

PITFALLS OF INSTANT SUCCESS

By Rick Boxx

In these days when gloom and doom seem to attract attention, when negative news receives so much coverage, our own focus is often directed toward the fear of failure. But what happens when we achieve success – too much success?

With the so-called “viral” nature of the Internet, in which an idea can achieve almost instantaneous, global saturation – enhanced by the 24/7 access available to us – many people have become rich or famous in a very short period of time. A couple of years ago, for instance, a man produced a video that captured worldwide attention, reportedly reaching 100 million people in a single week. How would you like to experience that kind of success?

In this individual’s case, he discovered unimagined success can be vastly overrated. His unrestrained attempt to capture and leverage this instant success led to extreme exhaustion and a public meltdown. Regrettably, this resulted in damaging the very cause he was promoting.

We can think of many other examples of successful people that ultimately failed: Entertainers who became household names overnight, only to let success go to their heads and just as quickly become forgotten; business executives who tried to take ethical shortcuts to perpetuate success; star athletes whose careers were like shooting stars, visible one minute but disappearing the next.

Many of us, with enough hard work and determination, will experience periods in life when success, exciting opportunities, and even wealth can tempt us to push beyond our limits. Fearful of having a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity slip away, never to return, we press beyond our mental and physical capacities. We could end up like the Internet entrepreneur, exhausted and publicly humiliated. Or we could cause irreparable harm to important relationships, not only where we work but also in our homes.

If success grabs you unexpectedly, pace yourself. Restraint will result in a healthier and better long-term result. The Bible offers wisdom we should consider:

Practice restraint. Caught up in the moment, when success seems like the snowball rolling downhill, picking up speed and size, we feel inclined to ride along. Momentum can become intoxicating. However, Proverbs 23:4 teaches, *“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint.”*

Prepare for the future. When we taste success, it becomes easy to assume it will last forever. In reality, however, today’s hot trend becomes tomorrow’s afterthought. A better approach is to use success as a springboard for long-term prosperity. Seriously consider issues such as, how fast should we grow? Can we keep pace with the demand if it continues? Jesus said, *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?”* (Luke 14:28).

Prevent ego buildup. Success can lead to an inflated sense of self. That is a dangerous trap, one we can avoid only when we anticipate it in advance. In Romans 12:3, the apostle Paul advised his readers, *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.”*

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CBMC INTERNATIONAL: Jim Firnstahl, President
2850 N. Swan Road, Suite 160 ▪ Tucson, Arizona 85712 ▪ U.S.A.
TEL.: 520-334-1114 ▪ E-MAIL: mmanna@cbmcint.org

Web site: www.cbmcint.org Please direct any requests or change of address to: jmarple@cbmcint.org

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. We often worry about failure, but have you ever worried about how you might handle great success? Explain your answer.
2. Have you ever known someone – perhaps even yourself – who became a “victim” of their own success? What did this look like?
3. Why do you think success can be so difficult for some people to handle?
4. Do you agree that determining in advance to practice restraint in the face of great success could lead to better long-term results than attempting to “seize the moment” and squeeze out every ounce of profit and productivity the instant it arrives? Why or why not?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 11:28, 15:6, 27:21, 27:24, 28:25; Matthew 6:19-21, 33-34