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How to Succeed? Their Way or Your Way?

Our early childhood development is determined by the values and desires of our parents. It seems that from the moment we are born, they are making all the decisions for us. Then control of our lives spreads further to teachers, coaches, and part-time bosses. It would seem that we have no say in our own lives until one considers entering college, but even then, there are professors and advisors trying to keep us to a set curriculum of course-work. There is a lot of outside pressure trying to keep you on a set course in life, but what if you break away from that set course? Instead of allowing outside forces to continue to run your life, you could do it for yourself. This is similar to what my management professor, Prof. Isaak, has said about the business world this semester. He lectured to my class about how there are many set up paths and procedures to success in business, but one may not want to follow those norms. He or she may wish to think outside the box and create a need in the business world and follow up by filling that need (Isaak). Ann Cunliffe and two other authors write that “a critical approach to management practice is intellectually demanding insofar as it requires thinking outside the box” (491). Essentially, this is the groundwork for what needs to be done with new college students trying to achieve successful careers. Instead of particularly following the pre-established course-work and continuing on almost mindlessly in life, a student should create their own course-work plan. Though the implementation of management techniques, a student can use their own mind to make their own core class structure in order to build a successful college experience. The main purpose of going to college, after all, is to have to opportunity to obtain a successful career. So why not build a successful lifestyle for yourself through management practices?

The main aspects for great management are: “planning, organizing, leading, and controlling” (Kinichi 13). The aspect of planning is one that coincides greatly with college students. Your experience in college is similar to a business in that it takes a great deal of planning and one can gauge how well the business is doing by how much planning went into it. There are also many different things that go into planning. It takes a very motivated person to create and stick to a plan. Carole Elliott writes that “[…] managers have been portrayed in constant struggle with complex and often contradictory demands” (513). The same is true for college students who must take various things into account when planning their college career. They must think about where they want to go, what they want to study, and how long they actually want to be in school. Even upon arriving at school, a student must ask themself certain questions. “What classes should I take? What clubs should I join? What sports should I play? What positions should I apply for?” This last question exemplifies the bridge between planning, and organization.

As noted earlier, if one wishes to be successful, he or she may wish to create a position to run for rather than fill one. Prof. Isaak has often talked about a smarter way to get a job with a company. In his example, you find out who the hiring manager is and speak with their secretary in order to grasp key information about the manager and needs of the company. You then analyze those needs and “run into” the manager when he or she is out at lunch (Isaak). You essentially need to pitch what the company needs and how you can personally fill those needs. At the very least, when this manager needs a position filled they will already have you in mind. In this action you have created a winning plan, organized helpful resources and hopefully met your goal. For a student this could be planning out a career path, and organizing the tools necessary to fulfill the ultimate goal. In *The One Minute Manager* Ken Blanchard writes about a concept called “One Minute Goal Setting” (34). This concept shows that when people are motivated enough to sit down once in a while and actually write out their goals, they become more productive. The theory is that you have your plans written out where you can clearly see them. Once you visualize these goals, you’re constantly thinking about how you will achieve those goals because you know exactly what needs to be done. You inertly become more motivated to complete those goals and almost instantly become more productive. This is a factor of planning and organization, because during one’s busy life as a student, you sometimes forget what exactly you are trying to achieve.

The simple act of taking a minute to write out what you plan to do and how you intend to do it can have dramatic effects on your work. You end up organizing all of your ideas so that when it comes time to do it, you aren’t stressed out or frustrated; you just do it. One example of this is how I started writing this research paper. At first, I would always have ideas about how to write the paper, but when it came time to actually write the paper itself, my ideas were jumbled and hard to recall. Later on, I started to write down my ideas whenever they came to me. I now have notes for this paper on the back pages of several different notebooks, but being able to read my own ideas helps a lot. This organization of ideas not only makes any process easier, but it gives me the feeling that I’m never working alone.

Another part of the organizing function “[…] is defined as arranging tasks, people, and other resources, to accomplish the work” (Kinichi 14). Essentially for a college student, this is making a schedule. Even if you create your own path to success, you will still need an amazing resume in order to get a head start. This means doing well in all your classes, and participating in extracurricular activities. This may not sound like much, but from personal experience, it is a lot to handle if you are an honors student athlete who is also involved with several student organizations. This daunting task entails making time to do school work, to work out and practice, to help out in student organizations, and to relax. With all these duties, sometimes the relaxation portion doesn’t get done. In essence, even achieving a middle point in all these duties takes great organizational skills.

