



How Success Thinks

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An insightful new course from the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute

■ COURSE RATIONALE

While definitions of success vary by society and culture, and from individual to individual, most people are driven to succeed: to perform well and accomplish their personal and professional goals.

Countless books, subject matter experts, seminars, and workshops promise to reveal the secret to success. The recent development of the Positive Psychology movement responds to the need for the empirical, scientific study of how to cultivate a satisfactory and fulfilling life, rather than focusing solely on mental illness.¹

How Success Thinks, a new six-week course from the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, draws on the findings of Positive Psychology and other social science research, as well as classic Jewish thought, to offer personal insights and strategies for success.

How Success Thinks has particular relevance for clinicians seeking to help clients/patients to succeed professionally, at home and in their relationships. Framing psychological models within the context of this worldview can help psychologists and other mental health providers understand and respond to Jewish clients/patients' spiritual and religious beliefs and cultural norms.²

¹ "For the last half century, psychology has been consumed with a single topic only—mental illness—and has done fairly well with it..[However,] relieving the states that make life miserable, it seems, has made building the states that make life worth living less of a priority. But people want more than just to correct their weaknesses. They want lives imbued with meaning. . . ." (Martin Seligman. (2002). *Authentic Happiness*. New York: The Free Press. p. xi)

² "Clearly, many clients, especially the highly spiritual, believe that religious and spiritual issues not only are acceptable and preferable for discussion in therapy but also are important therapeutic factors, central to the formation of worldview and personality and impacting human behavior. Psychologists who provide psychotherapeutic services need to be sensitive to client's needs to address religious and spiritual issues; those who provide training to future counseling psychologists need to prepare students to deal with these issues; and researchers need to identify the therapeutic aspects of religion and spirituality in counseling." (Rose, E. M., Westefeld, J. S., & Ansley, T. N. (2001). Spiritual issues in counseling: Clients' beliefs and preferences. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48, 61–71.)

■ COURSE OBJECTIVES

- A. Learn to assist clients/patients in identifying and cultivating a mindset for success in achieving goals.
- B. Learn to assist clients/patients in creating a personalized strategy to achieve success
- C. Learn to assist clients/patients in overcoming outside, mental or emotional barriers to implementing a plan for success



■ LESSON ONE

Defining Success

What is success? Merriam-Webster dictionary's first definition describes success as achieving wealth, respect, or fame; the dictionary's second articulates it is the desired or correct outcome of an attempt.³ Talking about success can be problematic when the word itself connotes dual, and potentially conflicting, meanings.

In this Lesson we ask, what do we mean when we talk about success? To what extent are personal goals shaped by external factors and pressures? How can we develop definitions of success that reflect our core desires, values, and principles? How do competing motivations, for factors including status and wealth, and also for achieving the goal itself, impact our performance?

This Lesson draws on research literature on Internal Motivation (often called "intrinsic motives") and Success⁴ as well as the Jewish mystical practice of *hishtatvut*—equanimity, a state in which one is not dependent on external influence or validation but in which one lives from within.

³ "Success," Merriam-Webster.com.

⁴ Wrzesniewski, Amy, Barry Schwartz, Xiangyu Cong, Michael Kane, Audrey Omar, and Thomas Kolditz. "Multiple Types of Motives Don't Multiply the Motivation of West Point Cadets." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 30 (2014): 10990–10995, and elaborated on in this review, and others: Deci, Edward L., Richard Koestner, and Richard M., "A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 125, no. 6 (1999):627–668.



■ LESSON TWO

Mindset

The path to success is usually fraught with challenges and obstacles. How should we address persistent doubts that certain goals might be beyond one's capabilities, or that success is even possible? What does science say about our ability to substantially change and grow?

This Lesson explores underlying mindsets and self-beliefs that are foundational to success. The Lesson reviews the research and theories of Martin Seligman (Learned Helplessness),⁵ Albert Bandura (Self-Efficacy),⁶ and Carol Dweck (Entity vs. Incremental Mindsets)⁷ on how thought pattern can impact success, and explores some Jewish theological premises regarding thought processes.



■ LESSON THREE

Signature Strengths

Perfect people don't exist, and most individuals tend to excel in certain areas over others. Martin Seligman,⁸ and Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton⁹ argue that while it is important to develop and strengthen character weaknesses, to maximize the chances of success, goals should be approached from individual signature strengths.

