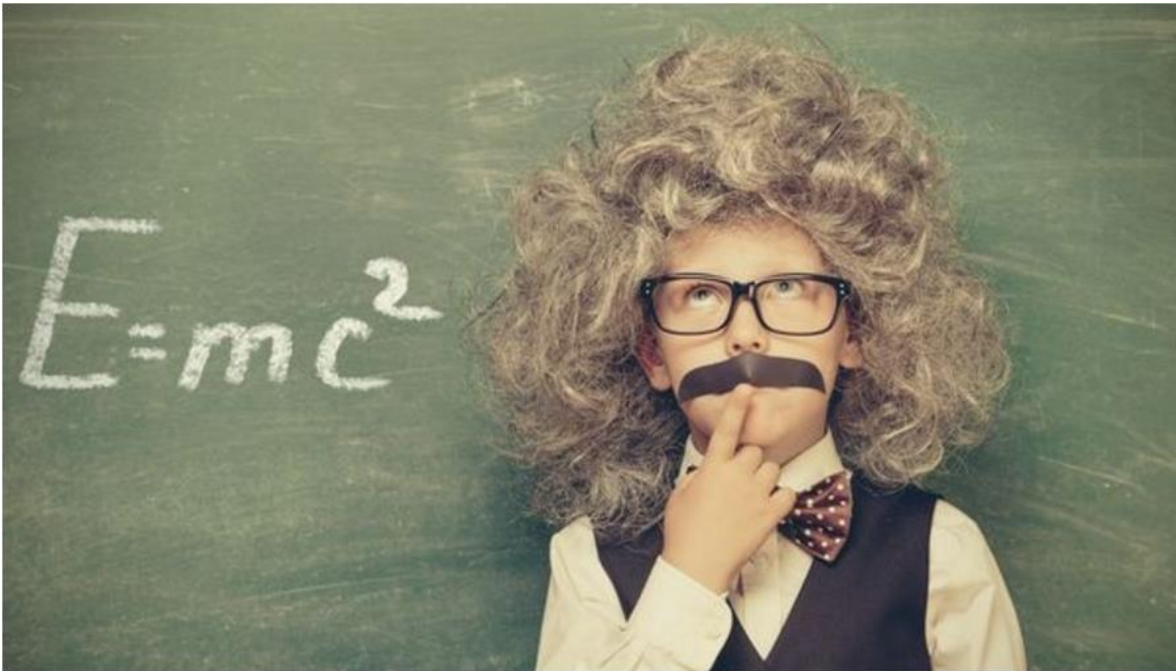


What Einstein doesn't tell - How to choose between success and value?

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TAGS

Leadership

Albert Einstein once said "Strive not to be of success, but rather to be of value." But not everyone knows how to define "value" and "success", which are relative terms. As I see it, value has three dimensions: intrinsic worth, moral beliefs, and giving.

(1) Intrinsic Worth

Everyone wants to become successful by accomplishing their goals. But the success can mean different things to different people. For many, it's a good education, a good job, a good income, and a good living. They also want to own house and maybe a car. Not satisfied with a good basic living, many wish to be in a position of status, and to be wealthy, famous, and powerful. These are all deeply-held life success indicators in our culture. One common perception of success is high status and a lot of material possessions – and the more of each, the better.

Success in this sense can be important, and is understandable. But success is not solely based on what you achieve at school or in business. It's not about the home you live in, what car you drive, and the positions you hold. These things alone may not make you feel good, happy, or authentic.

Success can also come in non-traditional and less physical or tangible forms, like happiness, living a simple life, finding love, building strong relationships, realising your interests and potential, giving back to your community by doing humanitarian work, strengthening the civic foundation of society, and enhancing the lives of others. To some people, they see these as 'value' which means more than success. This value does not always equal the "market price", as it known in the business world. Value can't always be measured, and not everything that can be measured has value.

Imagine that you live in a big house, but you get little affection from your family members. You work long hours in a job that pays well, but gives you no freedom. You maximise your own wealth at the cost of others, you are affluent but you lack sympathy for the needy, and you hold a position of power, but get little respect from your followers. Would you consider this lifestyle successful?

It is hard to admit, but human beings need more than just success in physical or material forms. We also need love, and to be loved. We need to feel like we are doing something meaningful with our lives. We need to feel valuable so that we can have authentic happiness.

We don't need to give up every material success just to feel good or valuable. We can strike a balance or even do things which embody both. But when value really clashes with success, many of us would choose value. I think that is when we are most satisfied and fulfilled.

(2) Moral Beliefs

If someone achieves something, or acquires something in an unethical manner, or at the expense of others, we assume that person's life is not authentic, or it's missing something.

Almost all of us subscribe to core social values like freedom, human rights, equality, justice, the rule of law, harmony, respect for nature, and shared responsibility. On a personal basis, virtues such as diligence, honesty, integrity, humility, trustworthiness, fairness, and gratefulness are crucial. As long as we stick to our personal moral values, we don't have to worry about success as such, since it will come from following these values.

Success is important, but staying true to who you are, and sticking to your own moral beliefs, is more valuable. Yes, money allows you to fulfill material needs but the pursuit of it is not worth losing touch with what you truly believe in. Wealth, power and fame do not mean anything if you lose yourself in the process. Being successful at the cost of others, or by acting unethically, can destroy you over time. Without moral values, a person cannot be truly happy. That person will not have any true relationships, and that will lead to an unhappy life.

(3) Giving

We seldom find one becomes an outstanding leader without first giving value to followers and others. There is one constant that allows for success: providing value. When one gives value and helps others, others will return you value. This is a basic physics – action and reaction.

Einstein believed: "The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive". I believe life is not a zero-sum game, so giving more to others does not mean you will get less. When you give knowledge to others, you become more knowledgeable. When you give others courage, you possess more power. When you give others recognition, you gain more respect. When you give others opportunities, you create more possibilities for yourself.

Everyone has a unique value they can offer to others, because we are all on our own unique life journey. I know I feel most successful when I am doing something of value, and providing value to others.

Becoming People of Value

Many people chase after short-term success, but relatively few pursue sustainable value, even though it's more worthwhile in the end.

To answer whether or not we are successful, we have to think about what motivates us. What do we want to achieve for ourselves? What do we value the most spiritually, emotionally, and materially?

The secret to genuine success is to engage in something which makes us happy, and makes us feel valued. As human beings, we are intrinsically tuned-in towards universal values of love, trust, honesty and cherishing others.

Success and value do not contradict each other. Success has to be achieved within the ambit of a strong value system. This knowledge is what makes leaders great.