

The Formula For Success

Success = Competence + Motivation + Opportunity

This simple equation is a practical and helpful tool you can use to chart your professional development and guide your pathway to personal achievement and leadership impact. The Success Formula can also help you do the same for your team members and direct supports. Let's start by applying the formula to *your* success.

Competence – The Cornerstone

Competence in your chosen profession is foundational to your success. Competence is what employers hire for; pay for; and promote. Competence is essential to impact and advancement. It is the sum of your skills and your experience that you access in order to make effective decisions, solve problems, and produce real results. It is what enables you to add value to an organization.

But competence can be a bit elusive!

Change Requires Constant Learning

The skills that support your professional expertise can be quickly rendered obsolete in the current climate of rapid technological change and an evolving global marketplace. Consistent personal competence will require a constant updating of your professional skills. This challenge becomes even greater as you experience promotion and advancement. Allow me to explain...

Promotion Requires New Skills

Each promotion or leadership transition introduces you to a new level of management responsibilities that also require a new set of skills to support them. The easiest illustration of this is the very first promotion: from a worker on the production line to a manager of production line workers. Working on the production line requires skills related to assembling, building, machining, etc. At that level, your focus is essentially on "things." That ends when you are promoted. Promotion introduces a new focus on "people" – the people who use or produce "things." Your new focus as a manager requires a whole new set of "people-skills" – hiring and firing; orientation and training; reviewing and evaluating performance; coaching; managing bad behavior; resolving conflict; and assigning and delegating work assignments. This is a classic example of what every advancement demands: a new set of skills; a different use of time and attention; and the willingness to embrace and value these changes.

New Demands Require the Willingness to Grow

This is why motivation is so important. Motivation is the willingness... the will... to embrace and value these changes, and invest the time and effort in acquiring the new skills necessary at the new level of management responsibility. Unfortunately, many newly-promoted managers discover that they really don't enjoy these new managerial tasks. They would rather do the things they were best at (and enjoyed more) in their previous position. Unfortunately, demotion is a rare experience for these individuals—they are much more likely to stay in their new positions and struggle with limited success and growing dissatisfaction. Sadly, they are likely to remain in their positions because their bosses are very likely to allow them to do so, instead of addressing the problem and either coaching them to greater effectiveness or demoting them to their former level of success and satisfaction. As a result, these ineffective managers become examples of Laurence Peter's famous principle: *In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.*

The Will to Succeed

Yes, you need the motivation to apply yourself to your job—to work hard and strive to succeed *in anything that you do*. But to succeed at higher levels, you also need the motivation to learn and master new skills and value your new use of time and effort as you apply those skills. This requires a firm and strong commitment to move outside your comfort zone; leave former and familiar success behind; embrace uncertainty in a new role; and endure the pain of learning and growth. Is it any wonder that many leaders are unwilling to embrace this challenge? If you desire advancement and promotion, you must confront the difficult question of your own will: Are you motivated enough to accept this challenge of learning and growth?

The Opportunity to Succeed

Okay. You've got competence in your job. AND... you're committed to do the hard work of acquiring new skills as you advance. Now you've got to determine WHERE you are going to work, grow, and succeed. How do you make that determination? Opportunities come in all shapes and sizes. Choosing the right one is critical to your professional development. So let's explore some possibilities...

The Large Successful Organization

It has been said: Nothing succeeds like success. That may explain the allure of the large, successful organization. Why else do thousands of applications flood the offices of Google and Yahoo each week? Large, successful organizations offer some tantalizing advantages to the eager and ambitious professional.

Prestige. Organizations share their status with their employees. The success of the organization "rubs off" on the individuals who work there. Right or wrong, your affiliation with a well-positioned organization can benefit your résumé and your reputation. Your connection with a prestigious organization may open additional doors of opportunity for you in the future—one good opportunity often leads to another.

Quality assignments. The right work experience can certainly add value to your reputation and résumé. Large, successful organizations can help because they are more likely to afford you a higher quality of assignments—those with greater challenge, impact, effect, and visibility. The right assignments can help you develop your professional skills by stretching you and demanding the best of your efforts and abilities. And as you grow in competence and confidence, you become more valuable to any organization you join. Some assignments can also open new doors of opportunity.