This lesson explores these theories and also integrates the Jewish mystical tradition of *sefirot* to analyze the basic traits and patterns that form an individual's character and personality.

⁵ Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Vintage Books.

⁶ Bandura, A. Self-efficacy. In Ramachaudran, V. S. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*. (Vol. 4, pp. 71-81). New York: Academic Press. (Reprinted in Friedman, H. (Ed.), (1998) *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*. San Diego: Academic Press.)

⁷ Dweck, C.S. & Grant, H. (2008). Self-theories, goals, and meaning. In J.Y. Shah & W.L. Gardner (Eds.), *Handbook of Motivation Science* (pp. 405–16). New York: Guilford.

⁸ Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York: Free Press.

⁹ Buckingham, M. & Clifton, D. O. (2005). *Now, discover your strengths: How to develop your talents and those of the people you manage*. New York: HarperBusiness.



■ LESSON FOUR

Creativity

Vaccination. The assembly line. The theory of relativity. The electric light bulb. The wheel. What does every major discovery that has propelled human progress through history have in common? In most success stories, the idea or product was an "innovation"—a radical departure from how things were done, or how things were thought about, until then. It was something that required "creativity"—coming up with something new and unpredictable

What is creativity? Is creativity a special gift, an inborn trait, or an acquired habit? Is there a formula that can generate creativity?

The lesson will draw on Dr. Robert Sternberg's definition of Creative Intelligence¹⁰ (one of a trio of intelligences in his Triarchic Theory of Intelligence) as a person's ability to go beyond given information, to imagine new and exciting ways of reformulating old problems.



■ LESSON FIVE

Interpersonal

The achievement of personal goals involves other people; how can one's interpersonal skills impact individual success? Do social-emotional skills matter for non-social tasks and projects? Studies of data from the Fast Track Project¹¹ indicate that there is a relationship between social competence and wellness.¹²

¹⁰ Sternberg, Robert J.: Chapter 6: The Triarchic Theory of Successful Intelligence". In Flanagan, Dawn P.; Harrison, Patti L. *Contemporary Intellectual Assessment: Theories, tests, and issues*: Guilford Press. pp. 156–177 and *The Assessment of Creativity: An Investment-Based Approach* in CREATIVITY RESEARCH JOURNAL, 24(1), 3–12, 2012.

¹¹ The Fast Track Project, led by Drs. K.L. Bierman, K.A. Dodge, M.T. Greenberg, J.E. Lochman, R.J. McMahon, and E.E. Pinderhughes, is based on the hypothesis that improving child competencies, parenting effectiveness, school context and school-home communications will, over time, contribute to preventing certain behaviors across the period from early childhood through adolescence. The initial sample of kindergarten students was selected in 1991 through 1993 with the study's researchers following the children for twenty years. www.thefastrackproject.org.

¹² Jones, D.E., Greenberg, M. & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11), 2283–2290.

The lesson explores interventions that can improve social and emotional skills, as well as classic Jewish works on character refinement¹³.



■ LESSON SIX

Failure to Execute

There is often a gap between establishing goals and resolutions, and then executing them. What are the obstacles to being able to follow through and persist?

The lesson explores the phenomenon on procrastination¹⁴, and suggests several solutions, including Angela Duckworth's theory of Grit¹⁵ to provide insight for individual persistence. The lesson also integrates the Jewish concept of *seder histalshelut*—a model from Jewish mystical teachings that informs the creative process as a framework for the discussion.

13 Jewish theology suggests that the human ability to be social is a culmination of all our unique talents over the animal kingdom including our ability to exercise self-control, delay gratification, prioritize the needs of others before ourselves, and be forgiving and compassionate.

14 Fuschia Sirois and Timothy Pychyl, "Procrastination and the Priority of Short-Term Mood Regulation: Consequences for Future Self," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 7/2 (2013): 115–127.

Joseph R. Ferrari, Ph.D., *Still Procrastinating: The No-Regrets Guide to Getting It Done*: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2010).

Pychyl, Timothy A., and Gordon L. Flett. "Procrastination and Self-Regulatory Failure: An Introduction to the Special Issue." *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* 30.4 (2012): 203–204.

15 Duckworth, Angela L., Christopher Peterson, Michael D. Matthews, and Dennis R. Kelly. "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-term Goals." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92.6 (2007): 1087–101.