

PART II: SUPPORTING TEENS IN AN E-MENTORING COMMUNITY



PART II of this book is organized around advice synthesized from hundreds of responses from the successful young people and adults with disabilities who contributed to the content. These chapters contain text of messages for the online community administrator to send to mentors and protégés. The administrator can choose from a collection of *Mentor Tip* and *E-Community Activity* messages. Note that some of the content is also published in *Taking Charge: Stories of Success and Self-Determination* (Burgstahler, 2006c) and *DO-IT NEWS* at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Newsletters/>.

The entire content of this book can be found at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Mentor/>. Use the electronic version of the document to cut, paste, and modify appropriate content and distribute to participants in your electronic community; please acknowledge the source.

In **Chapter Five** mentors help young people learn to define success for themselves.

In **Chapter Six** mentors help participants set personal, academic, and career goals.

Chapter Seven tells mentors how to help teens understand their abilities and disabilities and play to their strengths.

In **Chapter Eight** mentors guide teens in developing strategies for meeting goals.

Chapter Nine helps mentors encourage young people to use technology as an empowering tool.

Chapter Ten tells mentors to remind teens of the value of hard work, perseverance, and flexibility.

In **Chapter Eleven** mentors explore with teens how a support network can lead to a more successful, self-determined life.



Define success for yourself

*Life is not so much a matter of holding good cards,
but sometimes of playing a poor hand well.*

— Robert Louis Stevenson —

This book is about helping young people achieve success. But what do we mean by “success”? Success means different things to different people. For some, positive family relationships and friendships are most important. For others, academic and career achievements weigh heavily in their definition of success. Some measure success primarily in religious aspects of their lives. Clearly, “success” is a subjective concept, unique to the individual, and related to many aspects of our lives—personal, social, spiritual, academic, and professional.

The people with disabilities who contributed to this book define success in many different ways. Here are a few examples:

- Success is defined by who we are, what we believe in, and what we think it means to be “successful.” For some it is money, for others, relationships; for others, it’s family; for others, it’s jobs; for some it is religion; and for others it is education. I believe that success is reaching my own personal dreams. I’m not done with my dreams, but know that I have been successful so far because I’ve worked toward my goals regardless of my disability. (college student who is deaf)
- Success is possessing the capability for self-determination. Self-determination is the ability

to decide what I want to do with my life and then to act on that decision. (high school student who is blind)

- A successful life is one where I can be actively engaged in creative activities that make a contribution to the lives of others. Success is a kind of by-product and NOT an end in itself! (professor who is blind)

Successful people do not succeed all the time. They tend to experience many setbacks and failures, perhaps more than less successful people because they take more risks. Failing to take action minimizes our opportunities for success, to learn from our experiences, and to lead self-determined lives. In this chapter you’ll learn how successful individuals have defined success for themselves and how you can help young people arrive at their own definitions for success.

So what can we learn about the meaning of “success” from the individuals with disabilities who contributed to this book? Young people who complete the online activities will learn the following:

- Success can be achieved by everyone.
- Success means different things to different people.
- Success should be related to a person’s own personal belief system and values.

