who often long for it but I have found the following characteristics that to be generally applicable:

- 1) Success is embodied in absolutes and evidenced in relativity. In as much as success may exist as a resounding truth for everyone, it will vary in how it manifests itself from person to person depending heavily on an individual's perception of the events that evidence it. In effect, it presents a similar challenge as that presented by satisfaction with life in general – reality can be no better than your perception of it. That is to say that something that one person considers a success does not have to be considered a success to another and something that is considered a success today may not necessarily be considered a success tomorrow. *Upelo had a wonderful project idea that he was sure would impress his older brother – Jondo. Jondo was very critical of everything and impressing him was not very easy as a result. Upelo devoted many hours on his 'special' project and felt quite successful when it was all done; after all he had done it all by himself! Everyone seemed to share Upelo's excitement except for Jondo who, quite frankly, thought it was quite wasteful of Upelo's time.*

- 2) Success is realizable but not exhaustive and holistic in nature; it is a finite truth (limited to space and time). Success becomes most frustrating and disheartening because you are not guaranteed that it will last in the form that it has been evidenced at any particular point in time. Someone may be successful in one area, but this does not guarantee you success in all areas and you may be successful today but this does not guarantee you success forever. *Rebecca excelled with exception in her career at Sandtonia West, a firm that specialized in development and distribution of software solutions. After nearly 15 years of service, though, she felt that it was time for her to move on into a more challenging role. She managed to negotiate a relocation package to one of the more troubled markets where she felt that her successful track record and experience would add value without fail. After a few months in her new post, she realized that things would no longer be the same. In as much as she had been a success in the past, it didn't seem to make any difference in her new role.*
- 3) Success, more often than not, is not sought out for its own sake but rather for what it does. It is like buying a bar of soap at a kiosk; seldom do you buy the bar of soap for its own sake. You buy soap for what it does for you. Success, as a result, is an event in time that results into a specific benefit that does something desirable, giving you satisfaction; which ultimately results into 'happiness' for you. If success is an event in time, then happiness, arguably, is a state of the mind, which can be associated with *peace of mind*.

Given this ultimate destination, that is happiness; success may not be enough of an ideal to aspire for. This insight has compelled me to think more aggressively about sustainable success, which goes beyond what you get and extends into what you give. Sustainable success is heavily pegged against *peace of mind*; it goes beyond momentous joy. This being the case, then the *peace of*

*mind* of those around you will affect your *peace of mind* and hence the sustainability of your 'success'. For example, does it not amaze you how some of the worlds wealthiest people spend years earning billions only so that they can give them away to 'worthy' causes. Hence, when evaluating success we need to look beyond 'my' success and resulting happiness and create space to see 'our' success and resulting happiness.

My new philosophy on life – *live to love and you will love to live*, aims to take me along a happier way; where I focus on positivism and possibility and share it in abundance with those who most need it! From a spiritual perspective, love is the essence of our existence and in it we find true refuge so why not share it...

### ***From 'here' to 'there'***

In 2007, I acknowledge my successes and failures enough to know that the battle has just started. In order to capitalize on the progress made thus far I quickly seek refuge in my limited understanding of life's many lessons about sustainable success:

- 1) Know yourself enough to understand what the key drivers in your life are; the things that make you tick/ sick. When doing this, we need to look beyond the obvious and prevailing situation without completely forgoing it.
- 2) Define in clear terms the 'events' will be a measure of success? In simple terms what are your objectives?
- 3) Then look at the environment in which you and exist identify the likely disablers and enablers. Identify key initiatives that will help you

overcome these enablers/ disablers as a means of ensuring that you achieve your objectives. It is important that these initiatives be within your control

- 4) Employ yourself wholeheartedly in undertaking these initiatives within the set parameters. Be prepared to manage unforeseen eventualities into your plan but ensure that you do not leave yourself too exposed to the same.
- 5) Take time to appreciate your achievements and otherwise. Celebrate success and learn from failure as no one else will do this on your behalf. Life is a continuous improvement process that compels you to re-strategize in line with these critical learnings.
- 6) Ensure that your success and learnings are shared with others. This entails making other people successful along the way of achieving your success. Where possible build this in as one of your objectives.

For a good portion of my recorded history I have been a manager of self and others and reflection on this reality has almost become second nature. I always joke with my friends that, unlike other professions, you are a professional manager until you get fired (or quit your job)! Management of anything is tricky because management is not a static truth; it changes to reflect the new situations and environments. I attribute part of my success (and in some cases failure), thus far, to an early realization of this truth. I set out my plans, but critical to my success in management and many other aspects of life would heavily depend on my ability to pre-empt and adapt to changing demands and challenges. The likelihood of achieving this is dependent heavily on *doing what you do best and doing it often* (being is only evidenced in doing when doing becomes who you are). But how often do we consciously stop trying to be the

best at what we do? How often do we expect our job titles to work harder than we do? *The road to our personal and professional redundancy is a gradual one especially if stop trying to do the best at what you do best...*

I started my mid-year review by stumbling on the following quote: “*The road to hell is a gradual one*”. This is by far one of the most inspiring quotes that I have ever heard! In as much as it sounds very spiritual (maybe that’s because it is). It sounds of a very real and captivating truth. At the time I heard this quote I was already thinking along these lines (for many reasons) and hearing it helped me jell my thoughts into actions. The quote, as was so well explained by Father Mallya, warns of the effect that habits have on the human conscience quite like John Wittmore’s competency matrix. When you are doing something for the very first time, you are very conscience of what is going on and employ your good judgment and attentiveness. As these things become habitual (or you gain competency in them), then the temptation to put aside your conscience increases. This is particularly true for things that we do that we know are wrong. Gradually, with time, they become ‘ok’ while in reality we know they are not.

Another quote that has resonated in my mind for months now comes from the ‘must read’ business book – *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. He starts off his first chapter, which is on Level Five Leaders, by introducing Darwin Smith who headed Kimberly Clark (a *Good to Great* company) for 25 years. Ironically, Darwin, who was the company’s in-house lawyer until his sudden and unexpected appointment to the position of CEO, was the least likely candidate for the coveted role. In effect, on being appointed as CEO some other members of the firm snubbed his appointment because they felt that he was not qualified enough for the job. When reflecting on his immensely successful

tenure as CEO, he had this to say *"I never stopped trying to become qualified for my job"*.

These two profoundly insightful quotes are critical adjuncts in my own life as I re-strategize for sustainable success in whatever I aspire to excel in. After a rather dogged five year sprint in corporate Tanzania, I can only be as kind as to continually remind myself of the title of a book that I am yet to read, but feel like I probably already have - *"What got you here, won't get you there"*. As I reflect on 2007 and beyond, I cannot help but wonder what exactly 'here' is and even more compelling what 'there' will be.