

# **Success**

30 Interviews with Entrepreneurs & Executives

Jason Navallo

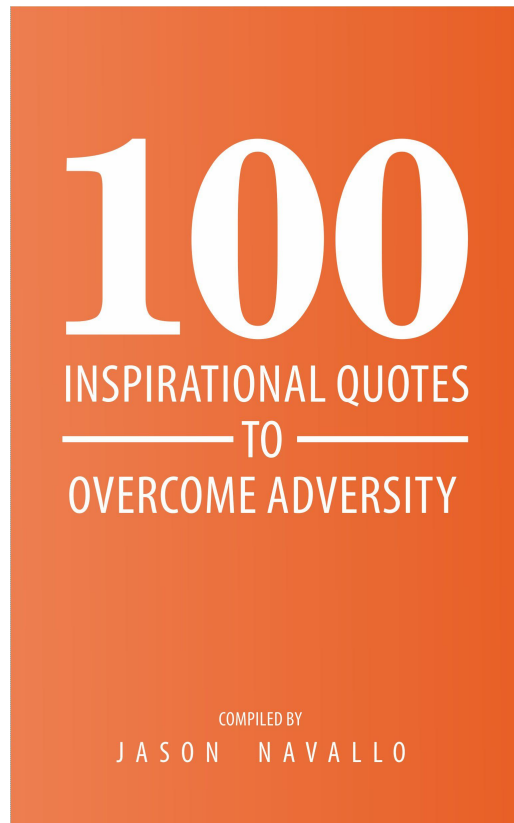


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# Introduction

“Success” is a subjective term. For some, success means having a big house, fancy cars, and a large bank account. For others, success means freedom: the freedom to do what you want, when you want. Everyone has their own definition of the word, which stems from our tastes, feelings, and life experiences.

A couple of years ago, I conducted an experiment. I wanted to know what some of the world’s most successful people, in my eyes, thought of the word “success.” I wanted to know what success means to them and the principles they live by. So I hustled, reaching out to hundreds of people, facing many rejections, to conduct insightful interviews.

In this book, you will read 30 interviews I’ve conducted with successful entrepreneurs and executives nationwide. For each interview, I asked everyone the same eight questions. These questions were meant to grasp their take on the word and uncover their life principles. These interviews changed my definition of the word "success," as well as my entire focus on what my life’s work should be about. I was truly inspired by what I gathered, and I hope you’ll be inspired, too.

## Colin Day



Colin Day founded iCIMS in 1999 and is the company's president and CEO. Prior to founding iCIMS, Colin worked in sales and new business development at Comrise Technology, an IT staffing firm. After successfully opening a new branch office in Washington, D.C., Colin recognized an opportunity to carve a technical platform out of the company, and iCIMS was born.

In addition to his responsibilities at iCIMS, Colin works to develop Software as a Service (SaaS) industry awareness and to educate human resources professionals on how to evaluate recruiting technology. He has contributed to various publications, including *Human Resource Executive*, *Employment Marketplace*, and *Human Capital*. He has also spoken at various engagements, including ReedLogic's HR Software Leadership Conference.

Colin has received numerous recognitions and awards. He has twice received *Human Capital* magazine's "HR Future Leaders Award," and has twice been rated one of the top five forward-thinking innovators in *Fast Company* magazine's "Fast 50 Readers' Challenge." In 2007, Colin was named Ernst & Young's "Entrepreneur of the Year" in the information technology software category. In 2008, Colin was recognized as one of the state's most dynamic business leaders in NJBIZ's "Forty Under 40" award program. In 2009, he was a finalist in the "Green Executive of the Year" category of the NJBIZ Green Leadership Awards, and in 2011, he was named a finalist in the "Executive of the Year" category of the NJBIZ Business of the Year Awards.

