

Redefining Career Success Starts With Passion

by [Elizabeth Palermo](#), BusinessNewsDaily Contributor | September 26, 2013 11:14am ET



In the business world, individual success is often defined in terms of how much money a person makes or an employee's rank within a company. But dollar signs and titles aren't the only measures of a successful career.

Redefining real career success goes beyond dollars and titles.

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Rana Florida — CEO of [Creative Class Group](#) and author of the Huffington Post column "Your Startup Life" — believes that there's a more meaningful way to define success, both at work and in every other aspect of life. True success, as she sees it, is all about balancing productivity with passion and having a good time while you're at it.

Florida's new book, "[Upgrade: Taking Your Work from Ordinary to Extraordinary](#)," (McGraw-Hill, 2013) is based on interviews with successful people in a variety of fields, from career politicians, corporate CEOs and entrepreneurs to professional athletes and entertainers. "Upgrade" explores the philosophies that have helped well-known figures — like Bill Clinton, Andre Agassi and Nelly Furtado — attain success both professionally and personally.

In an email interview with BusinessNewsDaily, Florida explained how following a few simple principles — like taking risks and embracing failure — can mean the difference between settling for an ordinary career and living an extraordinary life.

BusinessNewsDaily: *What conventional work practices are, in your opinion, in need of an upgrade?*

Rana Florida: Free the prisoners! When I began as CEO at the Creative Class, I told my team members that I was not their boss. Early on, I realized the value of changing my vocabulary. Subordinate, employee and staff became colleague and team, because, ultimately, that's what we all are in the workplace.

Constraining time encourages quality time. When there's less time to work, you waste less time. When you have a compressed workweek, you tend to focus on what's important. I've never had an employer who believed in this system. All of them assumed that if you're not sitting at your desk for long hours, you're not really working. Sometimes, exactly the opposite is the case. Rather than sneak out early and risk the piercing looks of colleagues and bosses, many efficient workers will ride out the last hour or so of the day at his or her desk, playing around with Facebook or online chatting with friends. [Being productive](#) does not translate to being busy.



Having more vacation time is beneficial. In 2006, the accounting firm Ernst & Young did an internal study of its employees and found that for each additional 10 hours of vacation employees took, their year-end performance ratings from supervisors (on a scale of 1 to 5) improved by 8 percent. Frequent vacationers were also significantly less likely to leave the firm.

BND: *One of the key principles in "Upgrade" is "Envision the future." Why do you feel this is so important?*

R.F.: The reality is that the majority of us don't think about how we can optimize our lives. Instead of developing a real strategy based on where we want to go in life and why, we just slog through in a state of what I like to call managed dissatisfaction. We are doing OK; we are managing to get by — but with an underlying tinge of unhappiness. Certain peaks — like an annual vacation, a new [car](#) or a slight promotion at work — lift our spirits for a while, and we ride the peak. But before we know it, the wave has crashed, and we are washed up to shore, longing for the next big wave to come through.

Well, it is never too late to envision an entirely different future — or to actively upgrade your life. Anyone can do it — young or old, single or married.

Your first step on the road to change starts when you envision your future. But most of us have to think long and hard about what we want to do and put a plan in place to make it happen.

Whatever it is you want to do professionally and personally, write it down. Don't think about your vision for the future as landing that dream job. The reality is, that job barely exists. The goal is to incorporate as many things that you enjoy doing — things that give you happiness, purpose and meaning — into your daily life.

BND: *In your book, you talk about finding your passion versus finding what makes you happy. Is there a difference?*

R.F.: There are two camps here. A few lucky people actually get paid to do the things for which they have a great passion. Then, there are the rest of us, who need to do something else to earn our paychecks. Either way, it's essential that you identify what makes you happy and find a way to incorporate it into your life through your career or your free time. This gives your life purpose and meaning.

Daniel Pink is the New York Times best-selling author of a book that launched a revolution: "Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working for Yourself" (Warner, 2001). A former chief speechwriter for then-Vice President Al Gore, Pink is a terrific speaker himself. He told me, "You know, I'm not a huge fan of the concept of passion when it comes to careers. Instead of trying to answer the daunting question, 'What's your passion?' it's better simply to watch what you do when you've got time of your own and nobody's looking. That will give you the deepest insights into what you should be doing."

[See also: [Is It Folly to Follow Your Passion?](#)]

BND: *What does it mean to "design your time?"*

R.F.: Andre Agassi told me, "People chase money and forget that time is our most precious resource."

Time is more important than money and possessions. It's the one thing you can never get back and something you can't buy, barter or borrow. Once it's gone, it's gone for good. Those who succeed protect their time fiercely and selfishly.