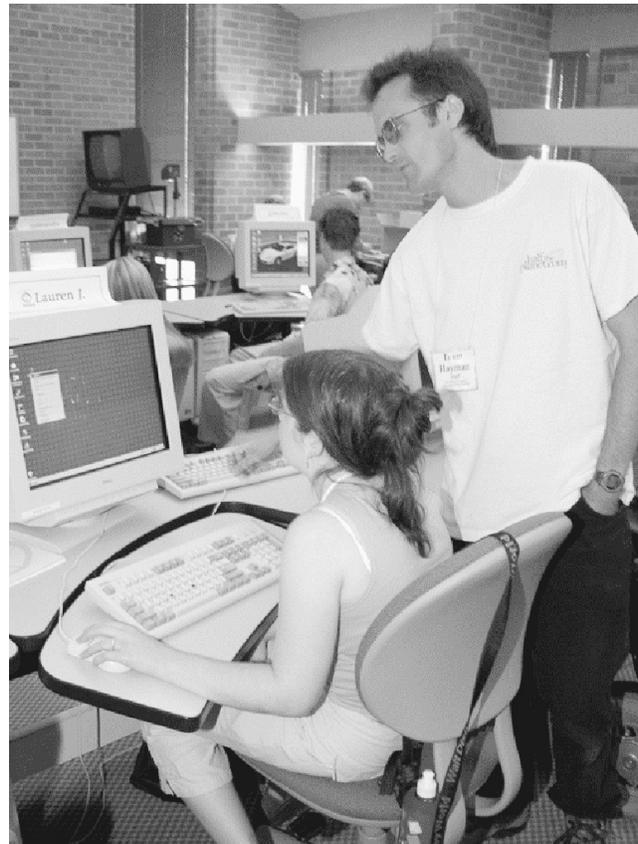


E-Mentoring

- Success can be measured in specific outcomes, as a process, or as a state of mind.
- Standards for success can be related to personal, social, spiritual, academic, or employment goals.
- Success can be defined for small, short-term goals, for overall life achievements, and for steps along the way.
- Self-determination—being able to make and act on important decisions in your life—is a measure of success.
- Successful people with disabilities accept disability as one aspect of who they are, but they do not allow their disabilities to define who they are or to dictate their goals in life.
- Successful people are socially competent. They make connections with others and value friendships.

Successful people know that they do not have control of everything in their lives. However, they can make choices and determine the course for the most important aspects of their lives.

The e-mentoring administrator can select appropriate electronic mail messages from the following examples and send those with titles labeled *Mentor Tip* to the mentors only and the messages labeled *E-Community Activity* to the entire online community. Use these examples to stimulate other ideas for online discussions. It is desirable that, ultimately, most discussion topics come from the mentors and protégés.





Mentor Tip: Steps to Success

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on steps to success

Some of the messages I will be sending out to our online community are organized around the following advice, synthesized from hundreds of responses from successful young people and adults with disabilities who responded to a survey:

1. Define success for yourself.
2. Set personal, academic, and career goals. Keep your expectations high.
3. Understand your abilities and disabilities. Play to your strengths.
4. Develop strategies to reach your goals.
5. Use technology as an empowering tool.
6. Work hard. Persevere. Be flexible.
7. Develop a support network. Look to family, friends, and teachers.

I will be sending the mentors some summary information in addition to the messages I send to our entire online community.

[name of e-mentoring administrator]



Mentor Tip: Definition of Success

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on definition of success

In the next message to the electronic community I will ask participants how they define "success" for themselves. Here are examples of how this question was answered by a group of successful teens and adults with disabilities. These responses might provide some inspiration as you interact with the teens in our community.

- To me, having a successful life is being able to do things independently for myself and not always have someone there to do things for me. It's achieving my goals on my own terms and at my own pace. (high school student with a mobility impairment)
- Success is a relative term. If you achieve what you want to and are happy, then I think that is success. It could be applied to life in general or to individual tasks in life. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- My definition of success is achieving personal goals, whatever they may be. Some goals are considered small by some people and enormous by others. What matters is that they are personal; each individual has his/her own formula for personal success. (college student who is deaf)
- I remember what my high school voice teacher told the class as we prepared for our senior solo. She said, "Success comes in CANS, and failure comes in CAN'TS." (speech language pathologist who is blind)
- Succeeding is accomplishing my dreams. However slowly I am moving toward that, to some degree I am succeeding. (high school student who is blind)
- Even though you might not have obtained that set goal, you are successful if you tried your best. (college student with a brain injury)
- To me, success is being able to do whatever it takes to lead a productive life. (young person who is blind)
- Success? That's an easy one. BE HAPPY. (high school student with a learning disability)



E-Community Activity: Learning from Successful Experiences

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Learning from successful experiences

The following statements about success were made by people with a variety of disabilities.

- For me, a successful life is living comfortably and satisfied. I don't need to be rich, just have enough money to get what I need and a few things that I want. I would like to have a good job that I enjoy doing and live in a decent-sized apartment with my husband and kids. As long as I have my family and we can live well, I'll be satisfied. This will be when I feel I can say I have achieved success.
- Success is pursuing what you want. Even when you fail or when setbacks occur, to choose to continue pursuing something is a success of its own. If you then happen to accomplish what you set out to do, that's another success. But, always, you must keep trying, keep your goals in mind, and give your best. Then, even if things don't turn out the way you hope, you have succeeded.
- The wonderful thing in this world is not where we are, but rather in what direction we are moving. My master's degree is a nice symbol of many challenges overcome and achievements attained. However, the times I've touched another person's life are even more important to me and confirm that I'm successful.
- I live my life by the SABAH (Skating Association for the Blind & Handicapped) motto: "I CAN do it, I CAN skate." Learning how to ice-skate changed my life forever. I am happier and healthier in every aspect of my life.
- To me success is knowing and understanding yourself, acceptance, and love.

Imagine being eighty years old. At that time in your life how do you think you would evaluate how successful your life has been?



