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ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

SUCCESS IS SOMETIMES EASIER TO DEFINE if you think about the definition of failure, which in my opinion is when people have talent but don't use it. So successful people do the opposite — they find their talents and passionately pursue them, they are goal-oriented, and they enjoy the journey. There's the outcome, and there's the experience — so successful people have integrity and fun while they are pursuing their goals.

I think you hit the pinnacle of success when money, fame, or recognition no longer matter. Money is one means of score-keeping, especially if you're in business. But that's not how all success should be measured. In the end, I think you're judged on whether you gave more than you took. People who are failures use resources — they take more than they give back. I think of success the way I think of business valuation — you have to create value. People who are successful create value. They give more benefits back — to society, to a venture, to the world — than they take.

Also, most successful people would rather have failures in something they love than success in something they hate. Thomas Edison said, "I've never had a failure — I've found 10,000 things that didn't work." It's that mental attitude that really translates into success in the end — never thinking about failure, but saying instead, "I'm going to be successful. I may take a lot of detours, but I don't have a problem with that."

Another big part of arriving at success is learning to recognize your failures and mistakes when you see them again. We all make mistakes, but you're successful when you can learn from them and move on. There are two things that can happen with failure: it can cripple you and make you give up, or you can learn from it, and it can make you stronger. Too many people have thin skin. They get knocked down, and they don't want to get up again. They take the easy route after that. But it's the people who go through a lot of adversity and still succeed who

are most inspirational.

One who had a big hand in my own success is UT professor Ernest Walker, who just turned 90. Walker taught at UT for 50 years. He started the very first small business classes in the 1960s, at a time when no university in the country was focusing on small business. There was so much demand for his classes that he couldn't fulfill it, so he enticed me to come help him. And it was because of him that I found my passion: working with students and seeing the light come on in their eyes. There's not another profession in the world where you can have greater influence. I've probably taught more than 7,000 students in 27 years. Not that I had an impact on all of them, but if I influenced even 10 of them, that's probably 10 more than I would have in a different job.

I want the same thing for my students that I want for my kids, and that is for them to discover their passion. I try to give them every opportunity to find that passion and their own talents. If you have kids later in life like I did, you just hope you'll be around long enough to see that happen.

I tell students to take a day each year and look back over the year to evaluate if they've found what makes them happy and if they've made progress toward their goals. Often people get so bogged down in their day-to-day lives that they don't have time to think about these things. That's when they need to stop and re-evaluate. Even though it may be painful economically to live out of savings for a few months, or to take a week away from the family to figure out what you need to do, you may have to do that to get re-oriented toward your goal. You can't continue to do the same things you've been doing and get different outcomes!

The "Success to Me" series is prepared by Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, an entrepreneur, and Pam Losefsky, an Austin writer and editor.