### **1. How do you define success?**

Stay true to yourself. It's one thing to get to where you want to be, quite another not to take shortcuts/lose your soul/bend your morals along the way. Our world is too focused on short-term growth. It's what the analysts/markets applaud right now. It doesn't necessarily build something enduring for the customer, and isn't that why we all got into business? You've got to wake up and be proud of what you've built, and the barometer for success should be beyond money and growth.

### **2. What is the key to success?**

Surround yourself with people who are smarter, more experienced, and more capable than you are, and then figure out how to get them all aligned around a common mission, vision, value system, and culture.

### **3. Did you always know you would be successful?**

Not at all. I knew I always wanted to work for myself, but I didn't always know I'd be successful. I still wonder if I am, and I constantly try to redefine success each year.

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

I've always had an extreme fear of failure. When I was young, I used to avoid certain things if I didn't know how to do them or have the confidence that I can do them better than others. I've brought that fear to the business world, and I am trying to make sure it's a healthy fear.

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

Be yourself, and don't be afraid to go in opposite directions. When our competitors started dropping prices, we raised them. When they started building out a broad portfolio, we stayed focused and went deep. When they got "starstruck" by enterprise customers, we remained focused on the small and medium-sized business (SMB) marketplace. Blue ocean strategy allowed us to stand out and win at what we do best.

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

Sleeping. I have two kids.

### **7. What makes a great leader?**

I am still trying to figure this out. I think it's an ability to persuade people who are smarter and more capable than you to follow you, and then get the hell out of their way.

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

Don't try to chart it all out. Life is random. I graduated with a psychology degree and joined a recruiting firm out of college because it was close to where my girlfriend lived. They built software that we took and spun out. That led to my company, iCIMS, where we now support over 1,500 companies. I never thought following a girlfriend would be the catalyst. Be open to any catalyst, but know an opportunity when you see one.

# Craig Newmark



Stephanie Canciello, unali artists

Craig Newmark is a self-described nerd, pioneer of the web, speaker, philanthropist, and a strong advocate of the use of technology for the public good. He is the founder of [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org), which he started in 1995 and is now one of the world's most-visited websites. He continues to work with [craigslist](http://craigslist.org) as a customer service representative (CSR).

Today, Craig's primary focus is [craigconnects.org](http://craigconnects.org), which he launched in 2011. The mission of [craigconnects](http://craigconnects.org), in the short-term, is to promote, expedite, and enhance the use of technology and social media for the benefit of philanthropy and public service. He uses the [craigconnects](http://craigconnects.org) platform to support the efforts of those "getting stuff done" in areas such as veterans and military families, open government, public diplomacy, back-to-basics journalism, fact-checking, consumer protection, election protection and voter registration, and technology for the public good. Craig's long-term mission for [craigconnects](http://craigconnects.org) is to ultimately extend the reach of technology worldwide, to "give a voice to the voiceless and real power to the powerless."

Craig currently serves on the board of directors of the Center for Public Integrity, Sunlight Foundation, Consumers Union/Consumer Reports, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. He also serves as an advisor on the use of technology for more than a dozen other non-profit organizations and government agencies.

Craig was born in Morristown, New Jersey and now lives in San Francisco, California, which has been his home for more than 20 years. He enjoys birdwatching, squirrel-watching, and science fiction. He communicates regularly through his own blog on [craigconnects](http://craigconnects.org), *The Huffington Post*, Facebook, and Twitter. He also travels the country speaking about issues, appearing on behalf of the organizations he supports, and delivering his [craigconnects](http://craigconnects.org) message to audiences nationwide.

## 1. How do you define success?

It's a matter of what makes you happy. For me, it's a matter of social impact, by my own actions, and more importantly, by finding ways to get everyone the means to work together for greater social impact.

**2. What is the key to success?**

Treat people like you want to be treated.

**3. Did you always know you would be successful?**

I'm not successful, yet.

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

Over time, people of good will prevail.

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

If it wasn't for comedy, I'd have no personality at all.

