

Reflections

The Art of Enough: Redefining Success on Our Own Terms**Dr. Wafa Qaisar**

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it,” Maya Angelou reminds us, and this simple truth utterly reframes the hour-by-hour architecture of our lives. When mornings begin long before the sun rises, each breath of caffeine-fueled resolve devoted to shepherding children into the world, and evenings stretch into the late hours as we serve both professional and personal obligations, success can feel like an illusion. Those of us in the “sandwich generation” know this intimately: we find ourselves bound to careers and mortgages on one side, and to the tender needs of both young children and aging parents on the other, even as we wrestle with our own capacity to endure. The question is no longer a hypothetical musing—what does it mean to be successful?—but a daily interrogation of worth and purpose.

Before dawn breaks, the house gathers in a hush broken only by bleary-eyed stumbling and the chorus of coffee machines. We morph into logistical experts, negotiating cereals and permission slips, negotiating emotions that oscillate between excitement and anxiety. In the midst of this morning choreography, we rarely pause to ask whether we feel victorious. We surrender to momentum: teaching shapes, tying shoes, sealing lunches, and mustering smiles even when we feel none. By the time the first glow of daylight blesses the kitchen windowsill, we’ve already won a quiet contest against distraction and exhaustion, though the world outside might never know the grace under pressure that unfolded within these four walls.

The hours that follow are themselves a cascade of responsibilities, each demanding its own mastery and threatening to spill over into the next. In offices or meeting rooms, our contributions are judged by output metrics, sales tallies, or research breakthroughs, and still our minds drift toward the school recital, the wafting aroma of dinner left undone, the voicemail blinking on the home phone. We chase deadlines for presentations that will define our year-end bonuses even as the clock reminds us of the math test looming for a child at home. If climbing the corporate ladder is purported to be the pinnacle of professional success, why does each rung feel simultaneously vital and hollow?



When evening arrives, it arrives not as relief but as the resumption of a second shift. We switch headsets for dinner aprons, toggling between spreadsheets and school projects. The glow of a laptop screen might still flicker in one corner, even as the laughter of children weaves through the living room. There are meals to prepare, pills to organize, laundry to fold, finances to reconcile, along with phone calls to aging parents who crave companionship more than our financial safety net. Seeking the line where “work day” ends and “home life” begins is like pursuing a mirage; there is no clear horizon, only a continuous tide. Victory in these hours is measured by the ability to sustain momentum—settled homework, eaten dinner, heartfelt goodnights—without dropping the ball entirely.

By day's end, our bodies yield calculus of soreness and strain, while minds replay micro-moments of shame and satisfaction: the time we raised our voice in frustration, the time we delivered praise and saw a child's chest swell with pride, the slip of forgetting a chore invitation yet once again remembering our resilience. But do these achievements register on any official ledger? The paycheck arriving in our inbox

might not reflect these triumphs, and LinkedIn updates don't highlight the patience we cultivated at bedtime. Still, when Maya Angelou proposes that enjoyment of self and process defines success, it invites us to meet our own glances in the mirror and ask whether we truly like who we are, what we do, and how we do it—even on our toughest days.

Our culture has taught us to count promotions and pay raises as tokens of worth, yet how often do these indices translate into genuine belonging and happiness? A bigger house or shinier car may impress neighbours, but those trinkets do little to stitch the fabric of emotional connection. Indeed, success defined by accumulation often comes at the cost of subtle joys: the first steps of a toddler, the stolen confidences of a teenager, the quiet bond of sharing a pot of tea with an elderly parent. The value of these experiences is incalculable, yet they remain under-celebrated in boardrooms and social media feeds alike. And when the prestige of professional titles clashes with the humility of everyday caregiving, many of us are left wondering whether we ever truly know what we're striving for.

