

## CHAPTER 25

# Success Is No Accident

By Peter A. Howley

As a kid in high school, I didn't have a lot of self-confidence. My dad and I, one hot summer day at home in New Jersey, were sitting on the front porch. Suddenly, my father made a surprising forecast leaving me dumbfounded. "Pete," he said, "someday you will be president of your own company. Do you know why? Because you don't follow the crowd; you're your own man." Wow! I was shocked. But, that statement changed my life and self image. It was perfect for me and showed a huge understanding of this then-shy kid. I loved it. It became my major goal in life; it gave me direction, motivation and was tremendously uplifting. President of my own company, now that would be "winning big."

So twenty-five years later, when I arrived in San Francisco, it was to take over an exciting new disruptive startup company as President and CEO. I was clearly on my way to "winning big." But life has its surprises.

In taking the required physical exam to comply with this company's medical insurance coverage, I was shocked when they notified me that I had extremely high cholesterol. This level gave me a 600% greater chance of dying from a heart attack than if it had been normal. That got my attention! Following one of my secrets to success, I thoroughly researched the subject, asked around and soon discovered from one of my coworkers a wonderful book that fully explained high cholesterol, its causes and provided a concrete course of action to correct it back to normal levels. Being focused on my goal and highly disciplined, I did more than follow the guidance provided. I prepared a two-page "cheat

sheet” and followed it religiously. Religiously. If it said chicken once a week was “okay” but not great for you, I totally eliminated chicken. Within less than one year, my cholesterol dropped from a high of 312 to below 150, an astounding positive result. Even the doctors wanted to know my secret.

In chasing your dream, you are bound to run into obstacles. Aggressively addressing mine allowed me to continue to pursue my dream of not only being the president of my own company, but also “winning big” in a way that would make a positive impact in my life.

I then led that company, Centex Telemanagement Inc., through a very successful Initial Public Offering until its even more successful acquisition some nine years from my arrival. It became, according to *Inc. Magazine*, *the fastest-growing service company in America, and the fourth fastest-growing company of any type in America*. The early investors received a 20 times return on their investment within the first three years.

Its later successful acquisition price was a quarter billion dollars, a “big winner” for me, my Centex Associates and our investors. The company and I were written up in *Business Week*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal* and many other publications. We were on the cover of *Equities Magazine* and written up by them as one of only a few companies to grow our revenues and earnings during both good and bad economies. The Wall Street Journal called us “the darling of Wall Street.” More importantly, it had created an almost cult-like following among the six hundred highly-dedicated Associates that made those results possible. Many of those young Associates have since gone on to great success in their own rights. This is truly “winning big” on many fronts.

Later, I served as a key Senior Advisor and Director of Exodus Communications, which grew within four years from a start-up to being valued at thirty-seven billion dollars. It was a big win, professionally and financially, for me. Its young founder was valued at over a billion dollars. That founder has since gone on to further success with another Internet technology company recently written up in a national magazine as #4 in its field, beating out a number of industry giants. That’s a “big winner.”

## GOAL SETTING

So what is the secret to winning big? *It starts with determining what it is you want to accomplish. What is your “winning big” goal?* How important is it to you? In my case, my father helped make it clear: I wanted to make a big mark in life through business, making an impact that would make me exceptional, perhaps even make a positive difference in people’s lives. If I made some money in the process, great, but money was not my goal. Perhaps I’d even be written up and long remembered. One such early model and mentor to me was Bill McGowan, the legendary founder of MCI, who opened the telephone/telecommunications world to competition.

I discovered that success is no accident. But first we have to define success as it applies to us individually. Is it money, fame, health, happiness, or maybe climbing Mount Everest before you die? Success can be defined as truly world changing, a la Steve Jobs, or more modestly, as perhaps being the best doctor, teacher or mother in town. It could include being the best runner in your age group or the tennis champ at your country club. Or getting a pilot’s license or taking up sky diving, two wild things I did in my youth. The answer will differ for each of us.

