

EVERYONE HAS A STORY (AN INTRODUCTION OF SORTS)

When I was twenty-two, I thought I was really successful. I can even pinpoint this feeling to a specific night. It was the Boston premiere of *The Social Network*, and I had tickets.

I was weeks away from finishing my last semester of college. I had just endured a long day of classes in the morning and eight hours of work in the afternoon. Not a college job. Not an internship. Real work. I had helped to start a PR agency only a few months before. And, in just a few weeks, I'd be graduating to take on my rightful spot as part owner.

I was an expert on healthcare technology and health-care reform. My résumé had been sent to the White House twice. I worked with big-name, national reporters. I had more than enough money. And friends. Plenty of friends.

There I was, waiting for the premiere of a movie to start. I was successful. I was important. I mattered.

But, as the movie started to roll, playing out the story of Facebook's impressive founding, I couldn't help but think that maybe my life was more filled with carefully crafted credentials and glossy photos than anything else.



And, looking at my friends to my left and right, I started to suspect that I wasn't the only one.



Beginnings are awkward. I never know where to start. Whenever I have no clue how to begin something, I try to think about whatever I'm doing like a little kid would.

Have you spent much time around children? They approach everything with a little naïvety, a heavy dose of curiosity, maybe a splash of wonder—and the annoyingly persistent question: “Why?”

Us adults, we gave up on our questioning years ago. Things just are. We accept them and move on. We don't have time to sit around and philosophize. We're off working long hours and paying the bills and doing chores and just trying to survive everyday life.

But now we're in a predicament because I already said that I'm approaching this just like a kid would. And you're reading a book about success. So I'm going to guess that you care about being successful, at least a little bit.

So I've got to ask: Why? Why do you want to be successful?

I've asked this question more times than I can remember. In fact, I ask this question when I first meet with any client. And, every single time, I get the exact same response: a blank stare. That's not entirely true. Once, someone asked how I made it this far in my business asking stupid questions like that.

But I don't think it's a totally unfair question. I mean, success is the end-goal for the vast majority of people. It comes up in casual conversation every day. And let's face it—Facebook has become little more than a gauge on how successful people have become since high school.

Our heroes have changed from actors and athletes to Mark Zuckerberg and Sean Parker. Our culture values the ideal of achieving astronomical success at a young age over almost anything else. We're a culture obsessed with success. All I'm asking is why.

Okay, I'll go first. If I'm being honest, I wanted to be successful for all the reasons you're not supposed to want it. Because it'd make me matter. It'd make me important. The cars, the chicks, the whole bit.

I was sold a fairy tale of success, and I bought it—hook, line, and sinker. I grew up believing that I'd work my little butt off, put in my time, pay my dues, and be rewarded with the pot at the end of the rainbow. I'd have money, fame, and power. My name would mean something.

I wanted to cover myself with fancy parties, impressive job titles, and large salaries because I was afraid that if people peeled back the layers, they wouldn't like what they found. Underneath, I wasn't enough. Not rich enough or smart enough or charming enough or experienced enough or old enough or good enough.

I was convinced that, once I made it "there," things would be different. People would look at me differently, treat me differently. Hell, I'd treat me differently.

I wouldn't let people walk all over me anymore. I wouldn't waste time on things that didn't make me happy. I'd have honest relationships. I'd have time for myself. Success would get me everything I wanted.

Turns out, I was confusing success with self-esteem. And, if I didn't have it from the get-go, no arbitrary milestone of "success" was going to bring self-esteem along.

This book in your hands lays out the journey I took to success. How I gave up looking for external validation and started building internal worth. How I rejected society's definition and started defining success as what would make me happy. How I recovered from a serious illness and stopped burning myself out. And, most of all, how I started helping people across the world create success on their own terms.

This book is set up like a journey—a hero's journey, to be exact. It's split into twelve chapters, or stages, of the journey. Each chapter begins with a short story from my own life, followed by an in-depth discussion of the topic at hand, and finally ends with a few challenges to help you incorporate that step into your life.

But I need your help. The book is incomplete without you. I can only give you the framework; you've got to fill in the picture. If you choose to complete the challenges and follow the steps in order, you'll have created a personalized guidebook for your own path to success. Not for the life somebody else envisioned for you, but for the life you've always secretly wanted.

