DEFINING THE DRIVERS OF SUCCESS: ANALYSIS OF A REAL-WORLD SURVEY

A White Paper by Dr. Alvin C. Miles
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Defining and Uncovering the Drivers of Success

The purpose of this white paper, is to present the details of a unique survey that was developed to and uncover the key issues that prevent an individual from attaining success, in both their work and home life.

Furthermore, this white paper takes a deep dive in to the results of this survey, and attempts to understand just what is driving these key issues.

By developing and actioning this survey, it is hoped that the real negative forces stifling success in the modern world could be uncovered.

If this result is achieved, we should be able to begin forming extrapolated conclusions to uncover the real drivers of success.

The aim of the survey from which this white paper draws its content, was to ask a series of logical questions that would highlight issues that act as blockers, stopping the achievement of what they perceive to be a successful work and personal life.

Patterns and trends should emerge as a result of analyzing this survey data. Underneath these, we should find the drivers of success.

The structure of the survey, and the sample of prospective survey respondents chosen, was designed to have the best chance of gaining a view in to the mindset and current state, of a fairly wide group.

This target group is mid-career professionals, executives and entrepreneurs.

The actual questions asked were open-ended in nature. This was a deliberate attempt to garner fuller, although potentially less focused, responses.

It has been shown that when asking web survey questions, respondents use 30 more words on average to answer open-ended questions. (Smyth, Dillman, Christian, & McBride, 2009).

The hoped for resolution, was that the resulting analysis would be able to begin providing potential solutions for empowering people to attain more success in both their personal and working lives.
Determining the Target Audience

When selecting a target group, we needed to focus upon survey participants that have the potential for success in both their personal and working lives.

The people who were asked to take part in the survey, were contacted via LinkedIn. They were selected from a wide range of markets, regions and spheres of expertise. This was done to try and ensure a varied, informative set of survey responses.

There were 143 full survey responses received that actually answered each question in full, and gave answers with enough meaning to actually be classified in to a specific category.

Although this sample size is too small to extract statistically valid results, it is sufficient to identify issues of concern.

The Questions Asked

The following questions were asked of each survey participant:

- What frustrates you THE MOST about your work, business or life?
- What are you trying to accomplish THIS YEAR in your work, business or life?
- What do you think you'd need to DOUBLE your success in either your work, your business or your happiness this year?
- What strategies have you ALREADY TRIED to improve in your business or life that a) worked & b) didn't work?

Each question requires that the respondent to consider the context of both their work and personal life, to provide an answer.

The questions were written in this manner so the responses would help to identify the overall key drivers of success, regardless of whether these drivers applied to working life, personal life, or both.
What Blurs Our View?

The results of the analysis of the survey may be muddied, by the fact that most survey participants would be more likely to respond in a negative fashion, giving answers that demonstrated discontent with their work life, personal life, or both.

We can presume, based upon the target demographic, that they were employed, in a steady job, have a good education and a potentially stable life.

Generally, reports of happiness become less qualified the higher the socioeconomic status of the respondent, whether that status is measured by income, occupation, education, or any other conventional indicator. (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1975).

Therefore, the analysis of the survey responses will likely lean more towards the negative, than it would have had we chosen a wider sample group.

We also know that it is likely that many of the people taking part in the survey would be unhappy with their working life. 51% of all Americans are unhappy with their work (Oswald, 2002).

It is likely that a similar trend exists for people working in other regions of the Western Hemisphere.
Data on the Drivers of Success

Taking a look at each question in turn, we find that for question 1; What frustrates you THE MOST about your work, business or life? The following responses are expressed as a percentage of overall results:

- 18% of the results indicated that the respondent had serious issues with their coworkers.
- 17% of the respondents indicated that they felt work was intruding upon their personal life.
- 15% of the people who answered, stated that they lack the respect and support of their boss.
- 14% responded with a generic answer that pointed at them having an overall dissatisfaction with their working environment in some way.
- 12% of responses indicated that the person was frustrated by lack of promotional prospects.
- 11% of the people who took part in the survey, believe that the level of remuneration they receive is insufficient.
- 7% of the answers received, show that the person believes they have little or no life outside of the workplace.

Example answers from Question 1:

\[\text{“Feeling like I am in a rat race. The pace of work, business and life is incredibly fast compared to what I would actually like it to be.”}\]

\[\text{“Living in a world where the majority settle for a life of mediocrity. In business, committing to assisting others to expand their awareness but seeing individuals continue to choose a life navigated by their limiting beliefs, subconscious mind and ineffective 'life manual' which was handed down to them from their family who also struggled.”}\]
Defining the Drivers of Success

One pattern that has begun to emerge here, and one that later results show has continued, is that people are far more likely to give answers that relate to their working life, than their personal life.

Even though they were presented with the option of giving an answer that could pertain to either working life, or personal life, the overall bias was to give an answer that uncovers a work related issue.

