

## The 8 Keys to Success: An Essay And Thoughts on What It Takes To Reach Your True Potential

“Do not blame your lack of success on your lack of talent. It will be your attitude that will determine your altitude, not your talent or lack thereof.”

*by David H. Lyman*

**F**or years, I have been lecturing to CEOs, artists, photographers, filmmakers and other creative people on what it takes to be successful - successful at least at being who they can be, not necessarily who others think they should be. I've interviewed hundreds of successful artists, counseled hundreds of students and working professionals on their way up and a few on their way down. I've also looked at my own career, talents and motivations along the way, and come to the conclusion that there were eight keys to being successful. When I started there were five keys; in a few years, when I am wiser, then maybe I'll have 10 keys, but for now eight keys seem enough. Here they are in their order of importance.

### **#1: PASSION**

Passion is that "demonic compulsiveness" that John Gardner talks about in his book, "[On Becoming a Novelist](#)." It's what fires any creative person, something that gets you angry, or something you love and want to share. It's ambition, a vision for your future, dim though it may be. That vision leads to setting goals, long-term goals (I want to be a photographer) and short-term goals, (what camera do I buy?). I ask everyone I interview, have you written down your goals? Most people have not. Have you? Do you know where you'd like to be in five years? I do. I have written it down, so that at year's end, or on some quiet evening, I can look at what I've written and reflect on where I've been, and where I'm going □ how far along the path I've come and how far I've got to go. Often, I realize I've reached my goals and need to be dreaming about new horizons, new challenges and new goals. Write down your goals. They will tell you what to do for the short-term goals □ what books to buy, skills to develop, workshops to take, exercises to do to get better.

### **#2: ABILITY TO ACCEPT A RISK**

I do not know anyone who has succeeded who has not been able to assess and take a risk and then live with the consequence - success or failure. Risk avoidance is a sure way to remain mediocre; being safe does not promote personal growth. Failure or making a mistake is not a bad thing; it's proof you were exploring new ways to do something, and that's better than safe success. We learn from our mistakes, not our successes. Really creative people embrace risk. They can sustain a high level of ambiguity; they do not need to know where they are. They do not mind being lost, for they call it just taking the longer, more interesting way around.

### **#3: HIGH SELF-ESTEEM**

You think well of yourself. You are not boastful or egotistical, but do have an honest understanding of your talents, handicaps and are working toward getting better.

### **#4: PERSISTENCE**

You have just done this long enough. How long is long enough? Well, it will take 10 years. I have asked hundreds of accomplished photographers, writers, filmmakers, painters and musician how long it took before they felt they were able to speak from a source within. Ten years was their unanimous answer. If it takes 10 years, then how do you spend the time wisely? It will take at least two years to acquire 70 percent of the craft you will need to work in your medium. It will take another eight years to acquire the next 20 percent of your craft. At 90 percent, you will have mastered your craft, but there is that 10 percent that will take a lifetime to acquire. In the meantime, while working to master your craft (the technical skills and processes for working in your medium) you will also be learning and acquiring a personal vision, your ability to see, to observe, to create and discover things. This is difficult at first, but the older you get the wiser and more aware you become. Craft and vision are your tools for inner exploration.

Persistence takes discipline. Discipline is simply doing what you know you need to do, even though you don't

feel like doing it. The first thing is knowing what to do. Most people do not know. You are reading this, so you are interested in finding out what to do. Make a list. Next, find the willpower to do what's on the list. This is the most difficult part of all the keys - finding the positive willpower to do what you know you need to do. We all wrestle with discipline for it does not come easily, not even for the most successful.

## **#5: BEING NICE TO WORK WITH**

Why is being nice important? Because it will be other people who will help you acquire the craft, help you discover and develop your vision, give you a job, introduce you to opportunities. People want to help others, but only if they show a willingness to work, to contribute and are nice to have around. People want to have positive, enthusiastic people around, people who will solve problems, not create them.

## **#6: WHO YOU KNOW**

If you are nice to work with, the next will follow. You need to know and be known by people who will help you, hire you, buy your work, and give you advice. Here is a list of people you need to know and be known by:

- *Good Teachers* - People who know what you need to know and can teach it to you in a way that you learn it.
- *Coaches* - People who know your limits and your potential and will help keep you close to your "edge" of learning and growing.
- *Peers* - Your friends and classmates, people who are on the same rung of the ladder as you, who are striving as you are.
- *Masters* - People who are successful in their careers who can look at your work, your process and your career and give you valuable feedback, feedback you will accept and follow.
- *Mentors* - A master with whom you have established a working relationship, someone who is wiser, accomplished and will help you understand the limits and possibilities of your projects, your process and your creative life.

## **#7: MASTER YOUR CRAFT**

Learn a craft, so you have a tool with which to earn a living. This tool can also be used to explore life - outwardly and spiritually inwardly - as you search your soul for the reasons of your existence.

## **#8: TALENT**

Talent is the last thing you need. You have to have some of it, but you do not need a lot. Too much talent is often a handicap. Things come too easily and there is little incentive to push, to make use of the talent. I know highly talented musicians who refuse to perform in public, photographers who are so arrogant no one wants them around, filmmakers whose egos are so inflated they are a pain to deal with, and others who are so impatient at getting what they want, they never master anything and, therefore, never do succeed. I prefer to surround myself with positive, successful people, young people who are enthusiastic even though they have yet to find or develop what talent they may have.

A talent is the natural ability to do something extraordinary. We all can do a lot, but some people have been gifted with talents that go beyond what others can do. What are you talented at? Do you know? Success is not a matter of being talented. Notice it is last on the list. A little bit of talent, combined with the other seven keys, will lead you to success. I know many people who are talented, but lack one or more of the other seven keys and they fail to succeed.

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