E-Community Activity: Finding Your Goals for Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Finding your goals for success

One successful person in an online discussion about definitions of success said:

Success may be when you educate the educators about your disability. Or achieve the National Honor Society. Or a date with the cute guy/gal. A homeless person's success might be finding a permanent shelter. To a college graduate, starting work. To someone working at a company, success might be attaining the CEO's position. Or success might be just getting through today. (adult with mobility and speech impairments)

What specific goals for success relate to your life?



E-Community Activity: Learning from Teens with Disabilities

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Learning from teens with disabilities

The *DO-IT Scholars* program supports teens with disabilities as they pursue college and careers. Consult the most current version of the *Snapshots* publication at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Snapshots/>.

Explore the interests and experiences of teens with disabilities whose bios are included in the publication. Consider how their interests compare with yours.



E-Community Activity: Learning from Role Models

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Learning from role models

It can be encouraging to know or read about individuals with disabilities who are working in fields in which you are interested. These people can become role models for you. You can try to emulate qualities that you admire, and they can provide inspiration for pursuing careers. Are you interested in being an engineer? An accountant? A biologist? A computer scientist? A physicist?

Role models can be people you know or people you don't know; they can be famous or relatively unknown. In this activity you'll learn about the lives of potential role models for you.

Visit the websites with the following addresses to learn about people in different careers and with a wide variety of disabilities.

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/cedir/kidsweb/fpwdinfo.html>

<http://www.disabilityhistory.org/people.html>

<http://www.independenceinc.org/trivia.htm>

<http://www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/organize/fsdrole.html>

<http://netac.rit.edu/goals>

<http://www.callahanonline.com>

Choose one individual in a career that interests you. Send a short message to the group about this person. Include an answer to at least one of the following questions:

- What disability does this individual have, and what has he/she done to make the disability an advantage in life?
- What attitudes does this person have that contribute to his/her success?
- What actions has this person taken to improve his/her life? To improve the lives of others?
- What is interesting to you about this individual's job responsibilities or other activities?
- What accommodations does this individual use in specific situations?
- What special skills does this person use for success?
- What have you learned from this person's story that you will apply in your own life?



E-Community Activity: Discovering Academic Success Factors

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Discovering academic success factors

Thirty-six college students with disabilities were asked to identify factors that influenced their academic success. Factors related to their personal beliefs are listed below. For each, think about whether you possess the characteristic.

- Discipline
- Effort
- Personal ambitions
- Self-confidence
- Prior knowledge and experience
- Ability

Tell us about someone you know who has at least one of these qualities. Give an example of his/her behavior that demonstrates this quality.



E-Community Activity: Selecting Your Best Teacher

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: The best teacher award

As you define success for yourself, sometimes it can be helpful to think about how you measure the success of someone else. Think about what it means to be a good teacher and about your best teachers in school.

Tell us who you would nominate for a “Best Teacher Award” and describe at least one quality that qualifies this teacher for the award.



E-Community Activity: Defining Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Defining success

Success means different things to different people. How do you define success for yourself?



Mentor Tip: Keeping a Positive Attitude

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Keeping a positive attitude

A positive attitude is often key to a successful life. Described below are ways that a positive attitude has enhanced the lives of people with a wide variety of disabilities. Contributors also share factors in their lives that helped them develop a positive attitude. Reflect on these responses as you mentor protégés in our e-community.

- Most of our society is "average." As far as I can tell, "average" is a wide gap, and as far as I'm concerned, I fall somewhere in the middle of it. (adult with a mobility impairment)
- I can attribute most of my positive attitude to the support system in my life—most importantly my parents. They've helped me to see the light and laughter in tough situations and have always been supportive with endeavors that help me to be successful in life. Most importantly, they've raised me to be an independent and outgoing individual, which goes hand in hand with having a positive attitude. They expected me to do on my own everything that was possible for me to do on my own. (college student who is paraplegic)
- I spent a lot of my childhood in a hospital bed, so I would have gone crazy had I wallowed in the disease of self-pity. I've tried to refrain from wallowing in self-pity or self-righteousness. Both paths lead to nowhere. There were times, of course, when I absolutely hated being "disabled" and wished the struggles away. There were many things I wanted to do that I didn't really see myself doing from the "confines" of a wheelchair. For example, I wanted to dance.... I mean REALLY dance....floating through the air. You just can't do that from a four-wheeled object, and, besides, I have quite a large ego and I'm pretty much a perfectionist, and I couldn't do it the way it was "supposed" to be done. But I DID dance, in my dreams....and so I learned to play the music that others danced to....and that was OK. (adult with a mobility impairment)
- For me, being with the same peers all through my schooling gave me confidence because my peers learned to look past my disability. I was also active in Boy Scouts, earned my Eagle rank, and am still active as an assistant Scoutmaster. This gave me purpose and fun with a group. (high school student with a mobility impairment)

