

**On Achievement**

**By Sam Vaknin, Ph.D.**

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If a comatose person were to earn an interest of 1 million USD annually on the sum paid to him as compensatory damages – would this be considered an achievement of his? To succeed to earn 1 million USD is universally judged to be an achievement. But to do so while comatose will almost as universally not be counted as one. It would seem that a person has to be both conscious and intelligent to have his achievements qualify.

Even these conditions, though necessary, are not sufficient. If a totally conscious (and reasonably intelligent) person were to accidentally unearth a treasure trove and thus be transformed into a multi-billionaire – his stumbling across a fortune will not qualify as an achievement. A lucky turn of events does not an achievement make. A person must be intent on achieving to have his deeds classified as achievements. Intention is a paramount criterion in the classification of events and actions, as any intentionalist philosopher will tell you.

Supposing a conscious and intelligent person has the intention to achieve a goal. He then engages in a series of absolutely random and unrelated actions, one of which yields the desired result. Will we then say that our person is an achiever?

Not at all. It is not enough to intend. One must proceed to produce a plan of action, which is directly derived from the overriding goal. Such a plan of action must be seen to be reasonable and pragmatic and leading – with great probability – to the achievement. In other words: the plan must involve a prognosis, a prediction, a forecast, which can be either verified or falsified. Attaining an achievement involves the construction of an ad-hoc mini theory. Reality has to be thoroughly surveyed, models constructed, one of them selected (on empirical or aesthetic grounds), a goal formulated, an experiment performed and a negative (failure) or positive (achievement) result obtained. Only if the prediction turns out to be correct can we speak of an achievement.

Our would-be achiever is thus burdened by a series of requirements. He must be conscious, must possess a well-formulated intention, must plan his steps towards the attainment of his goal, and must correctly predict the results of his actions.

But planning alone is not sufficient. One must carry out one's plan of action (from mere plan to actual action). An effort has to be seen to be invested (which must be commensurate with the achievement sought and with the qualities of the achiever). If a person consciously intends to obtain a university degree and constructs a plan of action,

which involves bribing the professors into conferring one upon him – this will not be considered an achievement. To qualify as an achievement, a university degree entails a continuous and strenuous effort. Such an effort is commensurate with the desired result. If the person involved is gifted – less effort will be expected of him. The expected effort is modified to reflect the superior qualities of the achiever. Still, an effort, which is deemed to be inordinately or irregularly small (or big!) will annul the standing of the action as an achievement. Moreover, the effort invested must be seen to be continuous, part of an unbroken pattern, bounded and guided by a clearly defined, transparent plan of action and by a declared intention. Otherwise, the effort will be judged to be random, devoid of meaning, haphazard, arbitrary, capricious, etc. – which will erode the achievement status of the results of the actions. This, really, is the crux of the matter: the results are much less important than the coherent, directional, patterns of action. It is the pursuit that matters, the hunt more than the game and the game more than victory or gains. Serendipity cannot underlie an achievement.

These are the internal-epistemological-cognitive determinants as they are translated into action. But whether an event or action is an achievement or not also depends on the world itself, the substrate of the actions.

An achievement must bring about change. Changes occur or are reported to have occurred – as in the acquisition of knowledge or in mental therapy where we have no direct observational access to the events and we have to rely on testimonials. If they do not occur (or are not reported to have occurred) – there would be no meaning to the word achievement. In an entropic, stagnant world – no achievement is ever possible. Moreover: the mere occurrence of change is grossly inadequate. The change must be irreversible or, at least, induce irreversibility, or have irreversible effects. Consider Sisyphus: forever changing his environment (rolling that stone up the mountain slope). He is conscious, is possessed of intention, plans his actions and diligently and consistently carries them out. He is always successful at achieving his goals. Yet, his achievements are reversed by the spiteful gods. He is doomed to forever repeat his actions, thus rendering them meaningless. Meaning is linked to irreversible change, without it, it is not to be found. Sisyphean acts are meaningless and Sisyphus has no achievements to talk about.