Three of the top four answer groups, issues with coworkers, lack of respect and general dissatisfaction with their working environment, each pertain to issues that are not directly under the influence of the individual who responded to the survey.

The single answer that appears in the top four that is not driven by external factors, and is something that the respondent could take direct control of, is the balance between their working life and personal life.

It appears in second place. This contradicts previous research, which found that it was the major source of dissatisfaction for respondents. (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2005).

If we take a look at the bottom response, 7% of people said they had no life outside of work.

At first glance, a case could be made for combining the 17% of responses that highlight work intrusion, and the 7% of responses that highlight lack of a personal life.

This would bring the total percentage up to 24%, making it the most important issue overall. However, there is a subtle distinction between the two groups.

In the first, the responses directly blame work as the reasons for their limited personal life. In the second, work was not directly at blame, the lack of personal life was caused by other factors.

Remuneration appears well down the list of issues that were uncovered by the answers given by respondents. This could be due to the sample group chosen being more likely to be financially stable than a wider group including people who work in the lower echelons of the business world.
Moving on to question 2; *What are you trying to accomplish THIS YEAR in your work, business or life?* We find the following:

- 29% of the people questioned, indicated that they would be concentrating on personal development in the current year. This included tangible development such as further education, and intangible development such as attempting to be more understanding.
- 17% of respondents indicated that they were going to try and reach a better balance between their working life and their home life.
- 15% of the responses received pertained to financial goals, including earning more income, and finding ways to reduce spending.
- 14% of the people who took part stated clearly that they were seeking new pastures, by changing jobs.
- 13% of the answers showed that the respondent was going to invest more effort in to increasing the success of their working life or business.

Example answers from Question 2:

“I'm trying to find better work/life balance. It has been a tremendous challenge for me but I won't give up on trying to better balance this important part of my life.”

“Professionally, advance/expand my role with my employer or in my industry, and become someone who can make an impact. Personally, I want to establish a better financial foundation,
By far the most common response is related to self-improvement. It is important to note that the main drivers of dissatisfaction in the first question were predominantly focused upon external factors, which the respondent has little or no control over.

Interestingly, the majority of those who took part in the survey believe that improving themselves could solve their problems. This appears to be a contradiction.

17% of respondents intend to try and find a better work balance. But if we try and correlate this with the issues already highlighted as problems from question 1, we see that life balance was one of the major issues.

We might have expected to see a higher percentage of responses that intended to directly counter this problem. 17% is relatively few.

As with the answers to question 1, we see that financial concerns, although a factor, are not a major driver of satisfaction with this sample group.
The response data from the third question; *What do you think you'd need to DOUBLE your success in either your work, your business or your happiness this year?* The following was revealed:

- 25% of the people who took part in the survey indicated that they believed that they need to be far more focused.
- 18% of responses stated that applying additional resources was the key to doubling their success this year. Although it should be noted that the majority of responses implied that this was something they would need to do to achieve success in their work/business life, not their personal life.
- 16% of the respondents believe that growth could be the key to success. Although it should be noted that respondents who gave this answer, were predominantly speaking about their own business, not their personal life.
- 10% of answers indicated that investing more financial resources would allow them to double this years’ arc of success. Although it must be noted, that the people who gave this response, were speaking about their own business, and not their personal life.

Example answers from Question 3:

“To double my success this year I'm looking for a role that I would be fulfilled in emotionally and financially. With the next chapter I’m looking for a role I can grow with maybe a little closer to home and ultimately making an ROI difference with a corporation.”

“I need to stop giving in to pressure from work and make my personal commitments a priority. I need to double the confidence in myself to take a stand and not easily give in regardless of the consequences.”

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The largest number of responses to this question, gave an answer that only applied to work/business life.

And once again, financial concerns are very far down the list. This has also been a major pattern so far within the results.

By far the most common answer, was that the individual would need to be more focused to double their success this year.

We could potentially pair this answer with the most common answer to question 2, that the respondent would be focusing upon self-improvement this year. Better focus is a product of self-improvement, as willpower keeps us focused on our goals despite the tug of our impulses, passions, habits and cravings. (Goleman, 2014).
When we come to the responses to question 4; *What strategies have you ALREADY TRIED to improve in your business or life that a) worked & b) didn't work?* Yielded the following:

- 24% of the people who took part in the survey had tried to define better priorities, although these answers were weighted more towards managing priorities at work, than at home.
- 20% of the answers received, showed that the person had tried some form of self-improvement in the past, to become more successful.
- 19% of respondents had made an effort to improve their business network, by meeting new people, leveraging social networking sites, and participating in events.
- 10% of the people who responded to the survey indicated that they had tried working harder, and making more effort to become successful.

Example answers from Question 4:

“Strategies that have worked: BEING SEEN: Speaking engagements, workshops, continual focus on networking. Strategies that haven't worked: Typically passive engagements: Social Media, Internet Marketing, etc.”