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Mentor Tip: Keeping a Positive Attitude (continued)

- Sometimes I fall into the bad habit of negativity. I am, however, successful at swimming upstream, where I find myself able to catch my breath, gain some of my strength back, and carry on with this thing called "life." I still look forward to tomorrow, because I know there is something that I've yet to complete, some place that I've yet to discover, and some person that I haven't met who needs to see me smile or feel my touch or hear a bit of cheer. (adult with a mobility impairment)
- I have a positive attitude, and I am optimistic about my future. This attitude was developed through a great deal of encouragement by adults and through my own experiences growing up. Also, the many new advances in technology that have given me opportunities in life contribute to this optimism. Doors are now open to me as far as jobs are concerned. (college student who is blind)
- I think I have a positive attitude because all my life I've been around positive people. My parents know that there is no limit to what I can do, despite my disability. When my brother was born, I couldn't walk or even crawl, and I was three at the time. Now, I'm able to walk, with help from a walker or a cane. I feel optimistic about my future because I know I can do anything that I set my mind to. (high school student with hearing, speech, and mobility impairments)
- Whenever I find myself not being positive, I try to put into perspective how fortunate I truly am, and usually what I'm upset about ends up looking pretty trivial. (college student who is paraplegic)
- Whenever my positive attitude gets deflated, I always think that things could be a lot worse than they are, and that makes me thankful for what I do have and have to offer to others. Another key factor that helps to develop and maintain a positive attitude is finding something physically that I enjoy doing and am good at. For me, I love exercising and being in shape. So in my spare time I work out, run, and go rock climbing. (student who had a stroke)



E-Community Activity: Building a Positive Attitude

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Building a positive attitude

Successful people tend to have a positive attitude and are optimistic about their future. Reply to this message with an answer to at least one of the following questions:

- Do you have a positive attitude? Why or why not? Do you feel optimistic about the future?
- How do you think you developed your attitudes?
- How, if at all, would you like to change your attitudes and why?



E-Community Activity: Finding Humor

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Finding humor

Successful people tend to be able to see the light side of situations. This includes finding the humor in things that happen to people because of their disabilities. In an online discussion, people with hearing impairments shared the following funny experiences.

- I once got off a plane in Sioux Falls and had a wheelchair waiting for me because they knew I had a disability. I am deaf.
- One of my favorite stories was told to me by a counselor who is deaf. He's driving through a drive-through window. He gets to the speaker and says, "Hello, I'm deaf and won't be able to hear you. I can read lips so we can communicate when I get to the window." All of a sudden this woman in the booth gets this "Oh good, I'm trained for this, I know what to do" look on her face as she runs out and gives the guy a Braille menu....in his car....he's driving.
- It's happened more than once that someone will come up to me and ask me if I'm from France or Germany or Switzerland or some European country because of my "accent." You can imagine the shock on their faces when I tell them I have a hearing impairment. Some of them act embarrassed. "Bonjour!" That's all the French I know! :)
- In my sophomore year of high school my math teacher left the room for a minute when I was using an FM amplification system (which amplifies the voice of the speaker, who is wearing a clip-on microphone, into my hearing aid). The teacher had the microphone attached to his shirt. If you leave the room with the FM system, the sound doesn't stop transmitting! :) Well, I heard some running water, and so I turned my FM off to save myself and my teacher from a major embarrassment. A few minutes later, I looked up and my teacher was right there in front of me. His face was as red as a beet as he announced, "I was just washing my hands, okay?"
- I've had the same experience! After class I told him I was scheduling an "FM Embarrassment Seminar" for the teachers who use the FM system. We still joke about it.

Share a humorous situation that occurred as a result of your disability.



E-Community Activity: Affirming Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Affirming success

Some affirmations (positive statements) from successful people with disabilities are listed below. Read each statement and think about whether it applies to you now.

- I know what success means to me.
- I use my own definition of success to measure my achievements.
- I can achieve success.
- I am self-determined.
- I have a positive attitude.
- I have a sense of purpose in my life.
- I have a sense of humor.
- I have control over the most important aspects of my life.
- I can make friends, and I value my friendships.
- I am sensitive to the needs of others.

Select one of these statements. Tell us what you can do and how others could help you make this statement stronger in your life.