

Do We Expect Success Too Quickly?

By Eve Menezes Cunningham



Many people blame shows like *The X Factor* for our ever growing need for instant success. Simon Cowell recently told Oprah Winfrey that, while partly to blame for the current 'fame' epidemic, he's still surprised at how instantly some people expect success.

He'd interviewed someone a few days earlier telling him that he could enjoy the ride and in 15 to 20 years, expect great success. The man looked shocked as if six months would be too long to wait.

I was surprised, in researching this piece, just how many people who appear to be very successful still don't *feel* that they've made it. Others were spurred by wanting to prove naysayers wrong.

Sue remembers telling her school careers adviser she wanted to be a teacher. The careers officer said, 'No, no, no. The handbag factory at the bottom of Whitehill is the place for you, dear. Don't be so silly.'

Sue went on to get a Teacher of the Year award and has since become Head Teacher at a school where she honours as many children as possible for different types of achievements. 'I don't *feel* successful as I'm always learning,' she adds, 'and I still don't have a handbag.'

'I *never* feel like a success,' says Phoebe. In spite of regularly writing for national newspapers and magazines and appearing on TV, she says, 'I actually get embarrassed telling people what I do as I think they'll look at me and just think I am lying! Whenever

“Something in me needs to finish what I start”

I get a new client or contract, I am always convinced they have made a mistake and think I am either someone else, or far more qualified than I am. Even with long-term clients, I can never relax - I always think they will eventually realise I'm not who they thought I was. When I reel off my achievements for a CV or profile, I can see I have achieved a lot but I still put it down to luck or other people making dodgy judgements.'

Hoopla (www.hooplainpro.com) founder Steve Roe, who runs improvised comedy classes, courses and shows says success means, 'Doing what gives my life meaning as much as possible. Passionately pursuing what I'm interested in and having a happy life with my fiancée and family. Doing something in the world that wouldn't exist if I wasn't here.'

'I'm notorious for never being happy with our shows/events/workshops. Sometimes not being satisfied is a big driving force to make things better.' When he feels momentary success, 'that feeling doesn't last long and I think that's just human nature. I now also like that side of me and find it useful and almost comical. Emotions can drive you towards a goal and then when you get there they are like, "Only joking, there's something else..."'

He loves seeing people turn up at workshops, 'have a really great time, and blow my mind with what they are able to improvise. I think when the workshops really took off like that was about two years ago, so six years after I started.' Between the teaching and performing, Steve lives Impro: 'It's an amazing feeling to realise that I'm now surrounded by amazing beautiful people my whole life. The more you do, and the more public you get, the more you open yourself up to criticism. We've done loads of really amazing shows which I'm happy about, but we've done some s****y ones too. As you grow you have to be able to learn from criticism, make it constructive, take from it what you can and rearrange your emotions a bit! Aristotle said "The only way to avoid criticism is to say nothing, do nothing, be nothing" and I'm not going to do that!'

'Don't seek permission to do something. The only person who knows what you should do is you, because nobody else is living your life, so only you can give yourself permission and only you can take responsibility for what you are doing.'

Heather Mason (www.themindedinstitute.com) trained me as a yoga therapist for mental health and I remember her telling us that she'd got in touch with Confer (big therapy conference organisers) offering to speak about mind-body therapies and they said, 'No thanks'. But then they came back and asked her to help put on an entire conference around yoga and other body therapies.

'There'll be another yoga therapy conference in 2014,' she smiles. 'For me, success means being fulfilled with what you do. That's why it means different things to different people. With this work, it was successful from the very beginning. I was listed in *Time Out* for teaching before I'd even taught for depression. I think part of the reason I've been successful is that I'm doing what life wanted me to do, I feel like I'm going with the grain of life.'

I know Heather pretty well now and do some PR, social media work for her so while this sounds very floaty and zen, she works incredibly hard for all she's achieved. 'I do work hard,' she agrees, 'but maybe that's part of it. When you're doing what you want to do, it's not so hard to do it. One thing I've learned is that, on the road to success, things that you've built up will crumble before you. Usually, in my career, when things crumble, it's because something better is coming. It offers the opportunity to grow something more substantial. Success includes finding happiness in the journey.'

Laban Rooms founded luxury gold plating company Goldgenie (www.goldgenie.com) and won investment on *Dragons' Den* a few years back. His clients include the Beckhams, Elton John and Simon Cowell.

'The way we live in our culture, everyone expects things now,' says Laban. 'Fast food, fast relationships. Rome wasn't built in a day. Have patience, conceive an idea, set a plan, then achieve it.'

'I always knew I'd be a success but in between always knowing there are times when you're like, "Wow, when's this going to happen? I thought it would have happened by now". But I always knew I'd be successful from a young age. I always visualised the house I'd live in. My son pointed out a book I wrote in 2001 and said, "Look, you're living in that house now!"'

'In terms of performing, I had (and have) pretty low ambitions, so a relative level of success was pretty easy to achieve,' says Paul Oswell (www.pauloswell.com). 'A year after I started writing, I had put together and performed a Fringe show, so that felt like success. The next level was a theatre booking for my show, which took about 18 months.'

'If you have the talent, then success is there to be found quickly. I can see the value attached to years on the circuit and practising, but overnight sensations are possible. I was looking for gigs early on to get experience and a performer I really liked said, "Bring the show yourself", which has always stuck with me. If there's no avenue for you for exposure, make it yourself. Book a small venue and do a show yourself and it will be scary and hard work but it's way better

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than waiting for something to happen - there are a million people vying for attention, so be your own promoter. Book yourself.'

'Success used to mean money or some sort of undefined professional achievement,' says Keris Stainton, author of *Della Says: OMG!, Jessie Hearts NYC* and *Emma Hearts LA* (www.keris-stainton.com).

'Now it really means liking myself and enjoying what I do.' After a lovely first book launch, Keris was almost disconcerted to not have 'that horrible feeling that I'd embarrassed myself in some way. Each time I woke up during the night, my brain would probe around for some humiliation and then be surprised to find there wasn't one. It was a perfect night. Then the following morning I got up early, walked down to Westminster Bridge and looked along the Thames and thought about how far I'd come. Cheesy, I know, but it's one of my favourite ever moments.'

'I spent years thinking I was scared of failure when I was actually scared of success. It was only when someone asked me to imagine myself as successful and I had an instant, disgusting, physical reaction that it became clear to me. And that changed everything.'

'It is possible to have amazing successes with NLP in a very short period of time,' says Marilyn Devonish (www.TranceFormationsTM.com). 'My life literally transformed in the space of just a couple of weeks. On a wider scale, when it comes to something like building a business and honing your skills, I do believe that a period of time will be involved to "get it in the muscle" and know that you have the ability to deal with whatever comes up. Once any planning and strategising has been done, the key thing is to take courage and take action. Sometimes an idea won't fully take form until it has been put out there and the first steps on that journey to success have been taken.' ■