



Ari Brown

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AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

I KNOW THAT PEOPLE OFTEN MEASURE SUCCESS in terms of money or stature, but in my mind, success has more to do with making an investment in the future by doing things that help other people, not just yourself. I try to achieve things that will outlive me. My favorite mantra comes from Harold Kushner, who wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He says, in your lifetime, you should plant a tree, write a book, and have a child. To me, these are good measures of success because each of them supports future generations.

The hallmarks of successful people are perseverance, self-confidence, and satisfaction in what they do. In my daily work, I interact with parents, and I truly think being a parent is the most rewarding thing you could possibly do. A parent who is raising his or her children well, being a good advocate for them, and ensuring that they grow up healthy and strong

in every sense of the word is a huge success. No matter what your walk in life is, becoming a parent is the great equalizer. New parents may be completely clueless and scared. It is very gratifying for me to see their confidence grow and help them become successful parents.

Personally, what motivates me is my desire to make things better. It must drive people nuts, but whenever I walk into a situation, my first thought is how to improve it. That's why I started writing books. I saw what was on the bookshelves in terms of parenting books, and I thought, "I can do better. Parents deserve better than what's out there." (One way that I measure my own success is to see how far I'm extending my comfort zone — not allowing myself to just sit where I'm comfortable, but constantly striving for more.)

When I see something that doesn't add up, or I feel needs to be changed, I ask, "If not me, then who?" I do a lot of child advocacy work through the Texas

Pediatric Society. That means showing up in places that are not convenient for my job — like being up at the Capitol for a 2 p.m. hearing on a Wednesday. It's difficult to do things like that considering what I do for a living, but I feel if I don't, then who will? For instance, a law was passed in a previous session on a philosophical exemption for children's vaccinations, but the law did not specify how to implement the exemption. It was assumed that parents would just have to sign an affidavit saying they objected to vaccinations for their children, and that was it for the rest of their lives. So I "showed up" and testified before the Department of Health, spoke about vaccinations, and why affidavit renewals would provide more opportunities to educate parents. And it made a difference — the law went from absolutely no renewal of the affidavit to having to renew every two years. People may wonder, "What difference does it make if I show up?" But really, in this case, it mattered. That experience inspired me to keep "showing up."

My advice to young people looking to be successful in life is this: You can do it all, but you can't do it all at the same time. Pace yourself. You want to accomplish many things in your life, but at the end of the day, your family is really the most important. Don't put your family on hold to build your career; you have your whole life to work!

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