

SUCCESS BUILT TO LAST

CREATING A LIFE
THAT MATTERS

JERRY
PORRAS*

STEWART
EMERY

MARK
THOMPSON

*Coauthor of **BUILT TO LAST**, Over 1,000,000 copies sold.

Foreword by Senator **JOHN McCAIN**

Praise for *Success Built to Last*

“If we are to live in a world that works for everyone, we must create lives that matter. This book presents a path to the kind of lasting success that transcends fear and endows healthy self-esteem. This is a book for all of us who care about the future of all of us.”

—**Jack Canfield**, Bestselling Author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*® series and *The Success Principles*™

“The best coaching you will ever get on creating a life that matters is in this book!”

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, Executive Coach and Author/Coeditor of 22 books, including *The Leader of the Future* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“An incredible book and a must read for anyone interested in achieving enduring success for themselves, their family, their stakeholders, and their community.”

—**Jason Jennings**, Bestselling Author of *It's Not The Big That Eat The Small—It's The Fast That Eat The Slow, Less Is More*, and *Think BIG—Act Small*

“In *Success Built to Last*, the authors show readers how to pursue their passions and achieve success beyond their wildest dreams, while staying true to who they are. The book is a ‘must read!’”

—**Bill George**, former Chairman and CEO, Medtronic, and Bestselling Author of *Authentic Leadership*

“In business and in life, lasting success takes teamwork, integrity, and the courage to stick with what really matters. It's the best five players that win the game, not the five best players. That's what this book is all about.”

—**Richard Kovacevich**, Chairman, President, and CEO of Wells Fargo

“There is nothing more important you can do than create a life that matters for you and your family. As a leader and a parent, you've got to read this book and then give it to the teens in your family!”

—**Greg Foster**, President of IMAX Films

“John Deere himself said, ‘I will not put my name on a product that does not have the best in it that is in me.’ Imagine using that same standard in your personal life and career. When you commit yourself to excellence that would make you proud to put your name on everything you do, then you will have *Success Built to Last*.”

—*Robert Lane*, Chairman and CEO of John Deere & Co., Inc.

“You will find rich insights about how to make a life—not just a living.”

—*Barry Z. Posner*, Dean and Professor of Leadership, Santa Clara University, and Bestselling Coauthor of *The Leadership Challenge* and *A Leader’s Legacy*

“Want to pick the brains of successful, influential people? For your career’s (and life’s) sake, I hope you read *Success Built to Last* this weekend. For the world’s sake, let’s hope this is the most-read business book of the year.”

—*Keith Ferrazzi*, CEO of Ferrazzi Greenlight and Bestselling Author of *Never Eat Alone*

“This book is a great read and provides excellent ‘real world’ examples for the reader to use immediately!”

—*Rob Reeg*, Chief Technology Officer of MasterCard International

“The book is both moving and practical. It also reflects the personal experiences of the authors—three leaders whom I admire and respect. As far as I’m aware, this is the most thoroughly researched work on enduring success and leadership available. The ideas are amazingly accessible.”

—*Spencer Clark III*, Chief Learning Officer of Cadence Design Systems

“In the end, whether or not your business prospers or fails is all a matter of how you behave and the decisions that you take. It is up to you. Let this exceptional book be your servant and guide.”

—*Lord Alistair McAlpine*, Treasurer of the British Conservative Party, 1975–1990

**SUCCESS BUILT
TO LAST**

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TO LAST

Creating a Life that Matters

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*To Rick Porras, Vanessa Thompson, and Paul Emery—
all on their way to creating a life that matters*

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C O N T E N T S

Foreword by Senator John McCain

Acknowledgements

Introduction—From *Built to Last* to *Success Built to Last* * *The Mandela Effect* * *Why Peter Drucker believed leadership is a pointless conversation without an understanding of what success means*

Chapter 1: From Great to Lasting—Redefining Success * *What high achievers don't tell you about success and survival that you really need to know* * *How success can betray you* * *Why celebrity is synonymous with short-term marriages and long-term addictions* * *The teen detective and the ravishing redhead reporter*

PART I: MEANING—HOW SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE STAY SUCCESSFUL

Chapter 2: Love it or Lose—Passions and the Quest for Meaning * *You're not safe in that safe job* * *Why it's dangerous not to do what you love* * *Lovers finish first* * *Why Warren Buffet thinks the way most folks build their careers is like saving up sex for old age*

Chapter 3: Portfolio of Passions—It's Not About Balance * *There's NOT just one thing to do with your life* * *Why balance is bullshit* * *Stealth passions and the power of peripheral thinking* * *Why Google pays you to play on the job* * *Transforming lives for 64 cents apiece* * *The paranoid survive, but the passionate prosper*

Chapter 4: Why Successful People Stay Successful—Integrity to Meaning * *Don't treat passion like a trivial pursuit* * *Practice integrity to what matters to you* * *The reinvention of three ex-presidents* * *What a billionaire Sex Pistols marketer and the celibate Dalai Lama have in common*

PART II: THOUGHTSTYLES—EXTREME MAKEOVERS START IN YOUR HEAD

Chapter 5: The Silent Scream—Why It's So Damn Hard to Do What Matters * *When it's not considered a worthy career* * *The allure of Bright Shiny Objects* * *The seduction of competence* * *How we're more obsessed with being loved than being what we love* * *The tyranny of the OR* * *If you haven't found your lover yet, keep looking*

Chapter 6: The Cause Has Charisma—You Don't Have to Be Charismatic to Be Successful * *Give me liberty or give me death—how Norma chose between her calling and suicide* * *Decolonizing your mind* * *When the cause has charisma, shrinking violets bloom in public* * *Dr. Doolittle and the silverback gorilla* * *Whatever you are, be a great one* * *The world would be a darker place without you* * *Why self-esteem is highly overrated*

Chapter 7: The Tripping Point—Always Make New Mistakes * *When successful people sound like losers* * *Positive thinking can hurt you* * *How to harvest failure* * *Why Yoda is so misunderstood* * *When the going gets tough, feelings come last* * *There is a dark side to every best practice* * *Persistence can be just another addiction* * *How innovation is failure sped up*

Chapter 8: Wounds to Wisdom—Trusting Your Weaknesses and Using Your Core Incompetencies * *There is no cure* * *Don't use a weakness as a reason to distrust yourself* * *You can't have it all until you use all you have* * *Finding*

*greatness at the intersection of pain and passion * Don't make the future pay the debts of the past * Beyond blame—creating a future that matters*

PART III: ACTIONSTYLES—TURNING PASSION INTO ACTION

Chapter 9: Earning Your Luck—Preparing for Serendipity by Using Big Hairy Audacious Goals * *Why you have to earn your luck * The myth of authenticity * How big, hairy, audacious goals help you prepare for serendipity * Too much presidential information * Bold risks measured in small steps * When bad goals happen to good people * The secret life of goals*

Chapter 10: Naked Conversations—Harvesting Contention * *Why enduringly successful people seek it out * Contention as an employee perk * Turning your next fight into a feast * Making sure the best idea wins * Don't be right—be effective * It's all about shining eyes*

Chapter 11: Creating Alignment—The Environment Always Wins * *Anything worth doing can't be done alone * Recruiting a team to your dream * Relationships built to last * Why you really are only as good as your people * Don't believe in words—believe in behaviors * In search of the miraculous * Understanding incentives really matters * The final secret*

The Pleasure of Finding Things Out—A Look at the Research Behind *Success Built to Last*

Endnotes

Biographical Index

Index

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F O R E W O R D

Although success can easily be defined as the achievement of goals, there's a difference between temporary and lasting success. I don't think you achieve lasting success unless you add another ingredient to the mixture, and that is to serve a cause greater than yourself. That's what lasting success is all about.

I can't tell you the number of people I have met who have been very successful in the pursuit of wealth, but late in the day began to sense that they didn't really succeed. And yet, I have known people from all degrees of financial wealth who have dedicated themselves to causes greater than themselves and their own self-interests who have led a very satisfying life.

In my book, *Character Is Destiny: Inspiring Stories Every Young Person Should Know and Every Adult Should Remember* (Random House, 2005), we wrote stories about different kinds of qualities that make up a person's character, based on the lives of people that you've probably never heard of—such as Sister Antonio, who resides in a jail in Tijuana taking care of people—to people we all know, such as Mark Twain.

