

Six steps to success

an overview of The Success Cycle



Tony Harvey

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Before the Success Cycle

All successful people spend a lot of time developing their skills and the techniques they use to define their goals and achieve results.

However, because we have picked them up over the years in lots of different ways, the tools and techniques we use are often fragmented, disconnected. We have to decide which to pick up and use for each task or challenge.

We may have the tools but which tool works best for a given situation? How do we decide which to use?

Perhaps what we need is a toolbox - or framework - in which each tool sits alongside others as one part of a consistent whole. That would make it much easier for us to decide which tools to use at a particular time.

It would be even better if that framework also gave us a template for tackling our big goals or projects and for helping us make sure we deliver them.

The thinking behind The Success Cycle

I created The Success Cycle to bring together various approaches to leadership & management - and their related skills, tools and techniques - in to one comprehensive and easy to use framework. The framework acts as a map or mindset, to guide us to use the most appropriate approach at any given time.

The Success Cycle was inspired by Joel Barker and his quote:

*Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action without vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world.*

What struck me when I first read the quote is that we need to align our actions, energies and resources with what we really want - our dream, vision or big goals. If these two, vision and action, are not aligned then we really are wasting our efforts.

I reflected on many of the people I have worked with in different organisations. If they don't understand the vision they don't know how to choose appropriate actions. Without this understanding their actions could, and often do, wander away from achieving their employer's ultimate purpose.

I thought about my personal and professional life. I have always had goals, dreams or a purpose.

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However, not everything I do always serves that purpose. Sometimes I make good choices and sometime I make poor ones. In general, the good choices are around actions that are aligned to my overall purpose or goals. The key is to know what makes a choice a good or a poor one.

How do I, you, all of us, decide what actions are best aligned to our vision?

So, I got to thinking, what we need is something to connect the polar opposites of vision and action.

It sounded like a planning loop to me.

Many people follow a step-by-step approach to planning, getting things done and achieving their goals. There are a lot of step-by-step approaches, or planning loops, around. However, most of them are mechanical in their nature. They tend to focus on being systematic, one step at a time.

Furthermore, they all miss one essential and very human quality at the heart of Joel Barker's saying.

That quality is, Balance.

Balance

Balance is the key to what I came up with, what I call the The Success Cycle. Balance combines a series of opposites. Opposite thinking. Opposite approaches. Opposite steps.

Every step on The Success Cycle is balanced by an opposite step. Each pair of opposite steps are equally important to your success. When you keep these balances in mind you will be on a journey to success that combines:

- Vision with action
- looking forward with learning from the past
- planning with tracking progress
- leadership with management
- the long term with the short term.

I developed the Success Cycle after years of using various planning loops. Every loop I tried was biased towards something like leadership, performance management, training, strategic planning or change management models & tools.

All of them worked OK up to a point and were good for their niche. None of them were as flexible or as widely applicable as what I had in mind. None of them incorporated this idea of balance.

The Success Cycle makes use of the best of all the rest of the planning loops, plus this unique feature - the concept of balance.

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Why did I call it The Success Cycle?

Because success is what we get we when we address both vision and action and do both well.

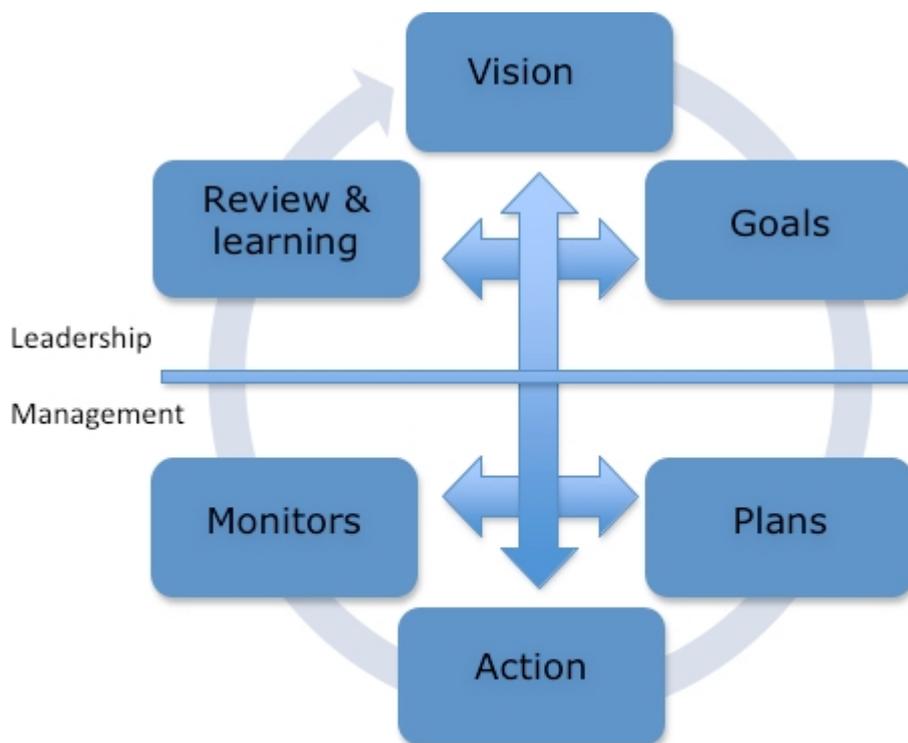
What is Success?