The link between the organizing and leading functions is innovation. The concept behind John Thackray’s article, “Fads, Fixes & Fictions,” and Leslie Berlin’s article, “Try, Try Again, or Maybe Not,” is that one must know when to continue with innovative ideas, and when to leave it alone. A study in Berlin’s article shows that entrepreneurs who try to start a business, fail, and then try again, have relatively the same success rate as those who are just starting out. It’s very true that not every idea you try out in college will pan out in the end. You might not get an A on the paper you worked so hard on. You may not be a starter on the sports team of your choice. You may even feel alienated from the other people in the student organizations. However if you want to be successful, and by your own definition of success also find happiness, “You’ve got to do what you love […] If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking, […]” (Jobs). If something you’re putting your time and effort into isn’t working, you must evaluate how much it means to you and how much must be put into it for it to work. If this means putting more time towards writing that paper so you can earn an A, and it’s something you would love to do, then continue trying. If you feel you’ve exhausted every part of your being into being a starter on the sports team of your choice and it’s still not working, you may wish to re-think your place on that team.

Kinichi defines the leading function “as motivating, directing, and otherwise influencing people to work hard to achieve the organization’s goals” (14). I feel that another way to look at this function is being able to lead yourself and possibly change the way you do certain things. One of my first thoughts upon entering college was: “can I continue to be the same procrastinating person that I’ve always been and still be successful?” Unfortunately, I found my answer to be no. One cannot keep doing the same things for changing situations and expecting better results. I feel this action would be ignorant, which is something neither a manager nor an aspiring student can afford to be. Many authors on management write that being successful in the business world is becoming more about communication with people and less about traditional business knowledge. Cunliffe cites that “‘MBAs are generally proficient in accounting, finance, and analytical skills… however, the biggest problem with MBAs is their lack of supervisory skills, communication abilities and leadership qualities’” (493). It’s apparent through Cunliffe’s article that she feels business students aren’t being taught to apply what they learn into “everyday life of business, the economy, and society” (493). For this reason I feel she would agree with me in thinking that students need to apply business practices to their lives in order to be truly successful.

The final main concept of management is the controlling function which “is defined as monitoring performance, comparing it with goals and taking corrective action as needed” (Kinichi 14). For college students, this would be defining what is productive and what is counter-productive. Odiorne writes about “[t]he Activity Trap [which] is the abysmal situation people find themselves in when they start out towards an important and clear objective but […] become so enmeshed in the activity of getting there that they forget where they are going” (56). You must eliminate anything that is keeping you from achieving your planned goals. For instance, if you have roommates who blast music when you’re clearly trying to do a term paper quietly, you may consider going to the library to write instead. In *One Minute Manager*, a part of “One Minute Goal Setting is […] [to] [t]ake a minute every once in a while out of your day to look at your performance, and 6. [s]ee whether or not your behavior matches your goal” (Blanchard and Johnson 34). Students must accomplish several goals throughout their college career, but they must focus in on each goal separately in order to do great work. If you spread yourself out trying to accomplish too many goals at once, you lose the ability to do great work. If all your goals are accomplished, they will have been done in mediocrity. I would say that mediocrity is not true success. However, when you force yourself to focus on one main goal and you accomplish it, you produce astounding results. In several lectures, Prof. Isaak has described how multitasking can be the downfall of many managers. It divides your attention and you lack the focus to do any one task well (Isaak).

I found that the common idea throughout many management readings is that technique and knowledge of business must be applied to more than just business in order to be used for success. This may be because the definition of success varies depending on whom you ask. Some of its conflicting definitions can be viewed as individuality vs. companionship, working to make a ton of money vs. being able to enjoy a smaller amount of money, or even having a lot of time off vs. making a difference in people’s lives every day. By the time a student enters college, he or she has been taught at least twelve years of academics which they only employ to follow someone else’s definition of success. Odiorne often mentions defining and classifying one’s goals and abilities in order to better understand and achieve those goals (91-98). He writes that “[i]nternally, commitment means that I have chosen my intentions and will be unsatisfied until they are turned into completed action” (Odiorne 205). I feel that a student must not only be committed to their own success, but also to their own view of what success is.

When Steve Jobs spoke to the Stanford graduating class of 2005, he said that “your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma, which is living in the results of other people’s thinking.” He means that you shouldn’t become engulfed with the way other people want you to live your life or you may end up wasting your life. Many college students wish to find success, which can be defined as making a lot of money or having an easy life. However, it cannot be truly attained if you’re following someone else’s plan. Despite this, I believe that if students use the four main concepts of management, planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, they can create their own plans and make successful careers for themselves.

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