Here's an example: The research that Tom Peters compiled for an assignment at McKinsey became the basis for his best-selling book, *Search for Excellence*. The success of that book elevated Peters to a whole new level of visibility, opportunity, and impact.

Advancement and promotion. Large, growing organizations are often hungry for leaders. They are always looking for talent and always needing good people. As a result, they are also often filled with many opportunities for advancement from within. Internal promotions offer wonderful opportunities for ambitious professionals who are eager to grow, develop, and succeed.

Influential contacts. You have doubtless heard it said: It's not WHAT you know... it's WHO you know. The importance of your professional network cannot be underestimated. Keep in mind: The quality of your opportunities is often directly related to the quality of your relationships. In other words, a network of well-positioned and influential people is much more likely to yield better opportunities for service and success. If you work in a large, successful organization, you are more likely to rub shoulders with the elite in your industry and profession. These contacts are capable of opening doors that would not be open to you otherwise.

Competitive peers. Many of us experience a higher level of motivation when we are surrounded by quality peers. They bring out the best in us by challenging us with their own example of excellence and high performance. This saying is true for many people in large, successful organizations: *I'd rather be in the company of eagles than be surrounded by turkeys.*

Help along the way. The majority of effective professionals credit much of their success to the influence and contribution of mentors and effective leadership models. Large, successful organizations can often provide young professionals with unique opportunities to find and recruit mentors—men and women whose depth of skill and experience afford a priceless reservoir of wisdom and guidance. Large organizations are also a potential source for effective leadership models—individuals who demonstrate the principles and practices of great leadership in their own behavior and performance.

Some Drawbacks to Consider

With all these potential advantages, why would anyone look anywhere else for opportunity? In truth, even large, successful organizations have their drawbacks.

You can get lost. ...lost in the crowd! “Large” means there are a lot of people in the organization. There are so many people in large organizations that it can sometimes be difficult for one person to stand out from the crowd and be noticed!

You can get stuck. ...stuck in a specialized role, with a limited scope of responsibility and depth of experience. Large, successful organizations are often of a size and complexity that favors increased specialization and departmentalization. Workers in such organizations often find themselves knowing more and more about less and less—developing more specialized skills rather than exploring and developing a broader range of skills that are more likely to benefit them at higher levels of organizational responsibility.

You can get comfortable. ...so comfortable with the security of a large organization that you lose your “edge”—your ability to take the risks that are so necessary to innovation and creativity. Even worse, large, successful organizations often become bureaucratic bastions of the status quo—resistant to change and flexibility. Creative workers in these organizations lack the support they need to develop and apply their potential for innovation and change.

The Small Entrepreneurial Organization

Is smaller really better? Sometimes it can be! Some smaller organizations offer a different kind of opportunity, without necessarily sacrificing the benefits of a larger organization. In a sense, they are the other side of the organizational “coin.”

Visibility. Your chances of getting lost in the crowd are a lot less in the smaller organization—there is no crowd! Now is your chance to shine! In the smaller, entrepreneurial organization you have a much better chance of being noticed by higher ups, especially the higher up—the owner or CEO. In fact, you may even be reporting directly to the person at the top. That kind of access is very hard to experience in larger organizations. And that has many benefits of its own...

Access to leadership. What better person to add to your professional network than an entrepreneurial owner/CEO? Access to the top of the organization not only offers you great contacts, it also gives you a unique opportunity to share your ideas and input with real decision-makers, not just your buddies in the break room. You may find yourself in the enviable position of actually being able to influence the direction and culture of the organization.

Variety of assignments. Leaders in smaller organizations often wear several hats. The nature of the smaller organization forces them to be generalists. If you demonstrate potential in this kind of organization, you are likely to receive assignments that will take you into many different corners of the organization. It will afford you a rare opportunity to learn about the various aspects of the business you serve and the industry in which it exists.

Breadth of experience. Varied assignments give one a broad range of valuable work experiences, and a wider view of the organization and its needs. It is precisely what a leader needs to perform well in leadership roles at higher levels.

