

Never Give Up

Jason Navallo

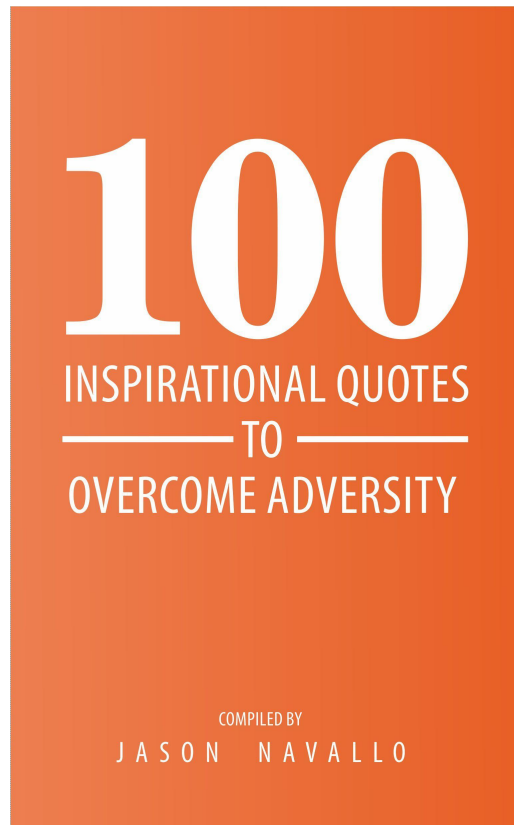


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Introduction

It's easy to give up. It's easy to throw in the towel when life throws us a big punch. People let us down, things don't always go according to plan, and we may feel as if we will never achieve what we set out for; as if things won't get better. Sometimes, life's ups and downs can seem too tough to handle.

I refuse to give up on my dreams. My vision for the future is stronger than any struggles or setbacks I face in the present because I know the surest way to succeed lies in never giving up. No matter how long it takes or how hard I have to work, I will not stop until I've achieved what I set out for, even if I have to fall flat on my face in order to improve and learn a valuable lesson.

I write books that I would like to read; books that I would look to for inspiration when times get tough. Some people love my work, and some people don't. This is something I have accepted, as an author, for having a writing style that's extraordinary. It's never easy having your work judged and reviewed. However, I'll accept a few negative reviews in order to reach my core audience: the visionaries, from all walks of life, who are driven to become successful. To them, my work is fuel for the hustle, which is exactly what I intend for it to be.

I've learned never to compare myself to others. Everyone has their own path; their own journey. And success takes longer for some than others. That's why I look straight ahead towards my goals, and try to always surround myself around the right people who will help me succeed because it's a team effort. You truly cannot make it on your own.

Aim for greatness. You may go through hell to get there, but nothing will stop you if you keep a determined mindset; if you keep moving. This book would've never come into existence had I given up; had I gave into my fear of failure. I pushed myself to great lengths, sacrificing my time and energy to chase perfection, in order to achieve excellence, even if no one reads.

A continuation of *Success: 30 Interviews with Entrepreneurs & Executives*, this book, features 20 inspirational interviews I've conducted with the leaders from some of America's fastest-growing private companies. It's a short book that serves as a commitment to my readers, and to myself, that I will keep writing, even when times get tough. Never give up.

Luther Cifers



Luther Cifers is the founder and president of YakAttack LLC; a paddlesports accessory manufacturing company focused primarily on the kayak fishing market. From 2009 to 2014, YakAttack has averaged 156% annual growth, with a 3-year growth of 902% from 2012 to 2014.

A self-described homeschool dropout, Luther started his career in manufacturing with an entry-level position of putting sheet pans into a belt oven that cured carbon brushes. He quickly climbed the ranks at the 3rd tier automotive component manufacturer, acquiring skills in manufacturing, engineering, programming, and management, spending most of his 20-year career designing products and automated manufacturing equipment.

In 2008, Luther took up the hobby of kayak fishing, and as a problem solver by nature, identified some opportunities for new products for outfitting kayaks. A classic “garage startup,” YakAttack was launched in 1999 with a few hundred dollars and has remained organically funded. An unwavering adherence to a set of core values including honesty, creating success for customers, creating opportunity for employees, and manufacturing exclusively in the U.S.A., has propelled YakAttack’s rapid growth and has made it one of the most popular and respected brands in the rapidly-growing kayak fishing market.