When I first started writing this book, I thought I'd just be sharing some wisdom from my journey. I thought that I'd be plotting out the map, pointing out the sights, sharing the tour guide's insider scoop. But, somewhere in the process of writing it, I was forced to take a hard look at myself. I was forced to answer the tough questions: *Am I actually successful? What does that mean to me? Am I completely happy? Where could my life be better?*

And I found myself—the expert, the writer, the guide—smack dab in the middle of yet another success journey. Doe-eyed and ambitious, I entered each step with more guts and glory than the one before. And I was spit out the other end of this book with the realization that I can be more successful than I ever knew was possible. Take it from the guy who's written the book on success: we're always cycling through deeper and deeper levels of success. No matter where you are in your journey, or how many times you've circled it, I hope this book can work its magic on you, just like it has on me.

But, before we go on, I have a rule—just one rule—for anyone reading this book. It's my number one rule in my practice, and I feel like I'd be a hypocrite if I didn't lay down the law here: we don't measure magnitude; we measure direction. It doesn't really matter if you leap or skip. Doesn't matter if you tiptoe or crawl. All that matters is that you move. That you move in the direction of your goals.

This isn't another self-help book to lay untouched on your bookshelf. This isn't just another inspirational story.

If you want to reach success—real success—you can't read and think about it all day. You have to move. You have to take the challenges and do something with them. It doesn't matter if you do every challenge or just one per chapter—just that you do something. Because if you take one tiny step every day toward your goals, at the end of a year, you'll be 365 times closer to accomplishing your dreams.

Beginnings are awkward because they require trust. They require you to let go of your fears and anxieties and cynicism and insecurities. They require you to blindly take a step forward and watch the path develop as you go. They require you to start before you're ready.

So, enough already. It's time to start.

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You Can't Get Started if You Don't Know Where You're Going

I'd always assumed I'd be successful. Not in an arrogant way. Not even in a hopeful way. It just kind of made sense. Like how I assumed I'd graduate high school.

I did everything right. I got the right grades. I got into the right schools. I joined the right clubs. Got the right internships. Networked with the right people. Climbed the right ladders.

To the outside world, I'd made it by my mid-twenties. I had a job I loved that paid me a lot of money. I had a gorgeous apartment, invitations to parties across the city, a booming social life, *and* I was working on stuff that mattered. I wasn't just making money for money's sake. I was working in healthcare reform, politics, cutting-edge technology, and medical research.

I did it right. I did everything right. I was successful by all accounts. But success didn't really feel like success.

It felt like . . . blood. All over my bathroom floor.



It was the middle of the summer, and I woke up one morning after a night of drinking. *Hangovers are the worst*, I told myself. But they usually didn't involve vomiting blood.

Three days later, the blood didn't stop. I was rushed to the hospital. No one had any idea what was wrong with me. I was bent over in pain, vomiting massive amounts of blood. And it wasn't slowing down.

Suddenly, the corporate climbing didn't seem so important. The meaningful job didn't feel so meaningful. And I desperately clung on to the hope that my life would amount to more than a brief encounter with workaholism.

I gave up on success. I totally and completely gave up on success—at least the version that I knew. I had played my cards exactly right. But all it got me was sick, stressed, and unhappy.

Crying in an emergency room bed, as doctors rushed to find out what was wrong with me, I made a decision—one that would change my life. I decided to stop buying into someone else's story of success.

And I started writing my own.



Every Crisis Is an Opportunity

We're in the middle of a success crisis. Students are graduating from college with no career opportunities in sight. Seasoned business veterans are being replaced by younger,

cheaper talent. People are climbing to the top of the corporate ladder and realizing they may have gotten on the wrong ladder. Others are starting their own endeavors, only to be swimming in an endless ocean of anxiety and workaholism. No matter what we do, it seems like we can never find fulfilling success.

Forget about midlife crises, we're having quarter-life crises. The traditional roads to success have dried up. With corporate downsizing and layoffs, we can no longer rely on the conventional résumé-building approach. There simply isn't the same job security to build a long-term career. On the other hand, opportunities for success are accessible to the general public like never before. In the age of telecommuting and social media, anyone with a laptop can start a thriving company.