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

What is "spare time"?

**7. What makes a great leader?**

"Greatness" in leadership involves the ability to inspire and motivate large numbers of people. It includes charisma, which I don't even begin to understand.

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

Read *Dilbert*. Take responsibility for how people perceive you, which is to say, you own your own brand. That includes your use of social media.

## Dipanshu “D” Sharma



Dipanshu “D” Sharma founded xAd in 2009 with the goal of conquering the mobile-local search and advertising markets in the U.S. For over a decade, D has found new ways to leverage technology and to improve business models for entrepreneurs and innovative companies. He previously developed new technologies for Nokia, as well as co-founded RockeTalk, India’s fifth-largest mobile traffic site, and Kadonk, the top Microsoft Project Viewer. He was named TeleFusion’s “Technology Leader of the Year” and was nominated for Ernst & Young’s “Entrepreneur of the Year.” D sits on the board of directors at xAd and Kadonk, and is a member of Veracity Wireless’ advisory board.

### 1. How do you define success?

For us at xAd, it’s about a relevant local ad experience that drives consumers to retail stores, and being able to do it at a global scale. For me personally, it’s about products that make our lives better.

### 2. What is the key to success?

Focus: Entrepreneurs have a lot of ideas and often companies fail from a lack of execution, rather than having the right idea.

People: Hiring “A players” is key. My philosophy is to hire someone who can do your job and make your job redundant. My team is self-sufficient, allowing me to focus on building the future of xAd.

Timing: All products can be too early to market or too late. While it is very difficult to time, there is no point in waiting forever for timing to happen. One way to check is to look at the dependencies for the business to be successful. For example, mobile technology companies before the open AppStore infrastructure could not really have been successful, as they lacked significant distribution. Online companies needed Internet adoption. The question you have to ask is, “Is the underlying infrastructure



ready to scale?” Predicting the size of the market can be tricky. It’s easier to make a better product for an already-existing large market, like a better cellphone or wireless router. If you are coming up with something like Facebook or Twitter, then the guiding force is the rate of adoption for your product and/or technology.

### **3. Did you always know you would be successful?**

Goes back to the definition of success, as there is a lot for me to do.

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

Focus on the plan and have the best people. When you face difficulties, just know that you have the right people coming up with the right solutions. Earlier in my career, I used to get stressed and overreact in trying to solve the problem, but that only makes things worse. Keep your calm and work on a solution. Have people with you that will support you through difficult times. When you are changing the world with your innovations, that’s all the motivation you need.

### **5. What is the greatest lesson you’ve ever learned?**

You can’t force timing. The ecosystem has to be ready for the product to succeed. Mobile companies largely failed until 3G and smartphones were introduced. Make sure you can scale without third party dependency.

There is no substitute for a great team, even if you have the right product, market, and timing. Having the right team is the only way to be successful. Most companies take longer than they should to bring experienced staff to their growing startups to help with the growth. It is very difficult for all the founding/early team members to be able to grow with a fast-growing company’s needs. Some entrepreneurs are great at starting an idea and bringing it to life and not so good at its growth, as they want to focus on the next one. Choose what kind of entrepreneur you want to be—serial entrepreneur: one that is product-focused and can bring innovation to the marketplace several times, or one that has the motivation to build a long-sustaining business. Either is the right answer, just knowing it is hard. Most of Twitter’s original founders are on their next companies that is actually a win-win, as Jack Dorsey (Twitter co-founder) is a very successful Square founder. Meanwhile, Steve Jobs and Larry Allison are classic entrepreneurs who built large successful businesses.

It’s also important to know when to exit. It’s a lot easier to exit a business at less than \$20 million than \$50 million+ and very hard over \$200 million. If you are looking to raise money and also have an offer to exit (sell) the business, you should think very carefully on which path to take. Because you will own a large part of your company early on and a lot less of it as you raise money, your eventual financial outcome could be similar. An example would be Facebook, which did not take a \$1 billion offer, and now it’s worth \$200 billion. On the other hand, companies like Digg and Color could have had a better financial outcome than it eventually turned out to be.