1. How do you define success?

I define success as the achievement of one’s goals. Success for individuals, groups, and companies can be very different since goals vary. When you achieve what you set out to accomplish, you’ve succeeded.

2. What is the key to success?

It might be more of a ring of keys to success. When I think of a key, I think of something needed to unlock a door. The path to success has many doors and requires more than one key. I’ll list what I view as the 5 most important ones:

Key #1: Know yourself. Success requires persistence, and too often people set out on impulsive journeys only to find when things get tough, they have embarked on a journey they don't want to be on. If you don't truly know yourself, it can be easy to set goals that seem attractive at first, but do not really suit you. Knowing yourself is a prerequisite to the second key: knowing your mission.

Key #2: Know your mission. Too often in business, the defined goal is simply "to make money." While creating wealth is a worthwhile endeavor, it's a means, not an end. What will making money help you achieve? What is the thing you really care about? Is it security for yourself or your family? Luxury? Power? Empowering others? Making the world a better place? Leaving a lasting mark on the world? There is intrinsic value in the mission because the act of farming is often greater than the fruit. The road to success is not an easy one, and the water of perseverance is drawn from the well of purpose. A shallow or misplaced purpose doesn't give you much to draw from. Know what truly motivates you. Know your mission.

Key #3: Know your principles. Your principles should establish your moral and ethical boundaries. Every road has boundaries, and the road to success is no different. Along the way we are tempted by many things, and as the landscape changes, it may become difficult to remember what those boundaries used to look like. Defining your principles up front, and keeping them in your field of view, will keep you from being led astray, chasing results. By definition, to succeed is to achieve results, but if you have to violate your principles to achieve something, it's not worthy of achieving. This appears, rightly so, to be a moral argument, but has strategic value as well. Short-term achievements gained by violating principles are often acquired at the expense of more substantial, long-term success. We can't control everything in life, and our shortsightedness often produces unintended consequences. If your principles are well-founded, and you allow them to guide you, letting the chips of success fall where they may, more often than not, will have them falling in your favor.

Key #4: Know your limits. This doesn't mean you shouldn't be ambitious, get out of your comfort zone, or test your abilities. It means simply to acknowledge your weaknesses and failures. Weakness is a rock in the path. If you ignore it, you will most likely trip over it again and again. But if you're willing to acknowledge it exists, you can remove it, find a way around it, or use it as a stepping stone. Failure is tripping over the rock. If you don't know the weakness exists, failure is the thing that makes it evident to you. We all have inherent weaknesses, and we all fail. One of the primary things that differentiate successful people from unsuccessful people is their level of willingness to acknowledge the rocks in their path, and how they choose to deal with them.

Key #5: Surround yourself with people who have found or are seeking the first four keys. Even if you feel like you can do anything in your business, you cannot do everything. You need good people around you, and finding them is not always an easy task. Hire people who want to go where you are going, who share your mission, and who share the principles that guide you. The easiest and most common thing to do, as a manager, is to build a high maintenance workforce. Forcing people to do what you need them to do will produce mediocre results amid the chaos,

but this is stressful and ultimately distracts you from your mission. Hire people who want to help you do what it is you are doing, and your capabilities multiply rather than being subtracted from.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

No. I attribute a lot of the drive early in my life that led me to discover I had the potential to succeed, to a perceived need to work as hard as possible just to be average. It was through this that I learned I had some unique skills and talents, and the journey of developing those skills and talents led to an understanding of what it takes to succeed.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

Confidence. Adversity is and should be expected. But the mission doesn't change just because there are barriers. The thing that enables me, to see adversity as something to be understood and dealt with rather than something that is preventing success, is a confidence that I can overcome whatever comes my way.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

This one is easy. Do the right thing and let the chips fall where they may.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love to fish (mostly from a kayak), and besides working, most of my free time is spent with my family. I'm very close with my kids and share different interests with each one. As they grow older, I hope to have opportunities to combine the two things I enjoy most, my work, and my kids, to help them get their own businesses started.