We have endless possibilities laid out before us, and we're paralyzed. Because, to take advantage of them, we have to decide what we really *want*. We're in the driver's seat. We can no longer follow someone else's model for success. We can no longer copy someone else's approach. We've tried that already, and it's left us all burnt out and miserable. Today, the only way to find lasting and fulfilling success is to define it for yourself.

In the modern era, we've broken the business model and disrupted the industry so many times that there's no clear-cut example for how to do things anymore. Billion-dollar corporations started in garages. High-end executives are dropping the million-dollar salaries for a simpler life. Kids

are becoming famous from posting videos on YouTube. Success is whatever you decide it is today.

Even the currency of success has changed. Money, power, and recognition are no longer the only paper bills in the game. What about time? Or relaxation? Or corporate culture? Or meaningful contribution to the world?

In today's world, success has many currencies. People are leaving high-powered jobs to buy more free time in their lives. They're taking pay cuts just to experience better workplace atmosphere. They're dropping out of the rat race and volunteering for purpose-driven companies.

Success can be bought with whatever currency is most important to you. At its root, success is really about what will bring you to happiness. And, if money isn't the only wealth that can bring you there, you need to start investing in something else.

If dropping out of the workforce to stay home with kids is important to you, I'd call that success. If getting to spend more time on the golf course matters to you, then maybe it's worth taking the pay cut. The point is that success is whatever we define it as.

The idea of a "job" is falling by the wayside. People are working on several projects with multiple revenue streams. They're turning products into services and services into products. They're intersecting industries and mish-mashing business models. Mostly, they're doing things on their own terms.

Working eight-hour days might be for you. But working around-the-clock with periodic breaks could be more your style. Or maybe you like saving up and then taking a month vacation every few years. Or even traveling the world while you're working.

Success can really be anything you want, but you just have to define what that is. In theory, it's simple. In practice, it's damn near impossible.

If it were that easy, a whole lot more of us would have what we wanted today—or at least have direction on how to get it. We have enough trouble picking out a movie to watch on Netflix. But knowing what we want to do with our lives? That's a mighty tall order.

It's not enough to pick a job in the right field. Do you work for someone or go your own way? What kind of corporate culture are you looking for? What kind of boss could you stand working for? How many hours would you like to work? What kind of pay would you demand? How much stress could you handle?

The questions start piling up. The analysis paralysis shifts into high gear. And we're tempted to follow somebody else's example, rather than start from scratch ourselves.

But, if we're going to create success on our own terms, we have to throw out the old success equation. We have to rip up that old map. It's the Wild Wild West. If you want to find success for yourself, you're going to have to venture into uncharted territory. You're going to have to draw up a new

map from scratch. You're going to have to answer the age-old question: *What does success mean to you?*

Success Feels Natural

The good news is you probably already know what it looks like and just don't realize it.

Let's look at an example. When do you feel more successful? When you're in a suit presenting to a room full of judging clients? Or when you're laughing along with friends?

The first step to deciding what success looks like to you is actually letting go of what you want it to look like (or, at least, what you think you want), and starting to embrace what it already does look like.

We're so inundated with the wants of our friends or family or bosses or significant others that it's hard to tell what we actually want anymore. We feel like we're *supposed* to be a certain way or do a certain thing. We play a part, we fit a role, we make ourselves into the perfect little package of who we think we should be. And we so badly want to be that person.

We have so many rules for a successful life: promotion by age twenty-five, marriage by thirty, make partner by thirty-five. We continuously compare ourselves to everyone around us. We check how we stack up to society's timeline. We surround ourselves with *have-tos* and *shoulds* of the lives we think we're supposed to live.

Instead of wishing you were some specific version of success, let's figure out when you feel most successful already. I mean, you're probably already pretty successful in some ways. So why not use those as examples?

Maybe you have good friends with whom you love hanging out. Or maybe you have a really successful romantic relationship. Or just a good connection with your boss. Or a mom you call once a week. Or a client that you secretly counsel on life.

The thing all of these *successful* situations have in common is that they've required relatively little effort to cultivate. You probably don't even really feel like you're trying. You're just doing your own thing, being yourself, and—*bam!*—you've created a successful situation.