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

My family just started a charity to help poor kids with the basics (education, food, etc.). That project is gaining steam. I love watching “Shark Tank” and will have an “As Seen on TV” idea one day!

### **7. What makes a great leader?**

The ability to listen. Ability to hire a great team. Be realistic (not overly optimistic or

pessimistic). Surround yourself with very smart people. And while doing all that, have time to take care of your family and friends.

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

It's an exciting time with so much changing in how we spend our daily lives. Find something that defines success for you and do it.

# Frank Britt



Frank Britt is the CEO of Penn Foster, a leading career-focused online and hybrid education institution that supports over 100,000 active students and 1,000 institutions nationwide. His mission is to create a national movement to better connect education, career pathways, and job creation, and to promote debt-free and affordable learning. Frank currently serves as an operating advisor at Bain Capital Ventures, and prior to joining Penn Foster, he was CEO of Pri-Med, the largest primary care-focused medical education and media company in the world. He brings 20 years of experience in growing companies in the education, media, technology, industrial, and consumer goods industries, including a variety of senior-level positions at IBM and Accenture.

## **1. How do you define success?**

1) Finding something you have passion for so you can use that energy to make a real difference and generate a solid income for you and your family, 2) being in a position that allows you to maximize personal growth and to use that role to help elevate and enable success in others, 3) building a personal brand (reputation) that stands for high performance, and 4) being an outstanding person.

## **2. What is the key to success?**

1) The five people you spend the most time with will disproportionately impact who you become. Always be mindful of who you surround yourself with as these people will shape you and ideally enable you to be even better.

2) I feel strongly that you have to embrace the idea of putting yourself in situations where you have vulnerability and risk in order to truly grow. The fearless person is well-aware of that reality and it becomes a compass, not an obstacle. If you accept that life is a journey, you should assume it will often be hard. This is how you build grit and resiliency into your life management skill-set, which you will need over time as your scope of personal and professional responsibilities expands. If you dedicate yourself to the process of pushing your boundaries consistently, you will evolve as a person and generally have a more fulfilled life.

3) You have the power to choose to be happy. Making that deliberate decision each day will change what happens. Yes, you get to decide the weather at your life picnic most of the time, and thus happiness is almost always about creating options, rather than a byproduct of what actually occurs.

### **3. Did you always know you would be successful?**

As you go through life, your concept of success changes a lot. Depending on your influences, you often start with a narrower notion of what is possible. In my case, I honestly never really thought about it; I just assumed that if I plowed ahead and was purposeful, I would become the best version of myself professionally and personally, as a manager, husband, father, and citizen. I remain a work-in-process.

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

I have seen that perseverance is generally the difference between the ordinary and extraordinary people. Learn to see the obstacles as joy, not pain, and by doing so, the harder parts of life that help you grow become privileges rather than burdens. This is hard to do, but comes with the territory of taking on big challenges. This will build grit, an essential element for success and a term often used, but not always understood. In practical terms, it means to build firmness of character and cultivate a spirit such that when confronted with the inevitable obstacles of life, you can persevere. With this mindset, I try to frame most things I am doing as either learning or training, whether good or bad, and with this approach, there is always value created. Regardless of the actual outcome and difficulty, I always end up growing throughout the process.

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

Many people think about their five- or 10-year plans. I learned long ago to set goals in shorter intervals, such as three-, 12-, and 24-month horizons. Additionally, at the start of every year, rather than make a New Year's resolution which we often abandon along the way, I choose three words to focus my goals and efforts for the year. Each day, I seek to calibrate my experience and objectives against these imperatives which helps me set priorities, stay grounded, and make sense of the turbulence often involved in navigating a high-performance life.