7. What makes a great leader?

By definition, a leader is someone that others willingly follow. To me, a great leader can only be defined as someone who is able to bring out the greatness in others.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Specifically to college students, I would say to understand the laws of supply and demand. Our society has changed greatly in the last 50 years, and workers with college degrees are no longer in short supply. Knowledge gained by formal education, while important, is not superior to knowledge gained by any other means. Consider this in the information age, where knowledge on any topic is a click away. A person's value in the marketplace is increasingly being determined not by credentials, but by an ability to achieve results. I expect this trend to continue as technology enables more and more unconventional methods of becoming educated, and the workforce becomes more and more saturated with college degrees. Start your career with determination, purpose, and humility. List your objectives and then describe, on paper and in detail, how you will go about earning each of them. Society owes nothing to any of us. Regardless of the job you have, always conduct yourself like you need to do a little more to deserve being there. This will keep you challenged, sharpen your skills, and will increase your value greatly to employers, particularly in an age of an increasingly entitlement-minded workforce. Value is relative, so create contrast between yourself and everyone else, not by pointing out their flaws or your strengths, but by simply being the one that is different in a

positive, inspiring, and productive way. Do these things faithfully and opportunity will gravitate towards you.

John Sammut



Prior to joining Firstronic LLC, an advanced electronics manufacturing services and optimized supply chain solutions company, John served as CEO of Live Sports Radio LLC, a private-equity backed business, for 3 years. He also served as president and CEO of EPIC Technologies, LLC, a multinational EMS company, for nearly 10 years. He led the company's growth from \$3 million (through its predecessor business, CCI) to nearly \$300 million in annual revenue, while achieving industry-leading levels of profitability. In 2006, he was the recipient of the "EY Entrepreneur of the Year" award in the technology category for the Midwest region.

Prior to joining EPIC, he was responsible for TMW's investment platform strategy in electronics manufacturing. He joined TMW's company Electro-Wire Products in 1990 as manager of market development engineering for the EMP division of Electro-Wire, which achieved revenue growth from \$6 million to \$30 million by 1992. John was also responsible for European business development from 1993 to 1995, during which Electro-Wire acquired a German electrical distribution system manufacturer with annual revenues of \$120 million. Prior to joining Electro-Wire, he held several positions at Ford Motor Company from 1986 to 1990. He holds B.S. degrees in Electrical Engineering and Industrial Management from Lawrence Technological University and an M.B.A. from INSEAD, The European Institute of International Business.

1. How do you define success?

Achieving financial freedom and a balanced life to enjoy the fruits of my labor.

2. What is the key to success?

Doing what you love so that it's not "work." So you can pour yourself into it and do whatever it takes to be successful. I also think a key is being "programmed" early on in life to have high

expectations, which means an important part of this comes from parents or those raising you as a child to expect great things.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

Yes, that has always been “programmed” into my mind for as long as I can remember.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

The fact that failure isn’t an option and knowing that there is always a way. It's just a matter of finding it!

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

That once you start succeeding, remain focused and don’t get distracted with other opportunities, because with success will come many other competing interests from all directions.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time with family and friends.

7. What makes a great leader?

Someone with vision, drive, motivation, inspiration, and tenacity.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Do profile testing to discover all of the options/opportunities out in the world for the type of skills you have to offer. The key early on is to discover what you truly love to do, as soon as possible, so you don’t waste a lot of time discovering what you don’t want!

Jim Spadaccini



Having founded the company in 1999, Jim is the creative director and CEO of Ideum, a multi-touch products and digital interactive company based in Corrales, New Mexico. He helps direct Ideum's commercial hardware and software initiatives and provides creative direction for custom software and installation projects.

Jim was the principal investigator for the National Science Foundation (NSF)-sponsored Open Exhibits software and community initiative and a co-PI for the Creating Museum Media for Everyone (CMME) project. In addition, he was co-chair of the NSF-funded Human Computer Interaction in Informal Science Education (HCI+ISE) conference. Additionally, Jim was a principal investigator on the NASA-funded Space Weather Mobile project and co-PI on a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-sponsored project, Hurricanes and Climate Change.

In addition to his responsibilities at Ideum, Jim is active in the community and volunteers as a board member for the Friends of Chaco and the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty. Before founding Ideum, Jim was the director of Interactive Media at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, California. While at the Exploratorium, his department was responsible for developing educational web resources and media exhibits for the museum floor. For his work at the Exploratorium, Jim received a *Computerworld* "Smithsonian Award," an Association of Science and Technology Centers "Award for Innovation," and three consecutive Webby Awards for "Best Science Site."