Let me try to make this as simple as possible: There are only three things to do with your time: have fun, be productive and give back.

Those three things — having a blast, feeling a sense of accomplishment and cultivating a sense of a larger purpose — are all that really matter in life. Anything that falls outside those three categories is clutter or filler and a waste of your time, and you need to eliminate it from your life

immediately. Not only is it a waste of time, but it interferes with getting to the three buckets that do matter.

The goal in life is to maximize these three key things while striking the right balance in your life to achieve maximum happiness. Try to think about them routinely. When making tough life decisions or just contemplating everyday minutiae, think about how your choices affect each of the three buckets. If something falls outside of them, it's time to eliminate it from your life.

BND: *You emphasize the importance of taking risks. What should entrepreneurs, business owners (or anyone else, for that matter) consider before taking a professional risk?*

R.F.: It's surprising to me how few organizations encourage [risk taking](#) and outside-the-box thinking. We are taught to set goals, achieve measurable results and assess success. But we are rarely encouraged to push the boundaries of new ideas and pioneering thoughts.

Curiosity is stifled in a risk-free environment. Steven Bathiche manages the applied-science group at Microsoft, where he helps develop new ideas and technologies. I heard him speak at the Creativity Conference in Washington, D.C., on the critical importance of encouraging stupid ideas. "People laughed at the guy who wanted to put seat belts in cars," he said. "People were like, this is really stupid." That logic lasted a full decade. "In the creative process, things that might seem unlikely or out of the ordinary are so only because of your frame of reference," he continued. "And your frame of reference is always changing." Five or 10 years from now, when one of your "absurd" ideas comes of age, it won't seem stupid at all, he said.

If workers are afraid of getting laughed at for their ridiculous ideas, any number of important inventions won't ever see the light of day. Our society and workplaces need to encourage more risk taking. Innovative leaders understand that not every risk yields success, but they also don't

reprimand their teams for taking risks. They encourage them to think their ideas through and assess their potential consequences.

BND: *What does it mean to "lead by serving," and how can small business owners use this strategy successfully?*

R.F.: Bosses who wag their fingers at you and give you marching orders are unfortunate relics of the past; the top-down leadership model in business no longer works. "In fact, most leaders — whether in politics or business — fail," according to a recent Harvard Business Review article. "[Good leadership](#) has always been the exception, not the norm." Think about leadership as the all-important task of inspiring, mentoring and setting a vision.

Not too long ago, I interviewed Mayo Clinic's president and CEO, Dr. John Noseworthy. When I asked him to describe his leadership style, he said, "Leaders at Mayo Clinic embody Robert Greenleaf's model of 'servant leadership.'"

"My style," he continued, "is to surround myself with really smart people and then listen to them, while encouraging the team to think and act boldly. Timely consensus must be followed by disciplined, successful execution of the plan."

Successful organizations treat their employees — all of their employees — as individuals who are interested in learning and contributing. As Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh advises, "Make sure that the company commits to values that match the employees' personal values, and make sure that the company has a vision that has a higher purpose beyond just profits or beating the competition."

People want to learn and grow, feel inspired and be mentored. When we spend a majority of our lives at work striving to make an impact, monetary rewards are nice, but the experience of learning something new from a truly visionary leader can have an even bigger impact.

Leaders who inspire, mentor and teach — rather than dictate and order — will have more productive, more engaged and more loyal teams.

BND: *You encourage your readers to "embrace failure." Why?*

R.F.: As children, we are encouraged to get good grades, get on the right team and score the winning goal. If we fail the class, we won't get into a good school. If we don't get into a good school, we won't get a decent job. And if we don't get a decent job, we'll be living at **home** with our mom and dad for the rest of our lives, or living on the streets, and everyone will know we're a failure. We teach children from a very early age to believe that only success is rewarded, especially when it comes to school or work. This message, however, is drastically different from the way we learn.

Most of us need to reset our definition of failure. Too many of us view business setbacks as something we haven't been able to accomplish — or, worse still, as shameful black marks that we can never erase.

Far too many of us waste too much effort and emotional energy dwelling on past failures instead of pushing forward. Agassi also told me, "Failure is lonely; success is lonelier." But then he went on to say, "Success and failure are so often the result of outside factors — things beyond our control — so you need to keep your mind on the few things you can control. Learn to love the process, the work, and disconnect your ego from the results. The earlier you learn this, the more peaceful you'll be — and peace, not success, is the goal."

"How do I handle failure?" he said. "Same way I tackle success: by treating it as the illusion it is." We need to create a new definition of failure. Truly successful people [embrace failure](#) as part of the learning process, as an opportunity to grow, reflect, reinvent and, ultimately, to push forward.

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