We know what success feels like. We *all* know what success feels like already. It feels like laughing with friends or playing a board game with family or staying in on a Friday night to watch your favorite movie. It's fun, it's easy, and it makes you happy.

Success feels natural to us. It plays to our strengths; it comes really easily; it's so much fun that we could do it all day; and it always happens when we're so lost in our passions that we forget to try. Success is about creating a life that's easy and enjoyable for you. It's about doing what you love every single day. And it's really hard to get burnt out if that's the way you live your life.

But, when we're following somebody else's model for success, we start following their rules. We push ourselves to be

just like them. And then we end up working really hard at something that just doesn't come naturally to us.

You never have to try to be yourself. If you're trying, it means you're being somebody else.

So, the first step to unlocking your own definition of success is just letting go of what you want success to look like, and starting to think about the way it already looks in your life. As you start to pick apart the successful parts of your life, you're well on your way to figuring out what success looks like to you.

Success Feels Big

Now, going to the bathroom every day may feel natural, but few people would regard that as overwhelming success. If you felt that your life was already successful as it is, you wouldn't be reading this book. So, in addition to natural, we need success to feel big. It always feels big. It has to—otherwise you're not challenging yourself. And we never feel successful when we're in our comfort zones. We feel complacent, bored, content, cozy—but never successful. Success comes when we expand beyond ourselves, when we show ourselves that we can be bigger than we imagined.

Your definition of success, whatever it is, has to scare you. Even just a little bit. It has to feel bigger than you've imagined yourself before—whether that means living on an exotic beach or just taking an occasional lunch break with friends. It has to feel like growth. In fact, part of success is

constant growth. We're hard-wired to keep expanding. We have an intrinsic need to push past our boundaries and continue growing. Any attempt to stay in your comfort zone is just going against biology. No wonder we have so many mid-life crises.

Something happens when things are scary—something big. Our eyes widen, our hands get jittery, and our hearts start to race. We call it nervous excitement. I've always liked that phrase *nervous excitement*. Because it's nervousness or excitement; it just depends on how you look at it. That same feeling of anxiety is what flips on the nerves in excitement too. It's what brings our bodies into action mode. It's what brings life back into us.

Some people backpack the world, or buy a Ferrari, or even take drugs to feel that nervous excitement we so badly crave. I personally prefer to live a successful life.

Success feels big and exciting because we have to lay all the cards out on the table. We have to be really vulnerable and own up to all the things we actually want. It doesn't matter if we don't feel good enough, or we don't think it's possible, or we don't feel ready. Success isn't about our limiting beliefs, it's about our deepest desires. It's about designing a life that's never been lived before. And, boy, does that take guts.

When we start growing big—really, really big—we do things we never thought in a million years that we could do. We dare to dream. We act like kids again. We imagine impossible things and then try to do them anyway, just for

fun. We dig up those buried desires. We let ourselves want what we want. We forget our favorite excuse: “I can’t.” We try things even if we’re not sure we’re going to succeed.

To ever reach success, you have to give up knowing for sure that you’ll ever get there. You have to stop doing the things that you know you’ll succeed in. Success is about taking a gamble. It’s about betting it all. It’s about putting all your money on yourself because you know that you’re worth it.

If you can dream up a life that big and scary, then success is just within your reach.

Success Feels Nourishing

I don’t think anybody’s definition of success ever started with, “I want to work eighty hours a week and hardly ever sleep.” But that’s exactly what society has been telling us that success means. It’s a rat race. We’re told to either achieve success *or* take care of ourselves. Not both at the same time.

But success—or, at least, any sustainable version of it—has got to include some nourishment. It can’t be all give and no take. Success is a relationship. And, like any healthy relationship, we’ve got to get back just as much as we give. We’ve got to be strengthened, supported, and energized by the very thing we’re creating. Otherwise, we’re going to tire out real quick. And that just leads to burnout and resentment.

Think of the things that enliven you. The things that you could stay up all night doing—talking to friends, writing poetry, arguing about healthcare reform, playing videogames. All of these things provide some form of nourishment. You may come home from work completely exhausted, but then someone recommends a game of Frisbee, and you're immediately refreshed. Any activity that's worth making it into your definition of success has got to nourish you to the core.