“The strategies that I have tried to improve in my business that worked for me are providing excellence service to all my clients with every interaction. Doing my best in all I do when working with my clients and in turn, I have received referrals.”
We can see, that once again, although the question asked for a response pertaining to work or personal life, the majority of people only gave an answer that relates to their work or business.

We see the concept of self-improvement being given importance again in this set of answers.

This is interesting to see for the specific reason that personal development was highlighted as a main focus for this year, in question 2.

However, in the answers to this question, we find it is something that the larger majority of respondents have tried before.

Unfortunately, the answers given within the verbatim survey responses fail to conclusively prove whether this had been with a positive or negative outcome.

A glaring omission from this list of answers to question 4, is anything related to financial issues. This pattern is consistent with responses from previous questions.
Extrapolated Conclusions

The biggest take away from this survey is that despite each survey question allowing for either a professional or personal life perspective, over 80% of the answers focused upon the professional life of the respondent.

It would be logical to conclude from the fact that 80% of the answers received pertained to working life, that many people see financial success (which is driven by success in their working life) as an empowering force for personal success and happiness.

In effect, they seem to believe that the latter cannot be achieved without the first being accomplished. Financial success has long been a core component of the American dream, and many of the values modeled and encouraged by modern society suggest that success and happiness depend upon procuring monetary wealth. (Derber, 1979)

Yet our own survey results would seem to debunk this theory. Financial concerns were far down the list of most common answers. Could there be a deeper driver than just money? Research into work/life balance has often proven that people find it difficult to detach their working life from their personal life, and this may be what we are seeing here.
Although empirical studies have supported the idea that psychological detachment from work during off-hours is beneficial for workers’ well-being and for various aspects of job performance (Sonnentag, 2012), many of the respondents to this survey comment this is easier said than done.

Considering the target demographic for this survey, the need for effective strategies to maintain a healthy work-life balance along with detachment from work could provide an important first step away from the vicious circle where work dissatisfaction spills into home life then further exacerbates the work situation, and toward the vibrant circle of balance between one’s work and personal life.

Another interesting fact uncovered by the survey, is that the majority of drivers of dissatisfaction are caused by external forces that, apart from changing working environment completely, the respondent has very little control over.

Yet when it comes to answering question 2; *What are you trying to accomplish THIS YEAR in your work, business or life?* Only 14% of respondents actually identified they are changing jobs.

Finally, we need to consider the almost complete lack of positive responses. There were only two responses that indicated a person had achieved success and contentment on a work and personal level. This could potentially indicate that the measuring stick for success is badly calibrated for some people.
Next Steps on the Road to Success

As we have seen from the results of this survey, most people identified problems with their working life. In addition, these problems could potentially have a negative impact upon a person’s personal life.

When we consider that many of these problems are the result of outside factors beyond our control, then perhaps we need to change. If we face problems we cannot solve, then it is logical to conclude we should change ourselves so these issues have less of an effect.

Unfortunately, identifying and developing a plan to enable change and personal growth is difficult to do alone. It is often a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees.

Making changes to the way we approach our lives, requires a shift in mindset, attitude and habits. These can be hard to achieve through introspection alone, and help from a Certified Managerial Coach can be beneficial.

Consider a moment something that this paper uncovers, based upon real-world answers. Many people face problems that are preventing them from achieving success. Yet the single most common answer, when people were asked how they could solve these problems, was to improve themselves in some way.

Pure common sense drives this answer. When we are faced with an immovable object, we have to go either through or around it.

Many of the problems people face are just this kind of immovable object. Finding a way around them, one at a time, could well be the road to success. Identifying our success blockers is just the first step, we then need to change our own conceptions about our lives, and find new ways to improve ourselves.

Ideally, this survey analysis will begin a deeper discussion into the first 5 areas in the Table of Contents by providing you with access to additional training content. Those who use these value-added resources will achieve a better work-life balance, enjoy greater influence, and ultimately make deeper contributions in their personal and professional lives.
Bibliography


About the Author

Dr. Alvin C. Miles is a lecturer of management in the Michael J. Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University, executive coach, and business management speaker. His unique background includes more than three decades of progressive advancement in the telecommunications industry and over seven years in academe and consulting.

Alvin’s educational credentials include a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management with honors from Morris Brown College, Masters of Business Administration with honors from the Michael J. Coles School of Business at Kennesaw State University, and a Doctorate from Kennesaw State University.

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Hewlett-Packard, AT&T, Kennesaw State University, BellSouth, RentPath (Formerly PRIMEDIA), McCracken Alliance, Lenbrook Square Foundation Board and the Paulding County (GA) Chamber of Commerce are counted among his past clients for sales team kickoffs, facilitation events, employee resource group sessions, strategic alignment retreats, research analysis, keynote addresses and leadership network courses.

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