

The Success Trap

The Success Trap

*Why good people stay in jobs they don't
like and how to break free*

Amina Aitsi-Selmi



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*I dedicate this book to my parents,
brother and all my teachers*

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About the author

Amina Aitsi-Selmi MD PhD is the Founder and Managing Director of Next Generation Coaching & Consulting Ltd. She's dedicated her 20+ year career to helping individuals and organizations create healthy lives and environments, first as a physician, then as a health policy expert, and currently as an independent specialist consultant and coach.

The depth and breadth of her work with patients, coaching clients as well as global health and policy agencies including the UK Department of Health and the World Health Organization has given her extensive speaking, organizational and educational experience. She's been featured as a World Economic Forum agenda contributor, published over 40 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals, academic book chapters and policy reports including for the United Nations. Her weekly articles on work culture, leadership and change have received over half a million positive reactions on LinkedIn.

Her diverse range of one-to-one professional coaching clients include doctors, lawyers, accountants, scientists in global organizations spanning intergovernmental agencies and multibillion-dollar companies as well as entrepreneurs. She helps them find freedom where they feel stuck and to move their careers, businesses and lives forward in alignment with their deepest values and with less toxic urgency. Her services also include The Leaders Circle supporting deep conversations as well as speaking on a range of themes in companies and educational institutions like Health Education England and the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence. Themes include dealing with uncertainty, the entrepreneurial mindset, transformational coaching skills and principles of non-violent communication. She has taught graduate students on the social determinants of global health as an Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer at UCL.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alongside her medical qualifications and PhD, she's certified in Strategic Intervention from the Anthony Robbins School of Coaching. She's registered with the General Medical Council and an Associate of the Institute of Coaching, Harvard.

Foreword

Professor Sir Michael Marmot

Preface

Three questions

I can't say I've ever spent much time in a job I didn't like. It's not that there haven't been ups and downs, but life seems to have been kind in giving me a sense of purpose and bringing the right opportunities. On the other hand, I've had reason to explore the relationship between success and happiness. And I've come to agree with the sages that they are two different things. While there might be a degree of overlap between worldly success and the feeling of achievement, the high moment of success is inevitably followed by a low one, if it isn't treated with some detachment and wisdom.

True happiness, by contrast, seems to be a home within. It's available to the richest and poorest person alike, perhaps more so to the latter, if we go by the biblical adage 'that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'. The idea of the Success Trap – that our past success can get in the way of our future success – may well have biblical support, alongside the mounting scientific evidence and thousands of years of wisdom pointing to our minds as the source of the reality we perceive. The identities, beliefs and myths we unwittingly internalized and that made us so successful in the past, start to hamper our way back home to a deeper happiness.

It's upon realizing that the roller-coaster of success is never ending while happiness is always available, that my career took a different direction, at least to the external observer. From my perspective, this book is the fruits of a lifetime of reflection on the question: 'How can we struggle less and be happier?' It's informed by my career in medicine, health policy, academia and business as well as a lifelong passion for philosophical and spiritual enquiry.

One of the central sociological and ethical questions that I've grappled with since my medical school days and that led to me specializing in big picture health is: 'How much freedom do we have?' 'If we are shaped by our environment and the prior conditions that led to our being born into particular circumstances, to what extent are we responsible for our life choices and therefore our happiness?'

I believe these are questions each one of us must find answers to, as they determine the quality of our life experience. Having looked for answers at both ends of the spectrum – the individual (biological and psychological) level with patients and private clients, and the societal structures at local, national and international policy level – I've found that a mind that can answer (or at the very least ponder) these questions satisfactorily functions much better, and its owner is much happier.

In letting go of the tyranny of success as defined by external expectations rather than a deeper wisdom, both from personal experience and working with clients, I've been led to another question: 'How can we be of true service?' After spending 20 years training and working in public service, moving into the private sector as an independent professional seemed anathema to the values I had been grounded in. How can a preoccupation with making money allow for a genuine offer of help? Surely it would crowd out any honest motive since there would always be an ulterior one?

A few years into the entrepreneurial journey, I came to the conclusion that a preoccupation with any personal motive, whether it be status, advancement or money, will always crowd out a genuine generosity of spirit. This is not a function of working in the public or private sector. It's a function of our level of awareness and whether we are willing to participate in society from a place of generosity and goodwill rather than from fear, anger, scarcity or limitation.

My intention in writing this book is to make an invitation to anyone who feels stuck or trapped in a situation to open up to a

new perspective and liberate their true power and essence. Music may be the language of the soul, but writing is a way of making music for the mind. My hope is that this book both uplifts you and challenges your thinking – particularly any limiting beliefs that hold you back from making your fullest contribution. The book doesn't claim to have all the answers but offers an approach to finding out what's on the other side of your perceived limitations.

May you inhabit the freedom and happiness that is every human's birthright while making a difference where you can.

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