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

I enjoy spending time with my wife and three kids, giving back to the community, and lots and lots of reading. Fitness and brain functioning are also highly linked, and I use ice hockey to physically challenge myself multiple times per week.

### **7. What makes a great leader?**

Pericles once said, "What you leave behind is not what is engraved in mountains, but what is woven into the lives of others." This fundamental insight is recognized by many and has been a guidepost for the most successful people I have encountered in my life. These special people make a priority to focus on helping others succeed, and recognize that everyone shines given the right lighting. In fact, even Giorgio Armani, the famous designer, once said that, "Elegance is not about being noticed, it's about being remembered." Making a lasting difference in whatever you do should be the goal, and that is mostly about helping to augment the destinies of others. Help other people build wings for their own lives, and that will end up transforming you.

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

Success and happiness are not a matter of destiny, but a matter of creating options. It is a choice you make each day when you open your eyes, and that single decision will drive much of your life in both direct and indirect ways. It is far more than a state of mind; instead, it is a skill to be learned and practiced. Every single moment, you are writing your life story, the sum total of your choices, and as the author you get to define the narrative. Finally, once you have a job, regardless of the role or the company, make an earnest attempt to learn how it makes money. All sustainable businesses have a so-called profit formula, and even at a high level, you should understand how it works, why it works, and how your area fits into the master formula. This insight will expand your understanding, and likely help you better make the trade-offs in most roles, and maybe as the CEO yourself someday.

## Gary L. Malin



Gary L. Malin, president of Citi Habitats, is the principal figure in the day-to-day operations, strategic planning, and overall vision for one of New York City's largest and most successful real estate brokerage firms. Gary shapes the company's brand through his hands-on involvement with marketing and public relations initiatives, builds and maintains alliances with key real estate entities and professionals, and directs Citi Habitats' affiliates.

In addition, Gary built the company's corporate relocation division, Citi Relocation, from the ground up. He also oversees Citi Habitats' new development marketing division, Citi Habitats Marketing Group. In all of these functions, his primary objective is to ensure that Citi Habitats remains, as it has throughout its existence, the industry leader in forward-thinking, customer service-centered real estate firms.

### **1. How do you define success?**

While "success" can be defined many ways, I define it as working in an environment where the culture and values match your own. It's important to enjoy going to work every day. Being regularly challenged in your career is important, too; it helps get the best out of you. People tend to judge success based upon financial growth. While having enough money to live a comfortable life is important, the key is not to make the number on your paycheck the only measure of success.

### **2. What is the key to success?**

Hard work always plays a role in success. It's also important to act honestly and with integrity—always. The value of your word is very important, and once it's lost, it's very hard to get back.

### **3. Did you always know you would be successful?**

I'm my harshest critic, but I've always had confidence in myself. If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will, either.

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

When I am faced with adversity, I remind myself that it's not the adversity that defines me, but the resolution of this adversity that matters in the end. In addition, many times something good comes out of a challenge. We need to get shaken up once in a while to help us grow and become better people. I look at change not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity.

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

The greatest lesson I've learned is that change is inevitable. Although you may not understand the rationale behind the change, as soon as you embrace it, the sooner you can excel. You have to anticipate change and prepare how to react. Remember, having great vision is one thing, but delivering on that vision is what matters.

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

I spend most of my free time with my family. I have two very active kids! I also like to hit the golf course with my friends. I find it to be a great way to relax and decompress.

**7. What makes a great leader?**

A great leader is open to suggestions and fosters an atmosphere where every team member's contributions are valued. On that note, it's important to take steps to make the work environment a fun one. In addition to simply making the office a more pleasant place to spend time, it instills a sense of loyalty and teamwork among employees. A good leader also has faith in his or her team and gives them the tools to excel, but also allow them to make mistakes—it's a part of the learning process. He or she also needs to be proactive and always focused on the future. It's important for a leader to challenge their current business model, and to be on the lookout for new opportunities for growth.