In *Success Built to Last: Creating a Life that Matters*, you will find practical wisdom drawn from the stories of hundreds of the world's most remarkable and enduringly successful people who the authors actually interviewed. This is a book that will make a difference.

Senator John McCain

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As we visited with remarkable people all over the world, we were struck over and over again by the notion that no one does anything that matters alone. This book is no exception. We're grateful for all the talented people who made this journey possible for us. They have all been great partners and many have become good friends. Prentice Hall Publisher Tim Moore brought us the resources of the world's largest publisher, Pearson Education, and generously provided valuable coaching and advice.

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We are indebted to Chuck Schwab for making it possible for Mark Thompson to create the Schwab CEO Series and to engage in the World Economic Forum and the Republican and Democratic national conventions. These events made this project inevitable and the subject of success even more irresistible.

We are grateful for the talents of Richard Wilson, who produced many of these interviews with Mark and who, along with leadership expert Terry Pearce, inspired him to expand this adventure to engage with remarkable people from so many different fields, faiths, and walks of life.

Bonita Thompson, our research director, poured through hundreds of hours of digital recordings and hundreds of pages of transcripts. Her passionate and tireless data analysis yielded ideas as diverse as *the cause has charisma* and the identification of the three circles, *Meaning, Thought, and Action*. Her diverse background—embracing behavioral psychology, human resources, information systems, statistical analysis, and business—contributed rich context and methodology to the book's structure.

Joan Emery provided us with feedback about what made a difference (and what didn't) in this manuscript based on her great community network, along with her

decades of coaching individuals and teams to find their greater potential in nonprofit and corporate settings. Joan also discovered that the ideas and practices set forth in this book not only serve critical issues that impact careers and organizations, but also families and teenagers for whom this work has become a valuable resource.

We want to thank Frank Patitucci for introducing Stewart Emery to Jerry Porras, and Denise Thomas for introducing Stewart to Mark Thompson. Without these serendipitous events, this book would not have been written. Thank you to Professor Klaus Schwab, Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, Jack Canfield, Dave Pottruck, Davia Nelson, Baylee DeCastro, Jason Jennings, Senator John McCain, President Jimmy Carter, Visa's Susanne Lyons, and the New York Stock Exchange's Carie Crandall for so many important introductions and illuminating questions that informed our inquiry.

We feel blessed and grateful to have so many remarkable people participate in these interviews over the past decade, from those who toil out of the limelight in communities of need, such as Norma Hotaling and Brother David Steindl-Rast, to those who are household names on very different journeys, such as Richard Branson, Steve Forbes, Maya Angelou, Herb Kelleher, Nelson Mandela, and The Dalai Lama. (A summary of participants can be found in the biographical index at the end of this book, and more information is available at www.SuccessBuiltToLast.com.)

We want to thank everyone we have had the privilege to meet and know in creating this work. We have been forever changed by your insights. We have only just begun.

With gratitude,

Jerry Porras, Stewart Emery, and Mark Thompson

Stanford, California

June, 2006

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

From *Built to Last* to *Success Built to Last*

The Mandela Effect

It was close to midnight at the World Economic Forum when we sat down to wait for the last meeting of the day. The freezing rain had turned to a blizzard, but inside it felt like noon in the Sahara as the heating system gushed to overcompensate. Mark Thompson was nodding off in his chair when Nelson Mandela suddenly appeared around the corner, extending a sweaty hand and a tired smile. Thompson shivered as Mandela leaned on his shoulder and eased onto the leather couch.

In the years before Mandela, an activist lawyer, had been sent to a death camp, he was rarely without zealous overconfidence about his mission to end apartheid. South Africa had suffered violence and unrest that seemed irreconcilable. Although Mandela initially advocated a peaceful solution, he eventually took up arms when the path of peace appeared to be a dead end. In 1964, he was convicted of conspiracy and sabotage and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Most of his years as an inmate were on Robben Island, off Cape Town, where the South African government sent the opposition to break its morale. During his many years of hard labor, the government pressed him repeatedly to compromise his beliefs in exchange for early freedom. He refused.

After 27 years in captivity, in 1990, at the age of 71, Mandela was released. He had every reason to have become the most dangerous man on his continent, but instead he accelerated the peaceful reinvention of his nation.

How could he have overcome his hatred to lead a non-violent revolution, seeking reconciliation instead of revenge? There he sat, exhausted, but radiant; continuing his quest to heal his homeland. The adulation of Mandela's fans has grown or evaporated, depending on whom you ask. Nevertheless, he took his own unique path—a journey that matters so much to him that he has stayed the course year after year, often despite the social and political consequences, not because of them. When he could be lounging in retirement, the Nobel Laureate and ex-President was instead recruiting people to his cause—as he had been doing not just for a month or a year, but for a lifetime, with an intensity that had not faded despite his decades of suffering in a South African jail.

Your three co-authors, separately and now together, have always been passionately curious about what makes enduringly successful people and extraordinary organizations tick. We have long shared a common question: What inspires long-term achievers to make the kind of choice Mandela did—to struggle and grow despite all odds—to find new meaning and hang onto it not just for the moment or for himself, but to create success that lasts? Although history supports Mandela's noble intentions, the fact that he didn't start out as a saint, with neither perfect grace, nor humility, before his long walk to freedom, makes his journey even more useful and inspiring to the rest of us. That's the *Mandela Effect*—when you can create enduring success not because you are perfect or lucky but because you have the courage to do what matters to you.

From Built to Last to Success Built to Last

Mandela's transformation is a courageous example of creating a life built to last. He achieved not just any success, but enduring success that lasts because it matters. In the introduction for the paperback edition of the business classic, *Built to Last*, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras reported "a significant number of people had found key concepts useful in their personal and family lives as they approached the fundamental human issues of self-identity and self-renewal. Who am I? What do I stand for? What is my purpose? How do I maintain my sense of self in this chaotic, unpredictable world? How do I infuse meaning into my life and work? How do I remain renewed, engaged, and stimulated?"¹

Healthy, sustainable societies require the creation of healthy, sustainable organizations, and great organizations and societies can only be built by human beings who can grow and create meaningful success. If you believe that—and we do—then talking to people who had remarkable lives and lasting impact seemed a natural thing to do. As inner-city educator Marva Collins (no relation to Jim) told us, when you create a life that matters—a life you feel worthy of living—then "the world would be a darker place without you."

And so began the journey of our collaboration on *Success Built to Last*.

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Conversations with Enduringly Successful People

This book is based on interviews with over 200 people all over the world who have made a difference—large or small—in their field, profession, or community, but who have lived a life that they believe mattered. In these conversations, we rediscovered a principle that is starting to emerge in books about organizational performance and leadership, but rarely seems fully developed: Success in the long run has less to do with finding the best idea, organizational structure, or business model for an enterprise, than with discovering what matters to us as individuals. It is here, at a very personal level, where thought and feeling inform each other, that creativity begins, and where the potential for enduring organizations emerges. We found ourselves on a quest to find insights—probing to uncover the principles and practices of individuals whose impact on the world endures.

These people are not confined to the categories of entrepreneur, revolutionary, or positive deviant. Many are reluctant to think of themselves as leaders or role models even today. Most did not start out by pursuing success as conventionally defined by their culture. Some will probably never have much money; others are rich, even very rich, but very few started out wealthy. They come from many backgrounds, some horrific and others privileged.

In terms of personality, they're all over the map—some are naturally loud and assertive, while others are barely audible until you ask them about what matters to them. A few have so-called charisma, but most do not; and many remain introverts in the midst of success. At some point in their lives, all of them found themselves on a collision course with a kind of need that generated a relentless, passionate conviction to change the way things are for the long run, often despite how society might judge them.

We struggled with how to refer to these enduring high achievers. Labels such as “visionary leader,” in this context, seemed unnecessarily lofty; creating a separation that would provide the rest of us with reasons not to reach inside ourselves to retrieve our greater possibilities. Let’s be clear, however, that all of these people are providing leadership in one way or another. Ultimately, we chose the terms “Enduringly Successful People” and “Builders,” the latter a description based in part on the “clock-builder” concept from the original *Built to Last* book. By way of metaphor, Collins and Porras made a distinction between the ability to tell the time in the moment and the ability to build a clock that could tell the time beyond the lifetime of the builder. They observed that leaders who created a vision and culture that endured were “clock-builders” whose organizations stood the test of time, outlasted them as individuals, and ultimately outperformed those organizations run by men and women who functioned merely as “time tellers” who lead in the traditional manner hoping to succeed with a hot idea.