Jim taught courses on design and technology at San Francisco State University's (SFSU) Multimedia Studies program for seven years starting in the mid-90s, and more recently, taught Technology-Enhanced Communication for the Cultural Heritage (TEC-CH) program at the University of Lugano, Switzerland. For more than a decade, he has taught courses on digital media and museums for the Cultural Resource Management program at University of Victoria,

British Columbia. Along with his work in informal education, Jim has consulted with Apple and Adobe, and has developed promotional and instructional materials for a number of professional software authoring tools.

1. How do you define success?

I believe a lot of people think of success as something you just acquire or earn over time, and there you are, you've arrived! I like to think about being successful at different stages in life, and in our company's development. I never thought of myself or our company as unsuccessful when there were only a few of us and we were struggling to make ends meet. I thought of us being successful for who we were and what we were at that stage of development.

Success is being able to work on interesting projects or develop interesting products. Success is getting to work with innovative people and partners on great projects. We've never really focused on the money, except as a way to do more, to take on bigger and better projects, and to develop new and more exciting products. For us, that has been really important. It has allowed us to grow the company with zero venture capital and debt. Because we don't have to spend a lot of time or energy with funders, we can focus on the work, the creative process, and on improving our staff and workflow.

2. What is the key to success?

I think a lot of it is hard work and persistence. That is certainly the driving force when you find yourself in a situation when you don't have a lot of collaborators. For our company, I think finding the right people to work with has been absolutely essential. I've been lucky enough to find people who can do things I can't, and who can bring ideas that I don't have. I can't stress that part enough. It is not really about the individual. It is about having a great and diverse team in place. That and hard work makes everything possible.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

Our company is now getting attention because we are growing and involved in very interesting, cutting-edge technology. While I am proud of what we've accomplished and where we are, I think. Unfortunately, our society defines success too narrowly. It is not always about money and the latest startups or new technology.

I have always thought of myself as successful. When I was a poorly paid teacher in San Francisco, California during the early 90s, I thought I was successful at that job. I think success is something you bring with you when you care about the work, and when you want to make a difference and create something meaningful. In that sense, I always knew I would be successful, because I worked hard at a job that was important.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

You really don't have a choice. You always move forward. I don't want that to sound negative, as some people feel that they are trapped in particular situations. I don't view it that way. When I face adversity, I tend to work harder, try to work more closely with those around me, and try to work with others to constructively solve whatever problems have arisen.

A huge benefit of adversity is that, usually, there are more than a few lessons to be learned in these types of situations. Our products, projects, and processes have all benefited from what we learned over the years from a variety of unforeseen incidents or (unfortunately) self-inflicted mistakes and blunders. Knowing that can also be comforting. You feel like you are getting something positive out of a bad situation. It is also a way to bring closure and close off the negative feelings associated with a bad situation.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

It is hard to choose one. Persistence and making sure you are always thinking ahead are probably the two greatest lessons I've learned.

Persistence is the continuum. It helps you day to day, but also means that you'll benefit in the future from sticking with things. Our company benefits from relationships and contacts that we made in the early 2000s. We have gained experience through projects, big and small, over more than 15 years. The time spent comes back to you and it can help you find new projects, develop new products, and innovate.

Thinking ahead and planning for multiple futures is something I do every day in some way or another. Things won't ever work out exactly as you plan, so that's why I focus on "multiple" futures. In addition, it is not all nuts and bolts kind of thinking. It is not all about staff, space, products, and money. It is also about being the company for which you want to work. What type of work are you interested in pursuing? Who are you going to collaborate with? What new technologies or design challenges are we going to take on? Can we do more for the local community? All of this forward-thinking prepares you for what's next. It has allowed us to grow organically and take advantage of the opportunities that have presented themselves.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I like to take on activities that are far removed from work. I love spending time with my family. Also, I enjoy gardening and have a vineyard with 135 vines. I'm just starting to make wine. I like to ride my bike and exercise. I think it is important to have some balance. It is easy to get wrapped up in work because I find it so interesting.

