

Part 1. Read the statements below. Without discussing yet — just decide: does each one feel broadly true, broadly false, or somewhere in between? Mark your reaction, then compare with your partner.

- Most definitions of success we inherit were never actually chosen — they were absorbed.
- It is entirely possible to tick every box of a successful life and still feel quietly disappointed.
- Many people only discover what success means to them after achieving the version they were told to want.
- The fear of being seen as unambitious keeps more people on the wrong path than the fear of failure does.

Part 2. Choose one option in each pair and explain your choice.

A life that looks successful to others	or	a life that feels successful to you, even if no one else notices?
Reaching a clear, external milestone	or	a quiet sense of having lived well, with no specific marker?
Success measured by what you've built	or	success measured by who you've become?
Being respected for your achievements	or	being loved regardless of them?
A single, defining success	or	many small, cumulative ones?
Knowing you've 'made it'	or	never quite being sure, and being at peace with that?

Part 3. Read the statements. Say which feel true, which you resist, and which feel genuinely uncomfortable to admit.

- My definition of success has changed substantially since I was younger — and not always in the direction I expected.
- There are markers of success I still chase, even though I privately suspect they wouldn't make me happy.
- I sometimes measure my own success by comparing it to people I grew up with, even when I know that's not a fair measure.
- If I'm honest, some of what I call 'my own definition of success' is still shaped heavily by what my family or culture expects.
- There is a version of success that would look unimpressive to most people but would feel deeply satisfying to me.

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- I find it harder to feel successful than to look successful.

Part 4. Discuss the following questions.

- Where did your earliest idea of success come from — a parent, a culture, a specific moment? Has it held up under scrutiny?
- Have you ever achieved something you were told would make you feel successful, only to find it didn't? What happened?
- Is there someone in your life whose version of success looks unconventional but who you privately admire?
- Do you think it's possible to fully separate your own definition of success from what others expect of you — or is that an illusion?

Part 5. Look at the areas below. For each one, decide whether conventional markers of success (money, title, recognition) genuinely capture what matters — or whether something else does. Choose the three areas where your own definition diverges most from the conventional one.

Career	Relationships	Health
Creativity	Family	Free time
Community	Personal growth	Reputation
Financial security	Independence	Legacy

Part 6. Read each situation. Choose the response that feels most honest and discuss what it reveals.

You attend a reunion — school, university, or otherwise — and find yourself silently ranking how everyone's lives have turned out, including your own.

1. *You catch yourself doing it and feel slightly uncomfortable with the instinct.*
2. *You do it without much guilt — it's a natural way to take stock.*
3. *You notice you're using a measure you don't actually believe in, and that bothers you more than the ranking itself.*
4. *You find you genuinely don't care how you compare — and that surprises you.*

Someone you respect achieves something significant by conventional standards — a major promotion, a public accolade, a milestone purchase. You feel a complicated mixture of admiration and something else.

1. *You feel genuinely happy for them with no real undertow.*
2. *You admire it but privately question whether it will make them as happy as they expect.*
3. *You feel a flicker of the old pull — wondering if you should want that too.*
4. *You realise their version of success has nothing to do with yours, and that's clarifying rather than threatening.*

You are asked, in a fairly formal context, 'So, what do you do?' — and you sense the question is really asking how successful you are.

1. *You answer straightforwardly, even though you know it's a narrow way to be understood.*
2. *You feel a small flicker of inadequacy, depending on how the answer sounds out loud.*
3. *You've made peace with the gap between how the question is asked and how you'd actually answer it, if asked properly.*
4. *You find a way to redirect the conversation towards something that feels more true to who you are.*

Part 7. Read the statements. Say whether you agree, disagree, or partly agree.

1. Most people are running someone else's race without realising it.
2. It is almost impossible to define success entirely on your own terms while still living inside a society that rewards conventional markers.
3. People who claim to have rejected conventional success are sometimes just succeeding by a different, equally rigid standard.
4. The clearest sign that someone has genuinely redefined success is that their definition would be hard to explain to a stranger in one sentence.
5. Ambition and contentment are fundamentally at odds — you cannot fully have both.
6. The question 'what does success look like to you?' is one most people have never actually been asked, let alone answered honestly.

Part 8. Think of someone — known to you personally, or known more widely — whose life looks unsuccessful by conventional standards but who you would genuinely call successful. Discuss with your partner.

1. Who are they, and what does their life actually look like?
2. By what standard would most people judge them as falling short?
3. What is it about their life that makes you privately consider it a success?
4. Do you think they would describe themselves as successful? Does that matter?

Part 9. Read the two viewpoints. Which do you find more intellectually honest? Where do you personally sit?

Viewpoint A

Redefining success on your own terms is mostly a privilege available to people who have already secured the basics — financial stability, social standing, a safety net. For most people throughout history, and for many today, conventional success isn't a trap to escape; it's a genuine necessity. The conversation about 'authentic' success can be a little precious.

Viewpoint B

Conventional markers of success were built to serve systems, not individuals — economies, institutions, status hierarchies. They were never designed with any particular person's wellbeing in mind. Regardless of your starting point, the work of figuring out what actually matters to you is not indulgent. It is one of the most serious tasks of an adult life.

Part 10. Tell your partner about a moment when your definition of success genuinely shifted.

Think about:

- What you believed success looked like before that moment
- What happened, and why it changed something
- What you believe now, and whether it has held up since
- Whether anyone close to you has noticed the shift — or understood it

Reflection

Complete the sentences in your own words.

1. If I strip away what others expect, success actually looks like...
2. One marker of conventional success I am still privately attached to is...
3. Someone whose definition of success I admire is... because...
4. The most honest answer I can give to 'what does success look like to you?' is...