Builders are people whose beginnings may be inauspicious but who eventually become defined by their creativity. At some point in their lives, Builders feel compelled to create something new or better that will endure throughout their lifetime and flourish well beyond. Builders often see themselves simply as people trying to make a difference doing something that they believe deserves to be done with or without them, and they recruit the team—build the organization—needed to get it done. Great organizations can be a dividend of this process, but enduring institutions seem to be more of an outcome of the Builder’s mindset than a goal in and of itself.

We learned that, for the most part, extraordinary people, teams, and organizations are simply ordinary people doing extraordinary things that matter to them. The message here is that you have it within you to live an

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extraordinary life. You have the choice to embrace a personally meaningful journey, integrating your personal and professional lives in ways that make a lasting difference. And when you do that, you have the potential to create an organization and a legacy that can serve the world long after you're gone.

How We Found the People

We interviewed relatively unknown business managers, entrepreneurs, teachers, Olympians, and Nobel Laureates, as well as Pulitzer, Grammy, Peabody, and Academy Award winners and the CEOs of large and small organizations. We met many of these people during consulting assignments around the world. To identify additional people to interview, we reviewed an eclectic variety of well-established lists—from *Time Magazine's Most Influential People* to Oprah Winfrey's *Use Your Life Award* winners, as well as those on the annual honor rolls of the biggest, fastest growing, or most admired in major business publications, notably *Forbes* and *Fortune*. We also looked at lists of noteworthy individuals honored by nonprofit organizations.

From this universe of people, we overlaid an unusual time limitation to our review—a 20-year minimum—eliminating those who had significant success in their careers, with a few exceptions, for less than two decades. As a result, we dropped celebrities-of-the-moment and multiple generations of charismatic leaders who come and go—culling our list to fewer than a thousand people who described themselves as having found lasting success.

From that group, we screened for diversity of interests, industries, and gender. We invited several hundred people to participate and, ultimately, completed more than 200 personal interviews from 1996 to 2006.² Not surprisingly, the group was largely over age 40, and the oldest individual interviewed was 95.

Avoiding the Apprentice Trap

In the age of reality TV, it has become commonplace for individuals to rise from complete obscurity to superstardom in a matter of weeks or months, only to soon disappear into the “where are they now?” files—or worse. We looked at people with a long tenure of performance—people who mattered year after year—rather than anyone who happened to show up on the cover of this week’s magazine as a celebrity-of-the-moment from *The Apprentice* or *Survivor*.

This long-term approach allowed us to include people who have had significant impact, both those who are popular as well as those who are wildly out of fashion, but nonetheless well worth interviewing for this project because they have (or had) been highly accomplished in their field for a long time. Jimmy Carter was stunned by a humiliating defeat—a landslide against him in the 1980 elections—but found a more rewarding role and won the Nobel Peace Prize after 20 more years of following an entirely new dream largely unrelated to his presidency. Although he’s under fire again for his strongly held views and his latest book on values and anti-fundamentalism, he continues his mission around the world.

There are bound to be people who you may think are inappropriate choices for this discussion about enduring success. Whether you love them or hate them, very few of

the people we interviewed will escape harsh criticism from one quarter or another because they are, by definition, having impact doing what matters to them! Indeed, as soon as you place someone on a pedestal as a role model, there seems to be a perverse law of the universe that increases the chances that person or that organization will stumble foolishly or become the target of heated controversy. Let's make it clear that the people interviewed are not presented here as role models for you to follow. That's a very personal choice only you can make. We offer them only to provoke a discussion that you may need to have with yourself, and the people who matter to you, about the definition of success. If there is anything that became abundantly clear after so many interviews, it was that there are many different, even contradictory and dangerous, ways to go about evaluating success that lasts—as you will see in Chapter 1, “From Great to *Lasting*—Redefining Success.”

Many high achievers who have enduring success cherish a dogma with which we disagree, and some that were even offensive to us. We hope you can't tell who they are. We excluded violent criminals and terrorists who have had impact for the long haul because we hope that none of us can or should count on insanity or other criminal pathologies to build a legacy of lasting impact.

Successful People Have a History of Mistakes and They Harvest Their Failures

What often surprises most people is that Builders have very significant failures, losses, and bitter disappointments. Some are experiencing difficulty as we publish this book. In hundreds of interviews, we never met a soul who didn't have embarrassments or failures in their portfolio of experience, including the authors themselves. Extraordinary individuals take one step back and two steps forward with most every

challenge—and sometimes two steps back to one step forward. They harvest useful lessons and knowledge from what doesn't work, and they display a remarkable resiliency; an ability to bounce back from adversity.

They don't just think positively, but rather practice the ability to respond and move ahead, often despite how they might feel in the moment, whether the setback was their own foolish fault or just an unlucky break. Builders generally did not blame others for their circumstances, but instead focused their attention on actions within their control that they could take to solve or manage the problem.

This sense of perspective was particularly necessary during our first set of interviews. As you might expect, a few of these high achievers seemed superhuman. They were not remotely like the vast majority of the rest of us on Earth. Some people are way too smart, talented, or lucky to be helpful as a reference. An unnerving number of Nobel Laureates and virtuosos came into this world with their special genius seemingly in full bloom. If you yearn for the heights of Yo Yo Ma, you had better be a cello prodigy by age seven. “No novelist in the world would have dared invent him. The combination of virtues—musical, intellectual, and personal is simply too implausible,” said *Smithsonian Magazine*.³ He is a generous humanitarian who lives his values and is an incredibly disarming and warm person when you meet him. These are gifts, but the rest of his talents are simply out of the reach for almost all of us, and, therefore, not as useful a source as others might be.

We certainly didn't want to take this journey just to find more people who give further reason to doubt our own abilities and reason to remain anonymous. Fortunately, and to our great relief, in the process of meeting and interviewing hundreds of remarkably successful people, we uncovered good news. We found powerful principles that transcend luck or simply great genes. In Chapter 1, we share

a simple, three-part theoretical framework that explores useful attributes that all these successful people have in common.

Tracking these people down wasn't easy. Some work in remote regions of the world and surface only occasionally; others are celebrities or leaders whose schedules are in high demand. We intercepted some during their visits to universities around the world. Many we met initially during business conferences and consulting assignments. We interviewed people in the field, at conferences, public radio stations, or in their homes, offices, limos, and studios in the United States, Asia, and Europe.

Throughout this book, you will see descriptions of the places and circumstances in which we interviewed people. We have provided that additional color because we believe that, whenever possible, it's important to observe the ways these individuals actually behave—not just what they say. We wanted to catch them in the act of doing (or not doing) what they said they do—for example, Mandela's willingness to entertain a bunch of caffeinated business suits and other leaders at the World Economic Forum to continue to fuel the global dialog about peace and freedom.

For many years, we have participated in the Forum, which is a four-day marathon in the January snow three hours from Zurich, where attendees run from early morning espresso to well past midnight, often standing in lines oddly packed with CEOs, social workers, billionaires, and Nobel Laureates—awaiting access to venues—all anxious to squeeze in quality time with rock stars, heads of state, and each other. This sounds like a spectacle, and sometimes it is, but it's one of the more effective places to connect with people who are having lasting impact. What keeps you going despite the high security and long hours is the intellectual feast—dining all day and night on the insights and eccentricities of some of the world's most enduringly successful people.

Our Approach to the Interviews

After we found Builders to interview, we needed a fresh way to think about this topic. We did not want to rely entirely on third-party biographies or send out yet another survey with a request to tick boxes on a mass mailing. We're not sure those surveys get the full attention of the leaders they're sent to anymore and, as Peter Drucker warned us, "That's all been done before." Drucker (and many others) encouraged us to think differently about this—to pursue free-ranging conversations with a diverse group of people about what success means rather than focus on business leaders or leadership per se. Until you "figure out what success means" to you personally and to your organization, leadership is an almost "pointless conversation," Drucker admonished. And we definitely did not want to confirm our own set of beliefs about some theory we were trying to prove. We wanted to learn!