Remember, we're not doing the success thing five days a week and hanging up the Superman cape the other two. We're not just trying to build successful careers here; we're trying to build successful lives. We finally acknowledge that we're not just compartmentalized robots. Personal life affects work life, and vice versa. Our relationships are just as important to our success as our career impact. So we need to be nourished by whatever it is that we choose to do with our lives. We need to get really clear on what it is that makes us feel alive and then plow forward with that.

If you can define success as the thing that brightens your spirits and nourishes your soul, you'll never have trouble getting out of bed to do that.

You Are the Judge of Your Own Success

It sounds good. It sounds inspirational. But just living a life that's natural, big, and nourishing isn't necessarily

successful, is it? I mean, that could define anything from a fisherman in a small village to a stay-at-home parent to a high-end executive. Are all these people really equally successful?

If we're going to create success on our own terms, then we're going to have to take back our power to define it. Corporate America has commandeered success for far too long, and we've been beaten over the head with its definition of a high-powered job and large salary. Maybe that's your definition of success, maybe it's not. But, if you don't define it for yourself, you'll never be happy when you achieve it. Because it's never what you wanted in the first place.

Even natural, big, and nourishing are just guidelines to get you started. If they don't feel right to you, trade them in for ones that do. Success can be anything from changing healthcare to following your passion to raising a beautiful family. You get to decide what success means to you.

The sky's the limit, and only you know what you really, really want underneath. So don't be afraid to think up your absolute ideal. Remember, we're only in the defining stages right now. It doesn't matter if it seems impractical or impossible. It doesn't matter if it changes throughout this book or throughout your life—it probably will. That's the nature of success. It's always changing because you're always changing. But all that matters right now is that you're being honest with yourself and allowing yourself to want what you really want.

Nobody can tell you if you're successful or not. Nobody can judge how successful you are. You're playing by different rules than everyone else. You're going by different definitions of success. And your version of success is just the journey that's going to bring you to happiness. So you need to decide what will take you there.

Your definition of success is your blueprint, your strategy plan, your roadmap to get you where you want to go. You've already laid out the main points on the path. You've already described how you want it to look, feel, taste, smell, and sound. Now all you have to do is follow along the journey.

