CUSTOMER SERVICE | LEADERSHIP | PERSONAL GROWTH | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

K.O.R.E. Elements of Success

Knowledge, Opportunity, Risk and Excellence, 4 principle elements of success.

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Over the years I have had the privilege of working with many successful people. Some were workers who worked for others but accomplished much, and some were leaders of both small and large businesses. I began to think about the characteristics that they all seemed to share and I found that there were common core elements in each of their situations. I want to focus our thoughts on each of these four elements of success. While these were originally written for a business audience, the principles can be easily translated to cover yourself or any group or organization you belong to.

Knowledge. Before one begins down the road of success, they need knowledge. Today, even jobs that once required little working knowledge or intelligence now see the need for training as those jobs become more dependent on technology. We will cover the importance of knowledge and ways to get more for yourself and the others in your business or organization.

Opportunity. One element that you see over and over again in our country is that we are indeed the "land of opportunity." It is great to be able to live in a country where people can pursue their dreams, and where it is possible to reach them. But some people have a hard time seeing opportunity. We will focus on ways to find and take advantage of opportunities.

Risk. Once a person sees opportunity, it is up to them to step through the open door and go for it. Yet many stop at the edge, unwilling to take a risk. Many times, often actually, taking advantage of opportunities requires risk. We will cover the importance of taking risks and to understand the difference between taking risks and being "risky."

Excellence. Businesses, organizations, and people who succeed are the ones who operate from a base of excellence. Think of Nordstrom's as a perfect example. We'll cover the importance of excellence and ways to raise your excellence quotient.

Knowledge

The starting point in the elements of success is Knowledge. This is becoming increasingly so as we continue deeper into the information and technology age. There simply is no turning back now. Even jobs that used to take very little knowledge require some because of automation etc. So here are some thoughts on ways to increase your knowledge and become more successful.

Become a self-learner.

I have met very few successful people who were not also self-learners. They love learning. Are you a reader? Reading is one of the most enjoyable ways to learn more. Or you can join what Zig Ziglar calls "Automobile University." All you do is go to the local library and check out some tapes on a topic of your choice and start going to school on your way to work. As you grow personally you will begin to rise above others who simply are not in the process of learning.

Job-specific training. I think everybody, regardless of his or her level in the organization, should be continually trained in their job. Someone once said that it is more expensive to not train employees and let them stay on the job than to train them. How true. What kind of ongoing job-training are you taking. If you aren't the boss, then go to your boss and ask him what kind of training he or she would like you to have and then tell them that you would be glad to go get it. If you are the boss, then what kind of training should you give to each of your employees? Maybe it is time to revisit the budget for employee training. Chances are, your competitor is.

Advanced education. Many of the local schools, both undergraduate and graduate, are increasingly tailoring programs for those who are working full-time jobs. Maybe it is time to go back to school. They have programs that are one night a week or one week every four to six months. They even have programs where you go to the campus for six weeks a year. Maybe one of these is appropriate for you right now.
Is this possible or even reasonable? It sure is. I know many people who are actively involved in all three of the above.

Increasing you knowledge will not only help you perform better on the job, it will help you become a better person.

Opportunity

In the summer of 1996 I was able to tour a country that is not democratic. While I loved the people and the cultures, I was struck again by a deep appreciation for the fact that we are free here in the U.S. We are indeed the "Land of Opportunity." And that is the second element of success.

Not so much having opportunity, as that is rather inherent to our American system, but that we see opportunity, and then take advantage of opportunity.

The successful people who I have met and worked with are people who have an eye for opportunity. Is that something they are born with? Absolutely not!

If anything, being able to see opportunity is an attitude. Yes, wisdom is an important part, but if you believe there is nothing good under the sun, that there is no opportunity, then you won't achieve much.

Instead, it is an attitude that does not see any circumstance as a problem, but sees it as, you guessed it, an opportunity. A great achiever said, "There is never a money problem, only an idea problem." He saw opportunity, not a lack of funds, and he simply needed to find the way to take advantage of the opportunity!

So where do you begin? Right where you are. Take inventory of who you are, as an individual, a business, or an organization. Then ask the following questions. When you get the answers, it is simply a matter of follow through. That comes next when we talk about risk.

What opportunities do we have to get better? This is the growth question. When you look for how you can grow, and then pursue it, you're on your way!

What strengths do you have? What skills, talents, or personalities are your strong points? How can those be seen as an opportunity to grow? When you operate out of your strengths, you have a much better chance of seizing opportunity and being successful.

What does your market need? This is a perfect question to ask. If you can answer this, you will have enough opportunity to last for the rest of your life! Can you, with your strengths, meet any of the needs of the population you are trying to reach or serve? Their needs are your opportunities!