The fact that we actually interviewed the vast majority of our sources, rather than rely on surveys or third-party data, sets this work apart from other offerings in this field. We explored the issues personally with individuals as human beings, asking them one kick-off question about their definition of success and lasting leadership. This open-ended inquiry enabled each enduringly successful person, or Builder, rather than the authors, to drive the conversation and provide insights in ways that would have never occurred otherwise. We followed their lead by asking clarifying questions to reveal the depth and creativity of their answers, rather than sticking to our own preset agenda of questions. All too often in academic research, dialog is

Until you "figure out what success means" to you personally and to your organization, leadership is an almost "pointless conversation," Drucker admonished.

curtailed when a respondent moves beyond the preordained questions or topic. We wanted to mine the richness of that spontaneous dialog.

The unique power of this project was that it did not start out as a science experiment, but was the culmination of many leadership interviews collected in the course of our intensive, face-to-face consulting work in a wide variety of organizations, at universities, at professional conferences, for public broadcasting programs, and at other eclectic settings over a ten-year period. We saw the resulting data set as a gold mine of information that, when systematically analyzed, yielded some incredible insights. This opportunistic approach provided a very different and, we believe, richer dialog than if we had started with a narrower, highly structured process. The conversations exposed us to viewpoints that we never would have thought of as theories to test. In a real sense, this journalistic approach gave us a better set of hypotheses and a fresh perspective on the issues of leadership and lasting success.

By approaching people with this kind of exploratory dialog, we learned more than we could have hoped for or imagined. In fact, we found it sometimes unsettling, and occasionally threatening, to hear highly accomplished people describe things we had believed to be universal and concrete—like core values and the definition of success—in many different and even contradictory ways. The values these people cling to are their own intuitive and artful interpretation of what matters to them. The beliefs that they defended so dearly were not facts of life, but daring choices—judgments about what was right for them, not what everyone else should do. As we listened to their stories, we felt the bondage of our own beliefs dissolve.

After completing the interviews, we analyzed the content in a structured way to find the most frequent patterns of behavior and thinking, identifying 21 broad topic categories⁴ that emerged from the conversations. The strongest of these made it into this book.

In *Success Built to Last*, we could not follow in the footsteps of many business books in which companies are paired for comparison and measured in terms of relative performance based on their business model, growth rates, founding data, key competitors, operating efficiency, or stock market or other relative financial data. In our interviews, we reached out to individuals who work not just for public companies listed on stock exchanges, but also private for-profit and nonprofit organizations, scientific and educational institutions, government agencies, and communities. As a practical matter, we didn't think it was reasonable to have a control group to compare human beings in those same ways—as winners, losers, or runners-up.

Instead, with our manuscript already drafted, we tested our assumptions by creating a unique independent survey to challenge our conclusions. To take this ambitious step, our Stanford-based team partnered with Prentice Hall/Pearson Education, Lauder Professor Yoram (Jerry) Wind, director of the SEI Center for Advanced Studies in Management at the Wharton School, and survey expert Dr. Howard Moskowitz and a team of researchers at the Moskowitz Jacobs design lab. Moskowitz's groundbreaking research at Harvard led him to author 14 books and 300 papers based in part on a sophisticated survey technique called conjoint analysis and rule developing experimentation (RDE). It's been around since the 1970s, but Moskowitz has been using this technique to reduce the tendency for people who answer surveys to give politically correct responses—digging instead into the soft underbelly of beliefs rather than what people think is appropriate or polite to say. His design lab uses it on everything from consumer products to presidential elections and views about terrorism.

Our *World Success Survey* was made available online on April 18, 2006, to executives and educators at senior and junior levels who are Knowledge@Wharton subscribers.

More than 365 people from around the globe responded within the first week. This independent sample of data provided a comparison set and validation for our interview findings, and showed significant differences in perceptions and mindsets between respondents categorized as “successful” or “unsuccessful” in their professional or personal lives.

Among the top line results were confirmation that successful people don’t rely on the approval of others to pursue their cause or calling. They have the audacity to take the initiative despite social pressures rather than because of them. They are more emotionally committed to doing what they love than being loved by others. They don’t wallow or obsess on a single defeat or rely on finding scapegoats or blame when things go wrong, but instead relentlessly place highest priority on being effective in getting the outcomes they are seeking. (As we discuss in Chapter 7, “The *Tripping* Point—Always Make New Mistakes,” and Chapter 8, “Wounds to Wisdom—Trusting Your Weaknesses and Using Your Core Incompetencies,” Builders “harvest” their failures and successes as data they can use to improve their effectiveness.) Successful people also said that “loving what you do” is a necessary condition for success. (Indeed, in Chapter 2, “Love It or Lose—Passions and the Quest for Meaning,” we review the dangers of not doing what you love because people who have that passion can outlast and eventually outrun you in the task.)

Regardless of whether the survey participants rated themselves as “successful” or “unsuccessful,” all groups said that the traditional dictionary definition of success—notably wealth, fame, and power—no longer describes what success means to them. Although popularity and affluence, for example, are nice outcomes, people prefer to define *success* as the ability to “make a difference,” “create lasting impact,” and being “engaged in a life of personal

fulfillment,” according to the study. What is special about Builders is that they won’t settle for less than that! (See “The Pleasure of Finding Things Out—A Look at the Research Behind *Success Built to Last*.”)

Perhaps most important, it is our hope that this book and the *World Success Survey* launch an international dialog—providing a forum for this important subject that empowers people to be heard with their own voices for the first time, together, on every continent. This extra step—to reach out to engage with the rest of the world in a conversation about redefining success—continues to keep us mindful, particularly when we find ourselves leaping to conclusions in a vacuum. *Science* in the social sciences can never escape influence from the personal realities of the people doing the work. Authors on leadership would love to convince you that they’ve been able to create the ultimate recipe for the secret sauce of success, but no one can give you that.

Why Take This Journey?

We made a conscious decision to find and share insights without being prescriptive for a change. This is like a dinner conversation. Our intent here is to provoke a deeper dialog about success and what matters in our lives, rather than yet another lecture about leadership pretending to offer all the answers.

What we can tell you is we have been deeply touched and forever changed by the spirit, principles, and practices of the people we’ve met. We invite you to enter into the world of what follows unburdened by the need to believe or disbelieve. Rather, allow yourself to be inspired to find your own way. We hope you can challenge conventional wisdom and unearth new possibilities for success that lasts in your life, relationships, and work.

When you opened this book, you may have not intended to discover or be reminded that you are—or have an even bigger opportunity to be—a Builder, just like the enduringly successful people you will read about here. We hope the stories herein will make this clear—leaving you no place to hide—moving you to stretch toward your highest aspirations.

From Great to *Lasting*—
Redefining Success

“It was another sleepless night followed by another cruel morning. We were running out of money, and I worried constantly about all the people who had sacrificed to come to work for me. They came and they toiled through the night and struggled to make ends meet for their families. The pressure was overwhelming—sometimes, I had to stop and throw up in the gutter on the way to the office.”

Keeping his dream going was the hardest thing he had ever tried to do in this life. Ed Penhoet had been comfortable as a biochemist and a professor, then reinvented himself as an entrepreneur and found himself barely keeping a fledgling firm afloat. Things would get worse before they got better, and he seriously considered merging with another equally desperate competitor or giving up entirely.

“Famous executives out there fundamentally gild the lily. They don’t tell you the awful truth about the pain you will face. They want you to think they’re brilliant and that they had it figured all out at the beginning. That’s revisionist history. They might have had a clue, but that’s barely all they had.” Penhoet was teetering on the edge of a humiliating collapse of everything he had worked 24/7 to achieve. He could lose it all. Success as traditionally defined was not even a concept at this point. What Ed faced was the opposite of success—had he looked up the word “success” in the dictionary, he would have scored zero.

“Famous executives out there fundamentally gild the lily. They don’t tell you the awful truth about the pain you will face.”

Why did he persist? It was not just because he was stubborn. There was something bigger than success at stake. When his favorite uncle died from cancer, he had long ago launched a career in biochemistry, determined to find new ways to bring basic research to the marketplace. That was a lifelong cause that had meaning uniquely to him. It was the way Penhoet would create a life that matters.