And sometimes the success you start out pursuing is not the one that you end up making the number one priority in your life. However, I cannot over emphasize the motivation, excitement, enthusiasm, *and satisfaction*—that extra zest in your life—that determining and setting a ‘winning big’ goal in life can have - everyday. Even, if ultimately, you fail to achieve all of it.

Regardless of where we are in life, I believe all of us should have grand goals, defined by us, that give us direction and purpose, while motivating us to enjoy every day. Put another way: “What do you want on your tombstone?” Our human nature is stimulated and motivated by grand goals, which if successful are truly winning big. Aiming high, giving it your best and even ultimately falling short of your goal can still be extremely rewarding and satisfying. In other words, do you just want to muddle along in life, as so many of us do, or do you want to genuinely try to make a difference, make a mark, and perhaps be fondly remembered years after your passing? That has certainly been my philosophy in life.

## THE SECRETS TO WINNING BIG

### I. Clearly & Carefully ESTABLISH YOUR GOAL

- Put it in writing.
- Break that goal into concrete milestones, with specific time frames, 1 through 5 years plus long term.
- Aim high.
- Follow your own path. Dare to be different.

### II. Courage, Drive and Attitude

- Have courage – fortune favors the brave.
- Be positive. “I can do it, I can do it; yes I can, yes, I will.”
- Always be working toward that goal. Always.
- Be almost obsessively focused on accomplishing that goal.

### III. Execution and Learning

- Always be learning, overcoming fears and acquiring skills helpful to succeed.
- Never, never, never give up - as long as the goal still makes sense.
- Only take jobs that move you in the direction of your goal.
- Setbacks and failures are learning opportunities. Take advantage of them.
- Create and gather the support needed – advisors, a team, etc., then excite and motivate them to reach your goal.

### IV. Luck

- When it happens, take advantage of serendipity. Luck counts.

## THE KEY STEPS

**Success is no accident.** And “winning big” certainly requires even more focus, determination, and smarts than just creating success. Winning big, as mentioned, can be in business, health, happiness, and other spaces.

So start by clearly determining what is truly your long-term goal, your passion, and how you will measure success. Early in my career, a good friend published an article about goal setting. I took advantage of that information, setting goals for one to five years, as well as later. Success back then included earning double your age in salary. Those milestones were invaluable to my ultimate success. It kept me on track and focused, not letting me even momentarily forget where I was heading.

## **DANGER**

Winning big does require being brutally honest with yourself. Are you really willing to commit to earn that reward? Are you being honest about the facts supporting your goal? Commitment is different from daydreaming!

## **COURAGE, DRIVE & ATTITUDE**

I encourage being brave and positive about your goal, no matter what others may say, as long as you're not kidding yourself. You have to be committed to following your own path. Everybody isn't motivated to win big. Take full advantage when you can find similar and supportive souls. In fact, seek them out. But realize that by aiming high you may find you're largely on your own, particularly in the early days of your quest. I am an independent person, as dad pointed out, so I've never had a problem with that. On my leave time while in the military, I traveled throughout the Pacific and Asia, South America, and Europe, frequently by myself. While it's nice to have companionship, I realized early on that I might frequently be traveling my own path alone.

As a youth, I certainly lacked the cocky confidence that so many of my peers seemed to possess. Public speaking was intimidating and yet I knew it was critical to my long-term goal of successfully running my own company. Taking positive action after college, I joined Toastmasters, which was an invaluable learning opportunity. Learning, improving and getting ahead go hand in hand. Don't let your fears stop you. Today, I am a sought-after speaker and enjoy this activity immensely!

I am still highly driven to succeed, to continue winning big. I also like to run foot races, play tennis, sail around beautiful San Francisco Bay, ski and travel to discover new places. I try to squeeze these in, but if you are setting a high goal, it's impossible in my view to do that and live

what is emphasized today as a “balanced life.” Fortunately, I thoroughly enjoy what I do. I have never found the long hours, challenging work assignments, and travel that comes with it to be a chore. Plus I hate failure, not necessarily a bad trait. As legendary Intel CEO Andy Grove wrote, “Only the paranoid survive.”