What is currently working? This is the "ride the wave" point. Take advantage of momentum. Don't settle for the good that you are experiencing. Ask if you can stretch further. Don't look at what ought to be successful, but go further with what is successful!

Risk

"A naval aviator told me that many pilots have died because they stayed with disabled aircraft. They preferred the familiarity of the cockpit to the unfamiliarity of the parachute, even though the cockpit was a deathtrap. Many people have seen their careers crash because they preferred the familiar but deadly old ways to the risky but rewarding new ways." So says Nido Qubein in Stairway to Success.

> **It is true that many people who have knowledge and the opportunity to see success, never do, simply because they are unwilling to take risks.**

As young people we are usually long on risk-taking but short on knowledge and opportunity. This is probably why you don't see many successful teens driving their own BMW's.

But by the time we are able to do something with our knowledge and opportunity, most of us are in relatively comfortable situations and decide that to pursue our dreams would be to simply risk too much. So we put off what lies in our hearts.

Yet most successful people achieve what they do because somewhere along the line they stepped out in faith and took a risk. Yes, many fail at this point, but at least they attempted greatness. And while many fail, many succeed tremendously and receive the reward, often helping many others as well.

Here are some thoughts to help you take risks and see great achievement in your life:

Count the cost of not risking. Most of us think of what we might lose if we risk, but what will we lose if we don't risk?

Realistically understand the worst case scenario. It usually isn't nearly as bad as we might assume, making it all the more worthwhile to risk. Most risks don't end up at the worst.

Calculate your risk. Since the risk isn't as much as we usually think it is, it helps to lie out the strategy beforehand. Then you know what you're up against and have a plan of action.

Prepare fully. What most often keeps us from risk is fear. One of the best ways to fight fear is to be fully prepared. This helps our minds to be rooted in fact rather than swayed by emotion.

Follow your dreams. They did a study and asked elderly people what their biggest regrets were. One of the top ones? That they didn't take more risks to follow their dreams. Go for it now!

Richard Bach says this in A Gift of Wings:

> *"Remember the high board at the swimming pool? After days of looking up at it, you finally climbed the wet steps to the platform. From there it was higher than ever. There were only two ways down: the steps to defeat or the dive to victory. You stood on the*

edge, shivering in the hot sun, deathly afraid. At last you leaned too far forward, it was too late for retreat, and you dived. The high board was conquered, and you spent the rest of the day diving. Climbing a thousand high boards, we demolish fear, and turn into human beings."

Excellence

Most people, if they have the drive and know where to look, can get knowledge. Everyone can take advantage of opportunity. A select few, relatively speaking, will take the risk needed to launch out to succeed. But what really sets the successful apart from the unsuccessful, or even just the average, is excellence.

In his book Raving Fans, Ken Blanchard says that many businesses have a false sense of security, thinking that they are successful, when in reality their customers don't view them as excellent, but rather as merely "no worse than the rest."

I would agree. Many of us settle for average, while a few choose excellence, in all areas, and go on to succeed far more that the rest of the crowd.

So what are some ideas to have excellence be your shining mark? Here are a few:

First, cultivate an attitude of excellence. Excellence must be your stated goal. Everyone in your business, school, or organization should know that excellence is the benchmark. You should desire it.

Second, define excellence. What does excellence look like for you or your group? This then, is the goal.

Here are some areas to begin looking at:

My personal life. Do I strive for excellence in my personal life? Do I know what areas I can improve upon, and do I try to achieve excellence in those areas? What about these specific areas: Financial, spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual?

Customer service. Excellence is defined here not in how we think we are doing, but in how the customer thinks we are doing. Have you asked lately how you are doing in this area? Ask for suggestions on how to excel. Then you can work on achieving it.

Employee satisfaction. You will more likely achieve excellence if you have deeply satisfied employees. How can you make it an excellent place to work?

Product. Is your product excellent? Is your whole line? Perhaps you may want to sell fewer, but much better, items. It's great to be associated with excellent products.

Atmosphere. What does your home, store or office look, sound, and smell like? Is it a help or hindrance?

I encourage you to think about these things, and even brainstorm with your family or staff. The results could be excellence!

Chris Widener is an example of how anyone can overcome any odds to achieve a successful life and help others achieve the same. Chris has overcome many obstacles... living through his father dying suddenly when he was four, being sent away from his family to live with relatives at age nine and becoming involved with drugs and alcohol by the age of twelve. Chris overcame those obstacles and has for the last ten years worked with some of the most financially successful families in America, helping them to achieve both personally and professionally. Now he can do the same for you!