Irreversibility is linked not only to meaning, but also to free will and to the lack of coercion or oppression. Sisyphus is not his own master. He is ruled by others. They have the power to reverse the results of his actions and, thus, to annul them altogether. If the fruits of our labour are at the mercy of others – we can never guarantee their irreversibility and, therefore, can never be sure to achieve anything. If we have no free will – we can have no real plans and intentions and if our actions are determined elsewhere – their results are not ours and nothing like achievement exists but in the form of self delusion.

We see that to amply judge the status of our actions and of their results, we must be aware of many incidental things. The context is critical: what were the circumstances, what could have been expected, what are the measures of planning and of intention, of effort and of perseverance which would have "normally" been called for, etc. Labelling a complex of actions and results "an achievement" requires social judgement and social recognition. Take breathing: no one considers this to be an achievement unless

Stephen Hawking is involved. Society judges the fact that Hawking is still (mentally and sexually) alert to be an outstanding achievement. The sentence: "an invalid is breathing" would be categorized as an achievement only by informed members of a community and subject to the rules and the ethos of said community. It has no "objective" or ontological weight.

Events and actions are classified as achievements, in other words, as a result of value judgements within given historical, psychological and cultural contexts. Judgement has to be involved: are the actions and their results negative or positive in the said contexts. Genocide, for instance, would have not qualified as an achievement in the USA – but it would have in the ranks of the SS. Perhaps to find a definition of achievement which is independent of social context would be the first achievement to be considered as such anywhere, anytime, by everyone.

Sam Vaknin is the author of "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited" and the editor of mental health categories in The Open Directory, Suite101, and searcheurope.com.

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## Achievement and Happiness the 80/20 Way

by: Rasheed ALi

If there was ever a principle that was responsible for the most happiness and achievement in the world, it would be the 80/20 Principle.

The 80/20 Principle or Pareto Principle was discovered in 1897 by an Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto while he was searching for patterns of wealth and income in England.

What he found was that 80 percent of the wealth was enjoyed by only 20 percent of the population. Additionally, it was consistent in different countries and in different times.

This has been found in present day as well and in almost any activity that we perform, business or otherwise.

In other words, 80 percent of your results in a given activity, are generated by 20 percent of your input or effort. Just the same, 80 percent of revenue or profits are generated by 20 percent of your efforts or sales.

The 80/20 relationship can also easily be documented in personal achievement and happiness.

Most people have never taken the time to count their achievements or much less figure out what makes them happy. If they did, they would have realized that there are very few things that contribute to most of their happiness. They would also have found that there are very few things that they have done that has resulted in most of their achievements.

A great example of the 80/20 Principle in achievement would be to look at some achievement that you've made in your life, and write down all of the things that you did that "truly" got you there. If you're looking at it honestly you'll see that it took consistent effort on very few things to get you most of your results.

My website <http://www.RasheedAli.com> is another great example. I could have spent a lot of working hours and even more money to get my traffic up, but in reality it took very little work and money to get my Alexa traffic rank from over 3,000,000 in the world to currently 212,901 and climbing every week! It has taken very few, small but effective steps to achieve this. You will find this time and time again in your life if you take a closer look. What you may have thought of as hard work may have been a few effective actions combined with many ineffective actions. By the way, this was done in less than three months.

Now, although achievement makes us happy, what else does?

A serious "Happiness Analysis" is also something all of us should do at least once in our lives. If you documented the things that contribute to your happiness then number the things that make you the happiest, you will find that there are only a few things that contribute to most of your happiness. In other words 20 percent of the things that make you happy, contribute to 80 percent of your happiness!

With that said, if you were to spend more time doing the things that result in most of your happiness or achievement, you WILL double or even triple your results!

Rasheed Ali was once a homeless runaway on the streets of NY and is now dedicated to helping people from all walks of life to reach their ultimate potential by conquering any and all obstacles through his Conquer Your Adversity Newsletter. You can subscribe at <http://www.RasheedAli.com>  
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