

Does Hard Work Guarantee Success? by Andrew Gabelic

We live in a world that glorifies hard work.

Is hard work all that's needed to make your dreams come true? Or is there something else?

This is a question we often ask ourselves during times of stagnation, when we can't see any evidence of progress despite making great efforts. When we begin doubting ourselves or getting cynical.

Once upon a time, in your younger idealistic years, the world was your oyster. You understood you had a great future. When life brought you the ordinary, you would close your eyes and jump off into the extraordinary, picturing a life you were sure you could construct without anybody's help.

Lately, you've been forced to reevaluate and reconstruct those dreams through the microscope of reality.

You swing back and forth between skepticism and idealism – sometimes knowing you can do everything you set your mind to, and sometimes forcing yourself to come to terms with the fact that there are certain things you can't control that could keep you from getting there.

There is always a lingering fear that one day you'll look back on your life and be forced to admit that the loftiest dreams of your youth were unrealistic, too grandiose, or simply naïve.

Maybe we all have delusions of grandeur. Isn't that a scary thought (that we're not the only ones that know we are going to "make it")?

Everyone knows they will achieve great things. Everyone waits for the day when they will clutch every company, product idea, and creative work in their hands and see it attract the success they know it deserves. Everyone knows it will happen for them.

Some get lucky and are validated, because they end up living their dreams. Some don't, and must spend their lives accepting smaller victories. They are forced to convince themselves that their modest successes and purple ribbons were what they wanted all along. They achieved a lot, but not what that they had in mind. Not everything they envisioned.

But that's ok, right? Sure, except the fear of belonging to the latter group is always lingering in the back of your mind.

And sometimes, all you want is for someone with authority to tell you which group you belong to. If your success is not up to you, then you would like to know (so that you can learn how to deal with it already).

If it is, then you would also like to know (so that you never have to doubt your idealism again).

If there is a third option, then you would REALLY like to know about it (perhaps one where the secret to success is a recipe that can be taught, learned, and shared amongst a special group of individuals).

Is hard work all you need to see your dreams come true, or could you fail even if you do everything in your power to achieve them?

Most life questions have two seemingly conflicting, but simultaneously true answers. This one is no different.

Yes, you have full control of your destiny, and hard work, determination, and commitment are certain to pay off no matter what the circumstances throw at you.

But there is a catch – not all hard work is created equal. Not all determination is created equal. Not all commitment is created equal.

And if you've ever met someone with a negative tilt who complains life did not deliver all they deserved despite their quote-unquote hard work, you will know exactly what I'm talking about.

There are four types of hard work:

1. The hard work you make for yourself, when on your own. The hard work you start without anyone's input, motivation, or influence. When you figure out what needs to be done, get started, and do it well just because YOU want to do it.
2. The hard work you are assigned by others who know what needs to be done. You could do it brilliantly and successfully, but it never happens unless directed by another's influence and ideas.
3. The hard work you do only when someone walks you through every possible step and helps you respond to every unpredictable outcome and holds your hand the entire way – in other words, the hard work you do without thinking, when you outsource your brain to someone you trust or who has power over you.
4. The hard work you do ONLY when situations outside of your control force you to do it. When you have no other choice but to work hard in order to stay alive. When it is all you can do to avoid some greater catastrophe.

Guess what? Only one of those types of hard work can help you manifest your dreams. Only one of those types of work leads to full freedom of time, resources, and self-realization. Only one is effective at the messy process of molding an idea out of the abstract and into the specific. Only one leads to your best possible life.

Guess which one?

You can work your ass off only when others tell you – but your dreams will never be yours. You can work your ass off only when you have someone guiding you through every step, but your dreams will never be yours. You can work your ass off only when you have no other choice but to work your ass off, but your dreams will never be yours.

It is only when your initiative guides that hard work, when you see what needs to get done, what the world is missing, what no one has ever thought of (and everybody needs), and you put in the hard work without ever being asked, or patted on the back, or rewarded or guided, that you achieve REAL success. This is the only kind of work that life rewards with freedom, adventure, and personal fulfillment.

Work is not enough. Initiative is the only true mother of all success. And initiative is hard. No one was born with it. No one ever acquired it by reading a book, or listening to a podcast or even deciding to have it.

No one ever took a pill or flicked a switch in their minds or found any easy shortcut to become a person of initiative.

Initiative is a habit and habits are notoriously difficult to build. Habits take time and repeated effort. Habits are only built by people who are comfortable with the failure and the criticism that may come with action.

Habits take confidence in your ability to stand back even after failing for the 700th time.

Have you ever tried to launch a new exercise routine or diet or quit smoking and failed? Do you know why you failed? You failed because you thought you could build a new habit just by deciding to do it and expecting perfect results.

Does that mean you lack that ability to build a new habit? Absolutely not. It just means that you didn't get back up after failing, something that was 100% predictable and expected.

It means that you're human like the rest of us. It means you need about 800 tries before it sticks like the rest of us. And if only you remembered that and understood it, that feeling of shame that comes with failing your second or third try would go away, and never bug you again.

Your goal this month, and really, your goal for the rest of your life, is to build the habit of initiative. To construct a brain of initiative, a heart of initiative, and a soul of initiative.

And I'm not just talking about your dreams in life. Whatever job you have, become a person of initiative. Do the work no one asks you to do and do it well. Find new projects and deliver the results without anybody asking. Do it in your relationships and in your community and with strangers on the street.

You will find what needs to get done, and you will do it.

You will not do it for rewards (at least not immediate rewards). You will do it to stretch that muscle in your brain so it becomes second nature.

You see problems and you fix them without being asked. You bring value wherever you go, and you love your work, because it is the work you decide to do and bring about because it makes you happy.

Initiative will be such a permanent feature of your thought process that you will apply it without even thinking about it. In a matter of months, you will come home one Friday night, take a sip of your favorite wine, lounge on your couch and be amazed at just how much initiative came out of your brain throughout the week.

Become that person today, don't doubt that you can, or push it off, or find a reason to wait a few months. Become that person today, and you have my word, you will attract many of the things you've been waiting for the past few years.