## **EXECUTION AND LEARNING**

I recently saw a very insightful quote: “A leader doesn’t always need to know the right answer, but they need to know how to find that answer.” I cannot overemphasize how critically important that wisdom is for success and ‘winning big’. All the distinguished and legendary CEOs with whom I’ve worked clearly knew how to collect information, synthesize it and make good timely decisions. Information may come from many sources. These include the people around you every day: bosses, peers, subordinates, board members, advisors and consultants; as well as from: Google searches, taking a related college course or reading relevant books and articles. The key is to be always learning, acquiring knowledge and skills.

Don’t fall into the fallacy that books are no longer relevant. Books, printed or digital, are an amazingly source of knowledge, information and valuable experience. They’re a great way to master a topic or issue; you can even learn from the masters of industry, Henry Kaiser to Steve Jobs, during your morning commute.

Books give me very helpful tools not only for my own use, but also for leading and motivating those around me. Teams need to work together, relentlessly, to successfully reach goals. Many of my earliest book heroes are still relevant today: management guru Peter Drucker, Robert Kotler of Harvard Business School and motivational folks like Zig Ziglar and Napoleon Hill. Great books are being published every day. Use them.

Job decisions can be pivotal to your success. After I found myself in the exciting telecommunications field, I carefully reviewed new opportunities based on their value in helping me reach my long-term goal. I turned down job offers, some at substantial salary increases, that didn’t take me in the right direction. That’s not easy to do. However, having clearly established my winning big goal, I knew what was right for me.

## **LUCK**

Luck can frequently play a part. In the U. S. Air Force, I was responsible for maintaining long-range B-47 jet bombers. When I completed my active duty, I applied to the leading airlines, Pan Am, Eastern Airlines and TWA. I was disappointed when none responded. However, staying focused on my goal of becoming president of my own company, I quickly accepted AT&T's offer of a management development position. At that time the telephone world consisted of staid monopolies, a poor "fit" for hard working outspoken me. Then suddenly, Bill McGowan's MCI opened the door to aggressive worldwide competition and I was—purely by luck—positioned to join his disruptive industry "upstart" in one of the most dynamic exciting fields imaginable. My phenomenal climb to winning big was launched.

During the seven years that I worked at AT&T, despite not liking the big company bureaucracy, I worked very hard at learning everything I could. I even completed an NYU Masters of Business degree at night. My goal was clear; I wanted to win big and never stopped working and learning toward that challenging goal. Thomas Jefferson said it so well, "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it."

## **CONCLUSION**

Carefully set your goal for 'winning big,' creating a detailed roadmap and then go for it. It's exciting and can be tremendously motivating and rewarding. To miss this aspect of life - winning big - is to miss a rich slice of life.



## About Peter

Peter A. Howley is a bestselling author and serial entrepreneur with unprecedented experience in successfully building high-growth disruptive technology and service companies. As Chairman of The Howley Management Group he works closely with CEO's, Boards and Entrepreneurs internationally to accelerate companies into

industry leaders.

In addition to founding five companies, Howley has also advised, served on boards and as interim CEO in numerous companies looking to accelerate their success. He has the distinction of leading his first venture-backed company through IPO and acquisition into the pages of American business history as CEO of Centex Telemanagement. It was recognized as one of the fastest growing, best managed, most profitable companies in America. It retains a cult status in the service industry.

Howley joined the founders of Exodus Communications, a Global Web Hosting Company, at its inception as senior advisor and director. He served on the post-IPO Board until June 2000. Exodus still holds a NASDAQ record for consecutive quarters of greater than 40% revenue growth. As the CEO and co-founder of IPWireless, Inc., Howley raised more than \$120 million in venture capital. His leadership was instrumental in the company's successful acquisition by Nextwave.

He routinely publishes articles and books. Howley speaks frequently to a wide array of audiences on industry topics, and has been quoted extensively in publications including *USA Today*, *the Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune Magazine*. Recently Howley co-authored a bestselling book, *Trendsetters: The World's Leading Experts Reveal Top Trends To Help You Achieve Greater Health, Wealth and Success* and received both the *Golden Quill* and *Editors Choice* awards from The National Academy of Best-Selling Authors™. Howley is currently completing his forthcoming book, *The Good CEO*.

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