Flexibility. Smaller, entrepreneurial organizations have the potential to be less bureaucratic and more flexible, experimental, and innovative. They represent an ideal environment to take (appropriate) risks and to try new ways to do the work *easier, better, faster, cheaper, smarter, and safer.*

Room to succeed. Small organizations are just as hungry for good leaders as their larger counterparts. But in the smaller organization, there is a lot less competition! Ambitious workers often have a clear field to express their potential, with lots of opportunity to grow, develop, perform, and gain valuable visibility and recognition. That often leads to the next advantage...

Advancement and promotion. Smaller organizations often give high-performing workers access to more layers of leadership—more “rungs” on the management ladder. If you demonstrate the ability to manage and lead other people and show higher ups that you have the potential to learn and grow, you are very likely to receive the opportunities to do just that, and to apply your strengths at higher and higher levels. It will help if you leverage the other advantages on this list (i.e. visibility, access, flexibility, etc.) to fully mine the potential of your opportunities in the small organization to learn, develop, and perform.

Some Caveats to Consider

The smaller organization can have its limitations as well as its advantages. In many respects, the large and small organizations are two sides of the same opportunity “coin.” The advantages of each one are reflections of the disadvantages of the other. So... choose your opportunity carefully!

Providing Opportunities for Your People

The Success Formula has application beyond the personal. It is just as true for your people as it is for you. If you want to lead your team effectively, you will use the Success Formula to make good choices in work and job assignments for each one of your team members.

The Key to Individual Delegation

Use *The Success Formula* to define effective job assignments. The best combination is to give an assignment to a team member who has all the elements of success—someone who is competent to do the job and motivated to get it done well! When the job itself fits the personal and developmental goals of the “delegate” then the *Formula* is complete—and you have a successful outcome created by an engaged and happy worker. So... *What do you do when the Formula is NOT complete???*

Got “C” But No “M”? What do you do when you have a competent, able worker who can do the job, but just isn’t motivated to get it done? You’ve got to “sell” them on the importance of the assignment and how it will benefit them to complete it. Show them how it will benefit them, the team, the client or customer, and the organization. As much as you can, link the assignment to their goals, values, interests, or gifts/strengths/talents.

Got “M” But No “C”? What about the motivated and eager, well-meaning “helper” who just doesn’t have the level of expertise that is needed? You’ve got to be ready to supply the support they need to be successful: training, tools, resources, coaching, oversight, and encouragement. If you resist this kind of assignment because of the time it may require of you, consider teaming the “newbie” up with a more experienced team member who can provide the support needed to complete the job successfully. (Look for someone who has patience as well as skill!)

Got No “C” and Got No “M”? You may be thinking, “If they’ve got no competence and no motivation, then they’ve got no job!” Unfortunately, you may have this kind of worker. Where do you start with someone like this? *You must start with motivation first.* It is an exercise in futility to try and train someone who is not motivated to learn. A wise leader said it well: *We never learn anything until something is at stake.*

The Key to Personal Development

Use the Success Formula to guide your efforts to develop your people strategically. Find or create appropriate opportunities for each of your team members—opportunities that match their unique abilities and interests as well as their goals for growth and development. Keep special opportunities like these in mind:

- Challenging job assignments
- Cross-training efforts
- Special projects
- Training courses—within the organization and with outside vendors or schools
- Cross-departmental task forces or committees
- Exposure to key organizational leaders or potential mentors
- Mentoring relationships—in formal programs or informally, self-driven activities
- Interaction with key clients and customers
- Involvement in industry-related professional associations
- Attendance at conventions or special events that offer additional learning or training

Use It or Lose It

Use the Success Formula to think strategically about personal growth and professional development—yours and your team’s. Examine each opportunity and measure it carefully against your needs and goals. *Help your people do the same.*

The Personal Trainer is a resource for growing leaders produced by Dr. Jim Dyke, the Founder and Director of **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.**—an organization dedicated to equipping men and women with skills and principles pertinent to the role and life of a transformational leader of the 21st century. This is a specially-designed tool for personal reflection and discussion that will help you and your team apply the ideas and principles presented in the matching edition of the newsletter **Leadership Tracks**. Log on to **www.CLionline.com** to discover more ways **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.** can bring its resources and expertise to your organization and help your people become better leaders and better followers. Copyright 2020—James R. Dyke— all rights reserved.