



## Success & Significance

George Dow

In his book, Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance, Bob Buford describes the first half of life as favoring the pursuit of success. In the second half, Buford suggests that the balance shifts towards significance. In discussions with my career transition clients, our focus is typically on how to achieve both success and significance in life and work. Why not both, regardless of our life stage?

In the first half of this blog I'll be sharing some insights on success from Wharton Professor, Adam Grant. His book, Give and Take, reveals some intriguing findings about how the most successful people behave. In the second half of this blog I'll explain how "remembering the ride home" can help us stay true to living a life of significance.

### Success

For a useful summary of Give and Take, [click here](#). In this book, Adam Grant described three types of people: givers, takers and matchers. For the givers, it's mostly about generosity. If you are a taker, it's about you. If you are a matcher, whenever you give away something, you expect something of equal value in return. Who would you guess are the most successful people?

According to Grant's research, the givers are actually both the most and the least successful. They are least successful when they give too much at the expense of their own work, don't set boundaries well, or burn out after consistently overextending their generosity. The givers who exercise a "healthy selfishness", while still being primarily focused on the needs of others, turn out to be the most successful. Grant describes these people as "otherish" givers. I often discuss Grant's model in my coaching sessions, and recommend his book. How would you describe yourself? Would being an "otherish" giver be an aspirational description you would choose for yourself?

## **Significance**

Charlie Maxwell is the CEO of Meristem, a Twin Cities based financial services firm. Charlie's job is extremely demanding, and he is also the parent of triplets. His children all received early childhood development services from an organization named Fraser. When Charlie was asked to join the Fraser board, he quickly and whole heartedly agreed to do so.

Over time, Charlie became aware of an increasing level of frustration caused by the demands of his work and family, combined with the time and energy required by the Fraser board and also serving as a Trustee of the Foundation at the Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute. He was most in touch with these frustrations on his trips in to his board and foundation meetings. On most rides home, however, Charlie would find himself feeling grateful for the choice he had made to serve in this way.

Charlie found a simple attitude adjustment as a method for alleviating these frustrations. He decided to remember the ride home on the ride to those meetings. From that point on, a broad smile appeared both to and from the meetings. Charlie has told me that he regularly shares this story with his staff, encouraging generosity as an ongoing expectation for everyone within his firm.

Shortly after hearing his story, I decided to try Charlie's advice myself, on my drive in to a volunteer church meeting. At the stoplight on the corner of 36th street and Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, I took a moment to recall Charlie's story, and began to smile myself. I pictured the faces of each of the committee members, imagined our meeting ending and then walking out of my church into the night air. I felt the warmth that was sure to come at the end of that meeting, and a pride in the contributions we had just made. I felt my emotions shift as I began to anticipate my ride home on that warm summer evening.

Before the stop light changed to green, I noticed to my immediate right the Lakewood Cemetery. I realized that one day my last ride would be to that cemetery, and just before that ride there would be a ceremony at my church, three blocks away. At that ceremony the significance of my life would be reviewed. My mind started to race ahead. What would be in my eulogy, and what should I be doing today to make that eulogy a good one?

It has become clear to me that our life's significance is revealed both during each day's ride home, and during those final events immediately preceding the "ultimate" ride home.

## **Summary**

Success and significance....what can we do to achieve both? Consider Adam Grant's "otherish" giver strategy, and Charlie Maxwell's advice to remember the ride home on your next ride in.

A specialist in career planning and development, George Dow has helped over 1,500 executives improve their career transition effectiveness, to ensure “fit” in their future position, and to review and help shape the strategic alignment of their chosen career path. He is highly effective in the development of executive job campaign strategies, whether the choice is traditional reemployment, an alternative career direction, or a more significant career transformation.