Creating a life that matters is what most everybody wants. It’s the subtitle of this book because it’s exactly what we heard from enduringly successful people all over the world. *Builders*,[†] as we call them, do things because they want to build a meaningful life. They want to create a life that matters, and one of the greatest tests of that conviction comes in those dark moments like those that Ed Penhoet suffered in the early days of his start-up. These are the times when Builders don’t feel successful—at least not in the traditionally defined terms of popularity, wealth, or influence. Yet they nevertheless choose to remain committed to what they care about despite success, not because of it. When faced with what they discover is so important to them, they summon the courage (or foolishness) to persist because it matters to them.

It’s Time to Redefine Success

In fact, we discovered that for most Builders, the culturally accepted measures of success that you find in the dictionary have never been what they were seeking. The standard

[†] The terms “Builders” and “enduringly successful people” are used interchangeably in this book to describe people who define their own success and have achieved lasting impact in their field for at least 20 years.

description must have been written for budding sociopaths. It is defined as

1. The achievement of something planned or attempted.
2. Impressive achievement, especially the attainment of fame, wealth, or power.
3. Something that turns out as planned or intended.
4. Somebody who has a record of achievement, especially in gaining wealth, fame, or power.¹

Notice that nowhere in the dictionary definitions do you find any reference to finding meaning, fulfillment, happiness, and lasting relationships. No mention of feeling fully alive while engaged and connected with a calling that matters to you. No thoughts about creating a legacy of service to the world. Yet those are all realities that people who have lasting success say they value most in life and work.

For Builders, the real definition of success is a life and work that brings personal fulfillment and lasting relationships and makes a difference in the world in which they live. The question is why the rest of us tolerate any other definition.

Folks who chase a fantastic but vain hope for fame, wealth, and power—for its own sake—may even achieve it, only to become miserable and pathetic people. Not that there is anything wrong with that, as Seinfeld would say, but we think that the current definition of success is a potentially toxic prescription for your life and work. It is a description that makes you feel more like a failure than a success if it's the standard against which all meaning in your life is measured.

Sure, you might be a little strange if you did not enjoy the “impressive achievement” of something that you “planned or intended.” But when you talk with Builders, you will hear that

The current definition of success is a potentially toxic prescription for your life and work.

wealth, fame, and power are not actually goals or accomplishments for most of them. Money and recognition are external factors—they are outcomes of passionately working often on an entirely different objective that is often a personal cause or calling, like Ed Penhoet's drive to find successful treatments for cancer. He chose a way of life that embodied his passions, making a difference to him and the world.

It was not just service or ambition; it was both at the same time. Penhoet's passion was also his service to the world. On his journey from academic life to entrepreneur, and now in his current role running a nonprofit, Penhoet channeled his passion and made it a business that changed the status quo in medical research.

And, yes, in case you're wondering, Penhoet and his colleagues eventually enjoyed many of the traditional measures of success, too, such as becoming wealthy, but these measures weren't his focus. Penhoet's lifelong cause inspired the creation of Chiron, the company he cofounded in 1981 and where he ended up serving as CEO longer than any other person ever had in that industry. Chiron is a \$1.9 billion biotech innovator, and today, Penhoet is well into his second career as director of his friend Gordon Moore's \$5 billion foundation, where he's supporting the sciences, education, and the environment.

To Achieve Success, First Abandon Popular Delusions

When you feel pressure to pursue the elusive outcomes of traditional success, it's often driven by the burden of making a living, pleasing others, or achieving status. Ironically, it appears that success often will fade, vanish, or become the dungeon of your soul unless it is not your primary objective. Builders like Penhoet tell us that when success just means wealth, fame, and power, it doesn't last and it

isn't satisfying. If he had let a culturally promoted definition of success be his guide, he doesn't think he would have ever achieved the success that matters to him.

Instead, people who seek to build long-term success by their own definition—Builders—insist that success may never come without a compelling personal commitment to something you care about and would be willing to do with or without counting on wealth, fame, power, or public acceptance as an outcome.

In reality, most Builders are hailed as leaders in their field usually long after they commit to their calling or to a particular way of living in the world that holds special meaning to them. The mainstream media stories about successful people—along with wishful thinking about instant gratification or a magic pill for success—may make it seem as if they were overnight successes, but it rarely happens that way.

Builders mostly toil with every ounce of their energy and persistence, with heart and soul, for their whole lives. They become lovers of an idea they are passionate about—for years and years—creating something that continually seduces them into obsessing over every detail, losing track of the passage of time. In a real sense, it's something that they'd be willing to do for free, for its own sake. Quincy Jones wouldn't give up music if it wasn't popular, nor would Mandela rest until apartheid was crushed. It's hard to retire from an obsession. Jack Welch is no more likely to stop teaching his brand of business than Maya Angelou is likely to stop writing poetry or teaching. They do it because it matters to them.

After being at it for years, and with the coincidence of whatever "it" is becoming popular, success came for some of them as defined in the dictionary. They may now have success as hailed by the culture, but this is a serendipitous outcome rather than an original goal.

Betrayed by Success and Searching for Meaning

Considering this mismatch between the dictionary definition of success and what you as an individual and your organization might actually care about, it shouldn't be a surprise that you might yearn to "make something of yourself," only to find that you're strangely dissatisfied along the way because what you are working so hard for doesn't really matter to you. Indeed, too many people at some point in their lives set goals and go on to achieve them, often brilliantly, only to find that they are mysteriously disappointed, empty, and unhappy.

Could this be why, despite acquiring material luxuries undreamed of even a few decades ago, there is a rising epidemic of clinical depression and suicide among the wealthiest citizens in America, China, and other rapidly growing economies? The World Health Organization predicts that depression will be the second leading cause of disability by 2020—a prediction that is, well, depressing.

How is it possible to achieve the very definition of success and yet find happiness so fleeting? Builders say it's a simple matter of being cheated by the absence of knowing what really matters to you in your life, not just for today, but for today and for the long term. This is why the people who win the lottery have such a terrible track record of staying happy or sober two years later. It's one of the many reasons why nine out of ten start-up companies fail to sustain themselves for the long term and why it's tough to keep a career on track for decades.

It's why most governments are fraught with needless acrimony and inefficiency, said Vaira Vike-Friberg, president of Latvia. A former psychology professor at the University of Montreal, she noted that, "All too often, legislators launch their grand plans before making sure there is a shared sense of what success means or whether it matters when we get there."

This also may be a reason why many partnerships, including marriages, don't have happy endings. And it may

be why Hollywood celebrity becomes synonymous with short-term relationships and long-term addictions.

You read about these folks all the time in *People Magazine* and the *Wall Street Journal*—the lifestyles of the rich, the famous, and the unbelievably disappointed. These are the people who so many of us aspire to be, and yet even these idols find themselves incomplete, feeling much less excited than when they had nothing but the promise of their imagined future.

You either know a person like this, or you are one.

To avoid this poignant dilemma, be careful what you wish for. When achievement for you or your organization comes without meaning, then it doesn't last. Builders experience a success that does not leave them half full, as can often be the case for those who pursue only material treasures or other short-term measures instead of their own internal definition of lasting fulfillment.

Three Essential Elements of Success Built to Last

In hundreds of interviews, we learned that Builders find lasting success when at least three essential elements come into alignment in their lives and work.

The first essential element is *Meaning*. What you do must matter deeply to you in a way that you as an individual define meaning. It's something that you're so passionate about that you lose all track of time when you do it. It's something that you are willing to recruit other people to, but will do it despite criticism and perhaps even secretly do it for free. In fact, you could not be paid to not do it.

"Success is about building lasting relationships and serving others," said Azim Premji, chairman of Wipro in India. He took the reins of the Bangalore-based firm at age 21 when his father died, then turned it from a fledgling hydrogenated cooking fat producer into an almost \$2 billion information technology services company.² When it comes to creating

lasting success in your life and career, Premji asked, “Don’t you think that building a meaningful lasting relationship with yourself about what matters to you is a good place to start?”

We’ll look at the many ways that Builders strive to build Meaning in Part I, “Meaning—How Successful People Stay Successful.”