7. What makes a great leader?

I think great leaders help assemble great teams, find great talent, and inspire people. I also think a great leader provides the tools, the environment, and the collaborators for others to be successful.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

The best advice I have ever heard is to find something you are passionate about. Yes, it is a cliché, but it is true (which is also a cliché at this point). However, there are a lot of people who have jobs they don't like. They do their work just for the money, and that doesn't lead to long-term happiness. If you find something you love and work at it, if you are good at it, chances are that the money will follow.

The other bit of advice I would give is, when you go to an interview, don't think about it as a one-way kind of process. Ask the employer questions. Learn about the work environment. Make sure it is a place where you want to work and a place that would allow you to grow. The type of company and work environment can be as important as the job itself when you are starting out.

Ralph Erenzo



Prior to starting Tuthilltown Spirits, New York's first whiskey distillery since prohibition, Ralph's business Extravertical Inc. provided technical production and event services to corporate and media clients such as ESPN, Ford and Danskin for projects that required technical skills developed over his 25-year rock climbing career. Ralph built and managed New York City's first public climbing gyms, including The ExtraVertical Climbing Center on Broadway. His dream of a "climber's ranch" near the largest rock climbing area in the east was set aside in favor of producing high-quality spirits. Ralph's writing and commentary have been featured in national media including Op-Ed columns for *The New York Times*. His work at the state level resulted in the passage of the Farm Distillery Act in 2007, which permits New York farms to establish distilleries and sell their agricultural spirits on site. Tuthilltown Spirits is a founding member of the American Craft Spirits Association, for which Ralph sits on the board of directors, and is chairman of the legislative committee, which works at the federal level to support the craft distilling industry nationwide.

1. How do you define success?

A satisfactory outcome in one's effort at some goal, which is not always the same as the specific goal a person starts with. Happiness with an outcome.

2. What is the key to success?

It's a key ring: persistence, flexibility, gumption.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I always wanted to achieve success in something, but not always the same or one single thing.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

Belief in a concept or goal, and the willingness to get up when knocked down and continue the struggle.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

Changing a plan is not the same as giving up. Things change, plans change, but still have forward momentum. Quitting is an end.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spare time? Reading, driving.

7. What makes a great leader?

Again, "gumption" (the ability to see a need and the temerity to believe you can do something about it). Also, the willingness to sublimate personal, specific desires for the benefit of an overall goal of those being led.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Success, most often, takes time. Be alert to opportunity. Your education gave you a valuable framework upon which to build your future, but the world fills out and colors the final result. Expect change, use it, and never give up.

Chris Jones



Chris Jones is the president of Plant Therapy, the fastest-growing essential oils company in the nation. He founded the company in 2011 after identifying a need for high-quality, direct-to-consumer essential oils and aromatherapy products. The results have been astoundingly successful, and in 2015, Plant Therapy earned a spot on *Inc. Magazine's* "Inc. 500" list as the 31st fastest-growing private company in America.

Yet, the essential oils industry is a far cry from where Chris once saw his life heading. As a young man, he was en route to pursuing a career as an airline pilot when his father became terminally ill. His college education cut short, Chris went home to care for his family and led his father's fertilizer business.

Since that time, Chris has been a self-employed entrepreneur. He ran several businesses before buying a small beauty products company from his mother-in-law, an aromatherapist. Chris found it challenging to find quality, essential oils for use in the products. Many were overpriced or of low-quality, and most companies sold the oils through multi-level marketing.

Chris was certain there was an increasingly strong market for high-quality essential oils at affordable prices, and in 2011, he launched Plant Therapy. Under Chris's stewardship, the company has experienced a three-year growth of nearly 8,000% and now has around 35

employees. Plant Therapy has outgrown four commercial spaces and is now planning to have a 40,000-square-foot facility by the end of 2015.

1. How do you define success?

There are lots of different kinds of successes, so such a broad question is hard. I think my ultimate goal is the same as most other people: To find joy. I don't think success is a destination, but rather a journey. If I am finding true joy (or peace of mind) in my current situation, I would say I am being successful. For financial success, I would say when my passive (investment) income exceeds my living expenses, I am successful.