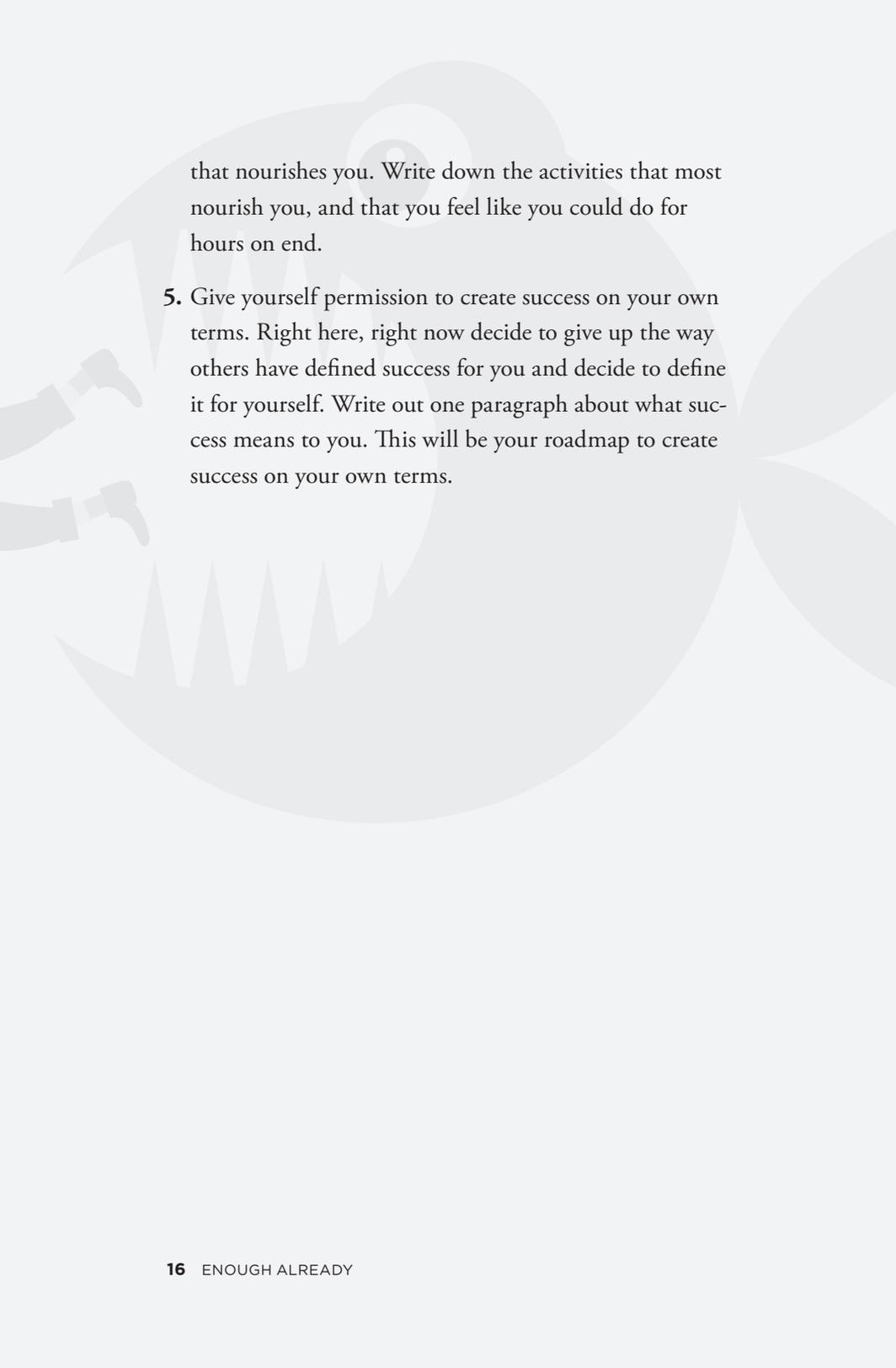
When you know where you're going, you know how to get there.

CHALLENGES

Complete the following challenges before moving on to the next chapter. I recommend reading them all over before you decide which ones to do. You can do all of them, some of them, or just one, but you have to do something. If you want to create success for yourself, you have to define what it is you're trying to create from the get-go.

- I.** Spend some time thinking about the success you want to create in the future. Take out a pen and piece of paper and write the first things that come to mind when you read the following questions:
 - I.** What does success mean to me? What does it look like? Feel like? Sound like? Smell like? Even taste like?
 - II.** How much money do I make when I'm successful? How important is money? What do my relationships look like? What do my friendships look like? What kinds of foods do I eat? How does exercise fit into my life (if at all)? What kind of luxuries do I enjoy?
 - III.** How do I let people treat me? How do I treat myself? What do I accomplish in the world? How much free time do I have? How do I value my time?
 - IV.** What is it about my life that makes me feel most successful?

2. Think about the most successful aspects of your life right now—whether they are relationships, work, a particular card game, or family time. Write down what all of these aspects have in common. What is it about them that makes them all successful?
 - I. Now write down what other skills come naturally to you. Maybe you're a great writer, or a good listener, or a whiz on the computer. Write down whatever naturally works for you.
 - II. Your fastest route to success is leaning on the skills that are already successful in your life right now.
3. Think about your biggest dreams—the stuff that seems way out of your reach. Maybe you're being interviewed by Oprah. Maybe you just bought that gorgeous condo in Hawaii. Maybe you've impacted millions of lives. Whatever your dreams, write down the ones that feel the biggest and scariest. These are the ones that matter most to you, and the ones that you define as successful. Some aspect of these dreams needs to be part of your success definition.
4. Notice the activities that seem to give you the most energy. Maybe it's going to the opera or playing a game of basketball. Maybe it's journaling in the morning or passionately arguing about politics. Whatever gives you energy and makes you feel strong is something



that nourishes you. Write down the activities that most nourish you, and that you feel like you could do for hours on end.

5. Give yourself permission to create success on your own terms. Right here, right now decide to give up the way others have defined success for you and decide to define it for yourself. Write out one paragraph about what success means to you. This will be your roadmap to create success on your own terms.