The second essential element is *ThoughtStyle*—a highly developed sense of accountability, audacity, passion, and responsible optimism. We call it ThoughtStyle. Steve Jobs told us in an interview back before his famous ad campaign: Enduringly successful people “think different.” They have a talent, yes, and perhaps some even have a genius. But they also have a ThoughtStyle that supports their special accomplishments.

As Gerard Kleisterlee put it, “When you can organize your thinking around creating real value, and your thoughts remain focused on what is important to creating that value despite all the incoming distractions, crisis, and complexity crashing down all around you...then you’re really lucky because you have a sustainable model” for your work and your life. Kleisterlee is chairman, president, and CEO of Royal Philips Electronics in the Netherlands, with over 160,000 employees in 60 countries and 2005 sales of more than \$37 billion.

We will focus on ThoughtStyles of Builders in Part II, “ThoughtStyles—Extreme Makeovers Start in Your Head.”

The third element is *ActionStyle*: enduringly successful people find effective ways to take action. This is hardly mind-blowing news, but there is more to ActionStyle than first meets the eye. Many Builders told us about times in their lives when they had a clear sense of meaning, but found it almost impossible to make things happen—to turn meaning and thought into action. Be thoughtful about meaning, but don’t let that paralyze you.

When you envision something that is meaningful to you that seems to be ideal or perhaps even perfect, sometimes “it’s like a beautiful pastry—too lovely to ruin by eating it,” said

Alice Waters, the restaurateur and pioneer in organic cooking who, through an initiative called the *Edible Schoolyard*,³ is determined to change the world one mouthful at a time.

Anyone who has “a perfect picture in his or her head of what must be done and what matters” also knows that the results of acting on that idea might “never be as perfect as that image in their mind,” Waters said. The reason this happens is because moving from thought to action puts idealism and beauty at risk as “your dream might lose something in the translation!”

Ultimately, “it’s about the pleasure of work itself—we’ve almost completely forgotten about that. The quality of loving the work is one of the most important values that we can bring to people,” Waters said with an appreciative eye on the talented chefs who were passionately tossing, chopping, and stirring lunch in her award-winning restaurant, *Chez Pannise*. They looked like sculptors as they arranged individual masterpieces on each plate.

“Do it because it’s worth doing even if you can’t quite make it as perfect as your original fantasy,” said Jack Jia, who grew up “with nothing but a head full of dreams” in Chengdu in China’s Sichuan Province. Today, he’s a serial entrepreneur, president of the Hua Yuan Science and Technology Association, and founder and CEO of Baynote. “If you refuse to do something you believe in, your mind will never leave you alone. It just will torment you. If it really matters, you might as well get on with it despite the problems that will occur when you take on a new challenge. Any new beginning, anything creative, will get messy in parts,” he said. “If you do it with your eyes wide open, with discipline, it will only get better when you do it more.”

That’s the way it is, Builders told us countless times. “So, get moving and get on with what you really care about doing.”

Without discipline, some overly ambitious folks encounter the opposite problem—all action and no meaning—

cautioned Singapore-based entrepreneur and government advisor, Peng Ong. People who find action irresistible for its own sake often discover they're taking the wrong hill. "You've got to get yourself and your team all on the same page about what success will require of you. Think about what matters and the people you are serving first. Then, organize your thoughts and creativity around that to make it happen." Taking action without stopping first to determine what you hold meaningful is a big reason things don't last. Builders use a special goal-setting process and even encourage contention to help them achieve those aspirations.

We'll focus on these and other *ActionStyles* in Part III, "ActionStyles—Turning Passion Into Action."

Three Simple, But Not Easy, Pieces that Must Fit Together

In our journey toward *Success Built to Last*, we discovered that these three elements—an individually defined Meaning, a creative ThoughtStyle, and an effective ActionStyle—when you have them in alignment, form the foundation on which you build and sustain the experience of success. It seems that you might not need all three aligned to achieve short-term ambitions or success as traditionally defined, but the more that you pull them together, the more likely it is that your success (that must be defined for you by you) will keep going decade after decade.

One way to remember these concepts is to think of these elements as the three primary colors of success built to last. When you overlap the primary colors of red, blue, and green,⁴ what do you get? A bright, white light. If there is a "right" target to go after, this is it. Builders don't seek goals for their own sake; they find something that holds great *meaning* for them first, so meaning is on top, informing the rest of the model. Builders manage their *thoughts* in ways that keep them on track and then take relentless *action* in

pursuit of what matters to them (meaning). The great opportunity in life and work is to make that target in the center as big as possible by bringing all three circles together and increasing the degree of overlap.



Primary colors of success built to last

Become consciously aware of what matters to you and then rally your *thought* and *action* to support your definition of *meaning*. That is what we call alignment. As these elements come together to constitute a single target of white light, it gets easier to hit the mark in your life and actually experience success that lasts.

Become consciously aware of what matters to you and then rally your thought and action to support your definition of meaning. That is what we call alignment.

Of course, this is a simple model for a very complex and often challenging process. The greater tendency is for these three circles to drift apart wildly out of sync. Without continuous effort, many forces at work and at home make it difficult to keep the alignment together. In the immortal words of Peter Drucker, “The only things that evolve by themselves (in an organization) are disorder, friction, and malperformance.”⁵

Teen Detective Meets Ravishing Reporter

When Jane Bryant Quinn, the money columnist and author of *Smart and Simple Financial Strategies for Busy People*, was growing up, she dreamed of becoming Nancy Drew, the heroic teen detective in the Carolyn Keene novels. This beloved character had been solving mysteries since the time when women weren’t allowed to do that for a living.

But when Quinn ran across comic strip sleuth Brenda Starr, she traded up on her fantasy. As the glamorous journalist for a daily newspaper, unapologetically called *The Flash*, “Brenda travels the world solving mysteries, unearthing scoops, and stealing the heart of almost every man she meets.”⁶ Brenda was a career woman before the phrase was even acceptable, let alone fashionable—a smart, competitive, ravishing redhead created by Dale (Dahlia) Messick in 1940 when it wasn’t likely for a woman to get a job like that.

“Sounded like the best job in town when I was a teenager,” Quinn told us, “A life of adventure, boys, and making a difference all at once.” So, when she graduated with a liberal arts degree, she showed up at the doorstep of *Newsweek*.

“It was still legal at that time not to allow a woman to be a reporter,” she said. Undaunted, Quinn worked at the mail desk. Her ambition was to work in journalism. That’s what mattered to her—to have an extraordinary life and

bring the truth to people. “I would live into my dream” even if the world wasn’t ready for it yet, she winked.

Quinn made herself more than useful, working behind the scenes on so many stories that she became indispensable to the reporting staff. Eventually, she took advantage of her growing interests in business and finance with a sort of Brenda Starr sense of righteousness about uncovering the dirt, dangers, and rewards of investing—a mission that makes her eyes shine with passion (and sometimes flash with rage) as much today as it did decades ago. That’s success built to last.

If Quinn had given in to believing that the only thing that had meaning was an egoistic need to be Brenda Starr on her first day at *Newsweek*—and if she thought that was the only way to turn her dream into action—then that would have been a tough target to hit. Such an attitude would have produced a minimal overlap of the three circles and a small bulls-eye. That would have made it terribly easy to miss the mark, become frustrated, and land in another profession. She might have missed her calling.

That’s not to say that you should settle for less. Quinn would argue that she didn’t settle at all. That’s the point. The toughest thing is to get out of your own way, even if life is incredibly unfair. Things seem to work out better for remarkable people when meaning, thought, and action overlap to create an abundant target for their dreams. Quinn realized that Brenda Starr wasn’t a destination; it was a way of life. She went for a bigger long-term prize. Quinn’s dedication to Starr’s sense of purpose rather than a job title got her on the playing field early, where she could build her skills and demonstrate her talent and creativity.

It didn’t bring her popularity in the beginning. A woman advising you about your money didn’t get much support 30 years ago. But Jane Bryant Quinn’s discipline to trust her head and her heart—to stay wide awake and bring them

*Most of us worry more
about being loved than
being what we love.*

into alignment without relying on external adulation—freed her to develop passions that inevitably made her successful by her own definition. She worried less about being loved than being what she loved, and that

meant many things to her: a fighter who would unearth injustice, a bestselling author, a wife, and a mother of five. In all parts of her life, Quinn brought together the domains of meaning, thought, and action and, as a result, she went from *great* to *lasting* and helped change the face of financial journalism in America.