2. What is the key to success?

I think for both personal and professional success, most of the answers are the same: Treat others how you would like to be treated. Don't cheat. If you screw up, fess up to it and learn from it. Play fair. Don't quit just because it's hard. Be honest. Don't cut. Try your hardest. Be respectful. It's okay to fail.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

I actually never really thought about it. I never really had a "plan." I have always just lived my life based on instinct and what was currently going on. When I went to college, I was never a very good student but planned to become an airline pilot (now I am so glad that didn't pan out). While in school, my self-employed father got sick. We didn't know what was wrong, but I was the only one that knew anything about his business. I moved home to help him run it while we figured it out. He died of cancer within a couple of months, and I did my best to keep his business afloat. I learned way more about business and life in the next year than I had in my previous 20+ years combined.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

I have 3 daughters (soon to be 4) and an incredible wife. They are really my motivation. I have a fear of failure, but it is more of a fear of letting them down, rather than a fear of judgment from others.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

That it is okay to be me, flaws and all. I don't have to try to impress others or live within their confines. As individuals, we have unlimited potential, and once we stop trying to please others all the time or try to keep up with others, life becomes much more enjoyable and fulfilling.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

What spare time? Just kidding. My daughters are still young, so they get most of my off work time. We spend the nights and weekends as a family. We enjoy camping and swimming. We spend many winter evenings in the hot tub. I also enjoy golfing and boating, but don't make as much time for it as I would like.

7. What makes a great leader?

Being able to inspire others. I think it is the leader's responsibility to make his people feel good about themselves and also help them to find joy in their lives. The vast majority of lessons taught and learned are done strictly through example. People need to talk less and do more.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Be open-minded and teachable. I have owned multiple successful businesses, and every single one came as a result of different circumstances in life, not a conscious decision to get into that business. When I got into the essential oil business, it was because I was presented with the opportunity to purchase a very small beauty products company with a minimal investment. I saw an opportunity for growth and jumped on it. You can learn important life lessons from everyone. Don't discount someone just because you don't see them as successful.

Dawn Kelley



As president & CEO of Barney & Co. California, maker of Barney Almond Butters and other California almond products, Dawn focuses on expanding Barney's growth (both domestically and internationally) in the nut butter and almond products categories, while leading the company's day-to-day business and manufacturing operations.

Dawn has adopted the three bottom line approach of Profit, People, and Purpose, and is using these filters in short-term and long-term planning and strategies. Through vertical integration of processes, Dawn is evolving Barney to consistently be the category leader and most conscientious, quality-focused, best-valued brand on the market. Dawn is simultaneously leading the way through a transition to an organic, fair-trade, sustainable ingredient profile and supply chain (where possible).

Innovation within the almond space is an on-going focus for Dawn and the promise to deliver peanut-free (no cross contamination) almond products to consumers everywhere is at the

forefront of this innovation. Dawn joined Barney in 2010 as president & CEO after overseeing the sale of her previous company, United Tote, to Churchill Downs. Dawn served as president of United Tote, a technology company and subsidiary of YouBet.com, a publicly-traded e-commerce company, and previously held senior executive/leadership positions at Orbitz.com and Careerbuilder.com.

Dawn holds a B.A. degree in Political Science from the University of Kentucky and currently resides in Maine, where she lives with her husband, three stepchildren, and two dogs.

1. How do you define success?

Being true to your own values and sleeping well at night, with a clear conscience.

2. What is the key to success?

"80% of success is showing up." – Woody Allen. And by showing up, I also mean not being led by fear, taking on challenges, as well as the day to day.

3. Did you always know you would be successful?

When I was growing up, my mom was a successful, working, single mother. She was a good role model for believing, from an early age, I could do and be anything I want. I never thought otherwise. Having said, I'm also pretty conservative financially and have a bit of bag-lady syndrome. I think that keeps me on my toes.

4. When faced with adversity, what pushes you to keep moving forward?

One of my favorite sayings is "there's a solution for every problem," and my mind usually doesn't shut down until it's been found. There are obviously situations where you just need to let go. Figuring out those times is key.

5. What is the greatest lesson you've ever learned?

If you mess up, fess up. If you are dealing with good people, it will build trust. Take accountability and own your decisions and actions.

6. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Yoga, reading, hunting through antique and flea markets for special treasures, and doing home improvements. Working with my hands is my form of meditation.

7. What makes a great leader?

A good leader manages by influence vs. authority. Your authority leaves the room when you do; Your influence does not.

8. What advice would you give to college students about entering the workforce?

Let go of ego and look for opportunities to learn from the best. Then work harder, longer, and faster than you ever have before.

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