Real contentment may arise from quieter triumphs—those small moments that elude trophy cases but resonate deeply in the heart. Offering reassurance to a colleague struggling under pressure or listening without judgment when a friend admits vulnerability; sitting beside a child as they tackle their fears; pausing in traffic to reflect on breath rather than berate ourselves for running late—these victories, though unheralded, fortify our resilience and empathy. Yet they seldom make year-end reviews or keynote addresses. If such qualities are the scaffolding of personal and communal wellbeing, why do we refrain from elevating them to the same level of reverence as project deliverables or quarterly profits?

In grappling with these questions, we inevitably ask: how do we decide when “enough” is truly enough? When does healthy striving morph into unsustainable perfectionism? Whose yardstick do we use to measure our achievements—society's applause, our peers' benchmarks, or an inner compass that may have grown fuzzy from years of compromise? Social media complicates the calculus, offering polished highlight reels that suggest others are effortlessly excelling in workplaces and living rooms alike. Such comparisons nurture restlessness, convincing us that stasis equates to failure and that more is always better. But if “more” is chased without reflection, it risks leaving us empty-handed.

The price of continuously chasing a shifting ideal exacts payment in missed presence. Time spent

upgrading closets or gadgets cannot buy back the moment a child beams at you for noticing their new drawing, or the gentle sigh of an elderly parent content to simply share yesterday's memories. Relationships fray when we prioritize the next milestone over the current conversation, and personal wellbeing withers under the weight of unrelenting ambition. Material success may cushion discomforts, but it cannot create the kind of fulfilment that comes from knowing you have lived and led with intention. In placing a premium on acquisition, we may inadvertently bankrupt our capacity for joy.

What if, instead, we measured our wealth in laughter echoing through the hallways, in the warmth of shared meals, in the absence of guilt when we press “pause” on our to-do list? These markers of abundance are not antithetical to professional accomplishment; rather, they enrich it. A career infused with the awareness that human connection matters can drive innovation that serves real needs, while a home fortified by presence cultivates the emotional safety net that allows us to thrive. When did we start believing a price tag determines value? Perhaps it is time to remind ourselves that true wealth is measured by moments of meaning rather than by market capitalization.

Such a shift demands introspection. We must learn to read our own signals of distress: the restless sleep, the flattened motivation, the quickened temper. Acknowledging vulnerability is not admitting defeat; it is exercising agency. It is granting ourselves permission to ask for help, to delegate tasks that deplete us, to set boundaries that honor our capacity for joy. There is radical strength in saying “no” to more commitments, no matter how noble some may seem, if they risk diluting the quality of the commitments we already hold dear. Each instance of self-care reaffirms the belief that our worth is not solely tied to output, but also to being fully engaged—mind, body, and spirit.

Ironically, strength often lies in surrender—surrendering the myth that we must do it all alone. Delegation is not a concession of failure but an affirmation of priorities. Setting firmer boundaries, whether around work hours or personal time, is an act of self-care. Saying “no” without guilt can feel revolutionary in a society that readies applause for busyness. It can mean asking a partner, friend, or professional for support. It can mean carving out moments for solitude, for creativity, for simply breathing. These choices do not diminish our commitment; they sustain it.

Technology, meanwhile, can be both a blessing and a curse: notifications keep us tethered to every front but

also offer windows for reconnection. Choosing when to unplug becomes another hidden measure of success. Practicing mindfulness—pausing to acknowledge small victories of the day, such as navigating a difficult conversation with grace—helps us internalize the pleasure of living intentionally. Compassion for ourselves is equally vital; we must forgive mistakes and regard setbacks as data points guiding us toward more sustainable rhythms. In these deliberate pauses, we cultivate presence, the most undervalued currency of all.

Ultimately, success need not be a stark choice between the boardroom and the living room. Instead, it can be seen as the art of weaving both into a life embroidered with purpose, presence, and compassion. Each dawn and dusk offer an opportunity to practice this art, shaping our stories not with gilded laurels alone, but with the everyday triumphs of the heart. And so, as we rise before the sun and finally rest after dusk, may we recognize that we are living success—on our own terms, and beautifully so.