Being what we love means doing what matters on and off the job. When Hector de J. Ruiz was busy starting his career and building a life with his wife in the early days, he found himself deeply troubled by the plight of young Hispanics in east Los Angeles. One of the things that greatly mattered to him was the notion that he “always had somebody that was willing to help [him]. That meant a lot to me,” he said. “So [at one point], I finally kind of grew up,” which to Ruiz meant that he would dedicate himself to helping the disadvantaged go to college despite the personal cost (and even when he had not long ago graduated himself).

“I was making very little money,” Ruiz said. But over time, “my wife and I both realized that it seemed like the more of it we did, the easier it got,” he said. “A lot of people in east L.A. feel like the Hispanic community is not capable of being able to perform well in some of the things that are required to be effective today in technology. You do a survey of people in east L.A. and they tell you that they are afraid of mathematics. And so I go and talk to these high school kids about the fact that the people who invented the zero were the Maya Indians in Mexico. The people who had one of the most sophisticated architectures in the

world were the Aztecs. All of a sudden, you can see these kids beginning to develop a sense of self-worth, and that's what these kids are missing," said Ruiz, who today is CEO of Advanced Micro Devices, with 2005 net sales of \$5.8 billion. (He's really good at math, too.) "To be able to in some way contribute to that [before even his own traditionally defined success was assured] has been incredibly rewarding for both my wife and I."

From Great to Lasting

When we first started sharing these principles during the development of *Success Built to Last*, some people feared—and others hoped—we would impose on them celebrity personalities as role models for success, or at the other extreme, we would expect you to become selfless and perfect, whatever that means. That may be a nice aspiration, but this book is not about worshipping the accomplishments of inaccessible, larger-than-life overachievers. That simply doesn't work. Your enduring success is not about following anybody else's roadmap, goals, or achievements. It must be constructed on a foundation of very personal choices that only you can make. None of the people you will meet in the coming pages are being offered as folks you ought to imitate. Take them or leave them, our pledge is to share with you some practices that Builders we met had in common and that work for them. What is more important is that we hope to stimulate a probing dialog about your lasting success and creating a life that matters (to you).

In the process, you may discover you are currently tracking some definition of success never explicitly challenged. It would be a shame for this to remain the unconscious default of your life. Until you compare what really matters to you with what may haunt you about the popular notion of success, your existing concept of both could remain the invisible tyrant you unknowingly resent.

If any of this feels uncomfortable at some point, it could be because of an unexplored gap between what deeply matters to you and what you think the world expects of you. When meaning and success sit together side-by-side out there fully illuminated for your consideration, you suddenly are in a stronger position to demand an answer to the question, “Why am I not doing what matters to me right now?”

It’s all too easy to dismiss this line of inquiry. Yet if there was one thing we saw that Builders hold to be true, this would be it: Although many things in life and work are temporary, and nothing seems to last, Builders believe that *meaning* actually does last—forever. They said that what they do (or do not do) while they are here matters. They feel that it might even matter beyond their lifetime.

Let’s see what else you have in common with people who have *success built to last*.

I N D E X

A

- accountability, audacity and, 177-178
- achieving success, abandoning popular delusions, 20-21
- ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), 115-116
- actions, 206-208, 233
- ActionStyle, 24-26, 233
 - research results, 236-237
- additive constants, 250
- Advanced Micro Devices, 31
- adversity, 127-129
 - Eziba, 140
 - feelings, 133-134
 - learning from, 131-133, 136
 - mistakes, 136-137
 - persistence, 134-135
 - tragedy, 152-153
 - weakness, 146-147
 - Welch, Jack, 137-138
- age, research results, 238
- alignment, 27, 202-203, 213, 243
 - incentives, 214-215
 - secret of, 215
- teams
 - recruiting*, 203-204
 - you're only as good as your people*, 205
- The Amber Chand Collection: Global Gifts for Peace and Understanding, 140-141
- ambiguity, 176
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 115-116
- Apple, 103
- archetype positioning statements, 245-246
- arts, 56
- attention, 196-197
- attitude segments, research results, 232-234
- audacity, accountability and, 177-178
- authenticity, 170-171
 - being true to yourself, 171-173
- authority, 243
- avoiding delusions of grandeur, 191

B

- balance, 53-55, 235
- Barat, Krishna, 61
- Baynote, 25
- behavioral point of view (BPOV),
245-246
- behaviors, 206-208
- being good at whatever you do,
120-122
- being right, 51
- betrayed by success, 22-23
- BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious
Goals), 170, 174-175
 authenticity, 170-171
- Bidwell Training Center, 56
- Big Hairy Audacious Goals
(BHAGs), 170, 174-175
- blame, 156
- BPOV (behavioral point of view),
245-246
- Bragg, Paul, 132
- brainstorming, 197-198
- Braniff Airways, 114
- Bright Shiny Objects (BSOs),
90-94
- Brin, Sergey, 61
- BSOs (Bright Shiny Objects),
90-94
- Builders, 5, 18
 failures, 8-9
 leaders, 21
 letting go of what doesn't
 work, 156-158
 passion, 40-41
 personality, 112
 success, defined, 19
 weakness, 147
- Bush, George H. W., Sr.,
80-81, 120

C

- Campbell, Joseph, 151
- capitalism, 139
- celebrities, 23
- change, 242
- charisma, personality, 112-113
- Chiron, 20
- Churchill, Winston, 46
 authenticity, 171
- chutzpah, 177-178
- Clancy, Tom, 89-90
- clock-builders, 5
- commitment, 117
- comparison group, 219
 exploratory field research, 222
- confidence, 242
- consciousness, 217
- content analysis, OTCs, 241-245
- contention, 188-190, 243
 attention and intention,
 196-197
 brainstorming, 197-198
 creative contention, 190
 mastering, 194-196
 rules for, 192-193
 harvesting, 235-236
 time and place for, 193-194
- core ideology, 76
- core values, 42, 76-82
- courage to move forward,
109-111
- creative contention, 190
 mastering, 194-196
 rules for, 192-193
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, 39
- culture, 242

D

Darwinism, 139
 death by PowerPoint, 41-43
 defeat, 140. *See also* adversity
 demographics, 225
 research results, 237-239
 depression, 22
 dreams, popularity of, 115-117
 dyslexia, 148

E

earning luck, 169
 ecosystems, 211
Edible Schoolyard, 25
 effectiveness, 198-199
 elements of success built to last,
 23, 26-27
 ActionStyle, 24-26
 Meaning, 23-24
 ThoughtStyle, 24
 “End in Mind,” 181
 endowing others with portfolios
 of passions, 55-56
 enduring success, 31-32
 enduringly successful people, 5
 environment, 211-213
 excellence, 242
*Execution: The Discipline of
 Getting Things
 Done*, 36
 exercise, 132
 exploratory field research,
 219-220
 comparison group, 222
 historical perspective, 221
 sample selection, 220-221
 exploratory inquiry, 239-241
 explorer mentality, 173-175
 external joy, 95
 Eziba, 140

F

failure, 137, 242
 harvesting, 236
 versus learning, 135
 failure, 136. *See also* adversity
 failures, 8
 fear, 37, 243
 public speaking, 153
 feedback, 137, 179-181
 feelings, adversity, 133-134
 financial planners, 46
 finding out what’s wrong with
 us, 123-124
 flow experience, 39-40
*Flow: The Psychology of
 Optimal Experience*, 39
 focus, 52-53, 242
 balance, 53-55
 Focus: HOPE, 201-202
 forgiveness, 158

G

Gandhi, Mahatma, 153-155
 Gates, Melinda, 65
 GE (General Electric), 182-183
 gender, research results, 237
 Genius of the AND, 101-102
 globalization, 242
 goals, 169-170
 bad goals, 181-182
 BHAGs, 170, 174-175
 authenticity, 170-171
 keeping your goals honest, 184
 Secret Life of Goals, 182-184
 size of, 178-179
 Google, paying for passionate
 distractions, 60-62
Google News, 61
 Graham, Billy, 81
 Grameen Bank Project, 63

grandeur, avoiding delusions
 of, 191
 gratitude, 243
 greatness, 153-156
 Greenspan, Alan, 45
 growth, 242