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

My advice would be to choose a profession that you are passionate about. When starting your first job, remember that there is no substitute for hard work. Do what it takes to prove your value to the firm. Don't pigeonhole yourself, and learn about other people's roles at the company. You may discover that you're interested in pursuing a position you never knew existed. Find a mentor, and ask him/her a lot of questions. Be a sponge and absorb all the knowledge you can. Most importantly, don't be afraid to fail. Learn from your mistake, brush yourself off, and keep moving.

# Jane Wales



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Jane Wales is CEO of the Global Philanthropy Forum and the World Affairs Council, vice president of the Aspen Institute, and host of the nationally-syndicated National Public Radio interview show, *It's Your World*.

Previously, Jane served in the Clinton administration as special assistant to the president and senior director of the National Security Council. She simultaneously served as associate director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, where her office was responsible both for advancing sustainable economic development through science and technology cooperation and for developing policies for securing advanced weapons materials in the former Soviet Union. During the Carter Administration, Jane served as deputy assistant secretary of state.

In the philanthropic sector, Jane chaired the international security programs at the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the W. Alton Jones Foundation, and she directed the Project on World Security at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. From 2007 to 2008, she served as acting CEO of The Elders, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and founded by Nelson Mandela. In 2008, Jane also chaired the Poverty Alleviation Track for the Clinton Global Initiative.

## 1. How do you define success?

When opportunity is not only seized but shared, individuals are empowered and their lives are improved. Enabling others to excel is not only a privilege, but also a joy.

## 2. What is the key to success?

Collaborative leadership. We never really walk alone.



### **3. Did you always know you would be successful?**

My parents taught my brothers and me that not only can you make a difference, you must. It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I heard a problem described as "too large to think about." Large problems are the ones that require us all. And, even if our individual contributions are so small as to be imperceptible, they are needed nonetheless.

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

The very fact that there is adversity and there are needs to be met. A powerful motivator is the sense that the solutions require us all.

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

There are two. The first lesson is that opportunities arise from unexpected places in unanticipated ways. When we launched the Global Philanthropy Forum in 2001, the word "global" in the title referred solely to the issues that GPF members sought to tackle. Most were American. Many were the beneficiaries of globalization. All wanted to see its benefits more evenly shared, and its dangers addressed throughout the Global South. Fast forward to today, when the GPF's newest members are path-breaking philanthropists who have emerged in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as economies are opened and enterprise is privatized. Several of them have helped to form GPF's newest affiliate, the African Philanthropy Forum, with the bold goal of Africa meeting its own development needs. Like their American counterparts, these philanthropists will not settle for economic growth that is robust; they want it to be broad-based. And they will use their giving, their investing, and their policy access to assure that outcome. Because of change agents like them and those they support, the next great wave of philanthropic innovation will likely stem from emerging economies. And the transfer of knowledge will not only flow from north to south, or west to east, but rather the other way around, creating an unprecedented opportunity for us all to learn.

This opportunity to learn, improve, and enjoy will be seized if we act on a second lesson—taught to me by a Ghanaian woman, whose name I have never known—and it is that, "the ground is never insulted by poor dancing." So, give it a try whether you believe you will succeed or fail.

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

Lots of laughter. A seven-year-old named Luke. A five-year-old named Aliya—and three rescue dogs named Pogo, Wags, and Blue.

### **7. What makes a great leader?**

In a world characterized by fast-paced change, leadership requires the combination of collaboration and determination, agility and strategy, empathy and audacity—and a listening ear. These are the qualities that allow individuals and groups to adapt and inspire. Today's philanthropists have the opportunity to support extraordinary innovators who have these leadership qualities. And the philanthropists themselves, while bold in their objectives, are increasingly collaborative as leaders. They form networks to learn from one another. They partner with governments and harness capital markets to their social goals. When faced with complex, difficult problems, they make big bets on local and global leaders who change lives.

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