



Measuring Success Decide what's important first - then measure.

By Peter J. McGarahan, Founder and President, McGarahan & Associates

The Situation



It started with a movie on the plane to New York.

It was just another week away from my young family to spend with clients and co-workers.

It was just another step on the road to success, making money and sacrificing, always sacrificing.

It was just another cross-country, redeye flight – business as usual.

There was something different about this flight - I thought I would actually watch the movie this time since I had no work to do.

The Movie

The feature movie was “My Life as a House”. The story was about George (Kevin Kline), an architect who was just been fired from his job of 30 years. Living alone in a dilapidated house, located in a posh Californian neighborhood, George is forced to reassess his life when he is informed that cancer will soon take it. Ready to tear down his house to rebuild it with a new one, George visits his ex-wife with a request to have his estranged son Sam join him for the summer to help with the construction. The problem is that the rebellious, drug-addicted son wants nothing to do with his father – and so begins the movie that grabs you from the beginning and doesn't let you go – even after the credits roll.

It's easy to hide a moist eye; but it's difficult to hide a pair of red, tear-stained eyes from your fellow first class passengers.

The defining moment in the movie was when George shares his most joyous moment in his life with his ex-wife. He describes his memory of hugging his young son in the cold, rushing waves of the Pacific Ocean. He feels his young son's heartbeat against his chest. He listens to his infectious laughter. At the end of the movie, his ex-wife brings this video to his deathbed for him to enjoy his most cherished memory for the last time.

Perfect Timing

Being a proud father of two young ones and traveling the way I did – this moment had a huge impact on me. It was like a shot of adrenaline – a wake-up call. My whole self seemed awakened as to the importance of this moment. I couldn't wait until my family woke up so I could talk to them. I couldn't wait until I ended the week's work so I could return home to enjoy them.

For George, he finally learned (better late than never) what success was, what made him happy - his family. For George, he finally appreciated what he had all along, right in his own household.

The Definition of Success

For me, being on the road often – it was simple. I wanted to enjoy more moments of happiness with my family. I needed to reevaluate my measurement for success in terms of 'what makes me happy'. It was clear after my reaction to the movie that happiness for me was enjoying every moment with my family. Enjoying every hug, every bath, every book reading, every vacation, every snuggle, every hug and kiss. Consciously 'Being Here Now' - everyday, every minute and every second. Be present and enjoy the 'little' things that life has to offer.

People often told me, "enjoy your children while their young, they grow up so fast". I never got it until I saw this movie. Now I know – and I have the time to do something about it. I can appreciate what I have – my family. I thank God for having two healthy, wonderful children and a loving wife. I am a lucky and blessed man to have the experiences / opportunities I have had and met the people I have met. I take none of it for granted and believe Friendship is a powerful and wonderful gift.

I will leave you with three things to think about:

1. Success is how YOU define it – not everyone else’s definition.
2. Success is what YOU want to get out of it – what is important to YOU – what makes YOU happy - not everybody else.
3. Success should be measured in your own terms – not someone else’s.

Service and support people find success in helping customers as well as each other. They find happiness in being of service to others. This is what makes our industry and community special, unique and rewarding. Sharing a real connection with family, friends and customers – priceless - what can be more successful than that!



Peter McGarahan is the founder and president of McGarahan & Associates and retired Chairman of the IT Infrastructure Management Association. Pete's value to the service and support industry is his thought leadership. As a practitioner, product manager and support industry analyst and expert, he has influenced the maturity of the service and support industry. His passion for customer service led the Taco Bell support organization to achieve the Help Desk Institute Team Excellence Award. IT Support News also named him one of the "Top 25 Professionals in the Service and Support Industry" in 1999. Support professionals voted McGarahan "The Legend of the Year" in 2002 and again in 2004 at the Help Desk Professionals conference for his endless energy, mentoring and coaching and his valuable contribution to the support industry and community. You can reach him at pete@mcgarahan.com or 714.694.1158.