H

harvesting
 contention, 235-236
 failure, 236
 health, passion, 38
 heroes, 146-147
 Hill, Napoleon, 205
 historical perspective, 219
 exploratory field research, 221
 honesty, goals, 184
 Hua Yuan Science and
 Technology
 Association, 25
 humor, 97-98
 Huntsman, Jon, 157

I

"I don't know," 207-208
 Ibarra, Herminia, 61
 IdeaMap, 223
 identity narratives, 245-246
 ideology, core ideology, 76
 impact scores, 250
World Success Survey,
 224-225, 251-253
 incentives, 214-215, 243
 innovation, 139-142, 242
 integrity, 74-75, 77, 80
 Intel Corporation, 183
 intention, 196-197
 internal joy, 95

J

joy, 95-97
 "just one thing," 52-53
 balance, 53-55

K

keeping silent, 179-181
 Kennedy, John F., 175
 King, Jr. Martin Luther, authen-
 ticity, 172
 Kitchens, James A., 95
 Knowledge@Wharton, 223
World Success Survey
instructions for participa-
tion, 248-249
invitation to
participate, 247
"menu of success," 249
 Koko, 111
 Korbelt, Josef, 119
 Kroc, Ray, 174

L

language, 209-211
 leaders, Builders, 21
 leadership, 38, 242
 Strossen, Nadine, 117
The Leadership Challenge, 40
 leadership training, eulogies, 93
Learned Optimism, 45
 learning
 from adversity, 136
 versus failure, 135
 learning disabilities, 148, 151
Let My People Go Surfing, 97
 letting go of what doesn't work,
 156-157
 life that matters, 18
 lives, transforming, 62
 Grameen Bank Project, 63

Loesch, Chuck, 246
 losers, 142
 love. *See* passion
 Lucent Technologies, 142-143
 luck, earning, 169

M

Manchester Bidwell Corporation, 56
 Mandela Effect, 2
 mastering creative contention, 194-196
 McNair, Denise, 118
 Meaning, 23-24, 233
 research results, 234-235
 searching for, 22-23
 measurability, 242
 measuring
 risk, 175-177
 what matters, 179-181
 media, 142-143
 mind-sets, research results, 232-234
 miracles, 213
 mistakes, learning from, 136-137
 MJI (Moskowitz Jacobs, Inc.), 222, 246
 money, 20
 Moore's Law, 54
 Moskowitz Jacobs, Inc. (MJI), 222, 246
 Moskowitz, Howard, 223, 247

N

National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, 109
 NBA (National Basketball Association), 92
 negative values, 250
 new ventures, 243
Newsweek, 28

O

optimism, 43-47
 optimistic attributional thought style, 45
 OTC (Organizational Theme Codes), 241-245

P

Page, Larry, 61
 pain, 242
 greatness and, 155-156
 partnerships, 22
 passion, 21, 35-37, 117-120, 243
 Builders, 40-41
 death by PowerPoint, 41-43
 don't treat passion like trivial pursuits, 72-73
 flow experience, 40
 health, 38
 looking for, 102-104
 making your passion take flight, 113-114
 optimism, 43-47
 payment for, 60-62
 peripheral thinking, 56-60
 personal capital, 36
 philanthropy, 63-65
 portfolio of passions, 52, 58
 Patagonia, Inc., 97
 payment for passionate distractions, 60-62
 peace baskets, 139
 perfectionism, 134-135
 peripheral thinking, passion, 56-60
 persistence, 134-135
 personal capital, 36
 personal success versus professional success, 231
 personality, 112-113

pessimism, 46
 pessimists, 45
 philanthropy, passion, 63-65
 planning, 169-170
 explorer mentality, 173-175
 popularity of your dreams,
 115-117
 Porras Principle, 206-208
 portfolio of passions, 52, 58
 endowing others with, 55-56
 positive psychology, 45
 positive thinking, when positive
 thinking doesn't work,
 129-131
 positive values, 250
 Posner, Barry, 40
 POV, 243
 preparation, 243
 priorities, successful people, 229
 professional success versus per-
 sonal success, 231

Q

Quixote, Don, 141

R

Reagan, Ronald, 77
 recognition, 20, 243
 recruiting teams, 203-204
 regression analysis, *World
 Success Survey*, 224-
 225
 regression model, 249, 251
 relationships, 204
 research
 BPOV (behavioral point of
 view), 245-246
 conclusions, 225-226
 content analysis, OTC,
 241-245

exploratory field research,
 219-220
 comparison group, 222
 historical perspective, 221
 sample selection, 220-221
 exploratory inquiry, 239-241
 regression model, 249, 251
 results
 ActionStyle, 236-237
 attitude segments, 232-234
 demographics, 237-239
 Meaning, 234-235
 *professional success versus
 personal success*, 231
 successful people, 227-231
 ThoughtStyle, 235-236
World Success Survey, 220,
 222-224, 246-247
 impact scores, 251, 253
 instructions to participate,
 248-249
 *invitation to
 participate*, 247
 menu of success, 249
 *regression analysis and
 impact scores*, 224-225

rewards, 243

Rich Dad, Poor Dad, 38

risk, 242

 measuring in small steps,
 175-177

Robbins, Tom, 156

Ross, Frank, 55-56

Rosten, Leo, 177

Royal Philips Electronics, 24

S

Safeco, 188
 The Sage Project, 106
 sample selection, 218
 exploratory field research,
 220-221
 satyagraha, 154
 searching for meaning, 22-23
 Secret Life of Goals, 182-184
 Seduction of Competence, 94-95
 self-esteem, 124-125
 self-improvement, 130
 Seligman, Martin, 45
 serendipity, 167-168, 174, 184
 setbacks. *See* adversity
 Siebert, Al, language, 210
 silent screams, 88
 reasons for giving up, 89
 material objects, 90-94
 *not considered a worthy
 career*, 89-90
 Seduction of Competence,
 94-95
 Tyranny of the OR,
 101-102
 simplifying, 75
 skills, 243
*Smart and Simple Financial
 Strategies for Busy
 People*, 28
The Soul in the Computer, 43
 Southwest Airlines, 113-114
 spin, 50-51
 Stewart, Ali, 65
 stakeholders, 242
 Starr, Brenda, 28-29
 strengths, exchanging with other
 people, 147-150
Student, 70

success

 achieving, 20-21
 betrayed by, 22-23
 defined, 19
 enduring success, 31-32
 success built to last, 26-27
 elements of. *See* elements of
 success built to last
 successful people
 priorities, 229
 research results, 227-231

T

Talking to Ducks, 95
 teams, 243-244
 recruiting, 203-204
 you're only as good as your
 people, 205
 Thompson, Bonita, 233
 Thompson, Mark, 1, 50, 70-71,
 82, 161
 thought, 233
 ThoughtStyle, 24, 233
 research results, 235
 harvesting contention,
 235-236
 harvesting failure, 236
The Three Princes of Serendip,
 167-168
 tragedy, 152-153
 transforming lives, 62
 Grameen Bank Project, 63
 traps, 89
 material objects, 90-94
 not a worthy career, 89-90
 Seduction of Competence,
 94-95
 Tyranny of the OR, 101-102
 tripping points, 143

true to yourself, 171-173
trust, 242
Twain, Mark, 47
20% rule, 61
Tyranny of the OR, 101-102

V

validation, you can't wait for
 a standing ovation,
 99-100
values, 242
 core values, 42, 76-82
victims, 159, 162
Virgin, 70
Virgin Atlantic, 71
vision, 196

W-X

Walpole, Horace, 167
weakness, 146-147
 learning from, 151
 managing, 148-150
Wiesel, Elie, 158-159
Wind, Jerry, 246
Wipro in India, 23
World Economic Forum, 1, 10
World Success Survey, 220-224,
 246-247
 impact scores, 251, 253
 instructions to participate,
 248-249
 invitation to participate, 247
 menu of success, 249
 regression analysis and impact
 scores, 224-225
Wozniak, Steve, 103
Wrigley, William, 192

Y-Z

Yoda, 131