When I talk of success I mean achieving the vision and goals that you set for yourself (or for your team, organisation or business - I have used The Success Cycle for both individual and collective efforts to achieve) and to become the best that you can be.

That success can only be achieved when our actions are aligned to our vision.

Here is the model I created.

The model



The Success Cycle

The horizontal line in the diagram divides the two “orientations” of the Success Cycle.

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The upper orientation is about the future. It requires you to look ahead. It involves vision and a desire to influence events, to take control of your life and, where appropriate, to provide transformational leadership to others. It is big thinking and aspirational in nature.

The lower orientation is about the present. It involves prioritising your use of time and other resources, taking action and a desire to be effective. Where appropriate, it involves transactional leadership and organised management. It is disciplined and mechanical in nature.

The two orientations provide balance between future and present, vision and action, leadership and management, transformational and transactional approaches, aspirational and mechanical.

The six steps

There are six steps in the Success Cycle. Each step is essential to achieving sustainable success.

However, at each step it is important to look also at the opposite step, what I call the balancing relationship.

1. Vision

The first step is to create your vision. This step is clearly in the upper orientation, the future.

A vision is an aspirational and imagined future that is some way off. It is over the horizon, not yet touchable. You don't yet know how you will achieve it but it is highly desirable and worthy of your best efforts.

It acts as a compass point, the direction of travel, a magnet to attract you and all your actions.

Start with your aspirations. Allow yourself to dream of your desired future. Think big picture and do not get consumed or bogged down in details or present challenges. Keep your eye on the horizon.

My guide, "Creating a personal vision", takes you through the process of defining your personal vision.

If the vision is for a collective success, rather than an individual one, then the vision must be shared and sold to the others involved. Selling a vision requires courage, conviction, a desire for change and a wish to take others with you. It requires leadership.

My toolbox guide, "Four steps to Leadership", explains how vision relates to leadership.

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2. Goals

Coming next to goals, you are still in the world of the future and you are still looking beyond the present difficulties and barriers. However, you are shortening your horizon and are more concerned with details than you were when you created your vision.

Goals define your desired outcomes and achievements in smaller, more manageable and tangible, chunks than the vision. They are measurable. Goals also require deadlines and resources.

At the time of setting your goals you do not yet have to know how you will achieve them.

However, it is a good idea to define the time and resources you have available.

Many people set goals using the SMART technique; Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant (or Realistic), Timely.

Personally, I am not a great fan of SMART goals, at least not using the system that has been handed down to us over the years. I think SMART goals are unimaginative, lack lustre, even mediocre. I have come up with a new way of setting goals that fit entirely with the aspirations embedded in our vision.

My guide, "Why SMART goals fail (and five steps to creating great ones)", explains my new approach to setting goals. This approach fits very well within the Success Cycle.

3. Plans

You have now crossed from the upper to the lower orientation and are in the realm of the detailed and disciplined.

Plans define, "What will I do by when?" or, in the case of collective plans, "Who will do what by when?" They outline the methods you will use to achieve your goals and they indicate the resources you will need if you are to be successful.

Plans may be quite logical and structured. However, the best plans are developed after considering lots of alternatives and before selecting the option best likely to achieve your goals.

I will be providing guides to cover a number of different planning techniques, and other steps in the Success Cycle. Look out for them as they are released on <http://tonyharvey.online>.

4. Action

You are now in the present moment. What you are doing right now. Your day to day actions and habits. The question is, do these actions and habits serve your higher purpose, your vision?

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Put simply, action is about carrying out the plans you created at step 3.

Action is also about managing your priorities and resources to focus your energies on your goals and your specific plans. It is doing what is right and what adds value. It is about being focused on your vision and exercising good judgement.

Action is also about developing habits that make it easier to make good choices and which ultimately help you achieve your vision. That often involves self discipline as well as determination and commitment.

5. Monitoring progress

I have seen a lot of good intentions falter at the action stage. Whether they be corporate initiatives, major projects or simply New Year resolutions, they often run out of steam when day to day actions don't fit with the plan, let alone the vision or goals.

Monitoring progress is a balance to planning. If planning is about, "Who will do what by when?", monitoring is about, "Have I done what I said I would do?"

Monitoring progress requires you to collect and process data about your activities, whether they are going as planned and what you can deliver as a result. This in turn means that, when you create your plans, you should put in place systems and processes to collect that data and adopt a disciplined approach to using them.

I use spreadsheets as the basis for many of my monitors. In them I log key information, or success indicators, on a regular basis.

Monitoring also requires action to correct any deviation from plan. This means putting the data to good use and making decisions to adjust the planned activities - or its resources and timescales - so as still to meet the goals.

The goal, or outcome, is what is important here, not a slavish compliance to a plan. This is one example of how balance helps us to keep the Success Cycle on track. We should not lose sight of what we are ultimately trying to achieve. The end is more important than the means.

6. Reviewing achievements

Now you return to the upper orientation. Armed with lots of data, at intervals you should be able to step away from the detail, take a wider view and review your overall progress.

So, this step is at a higher level than the monitoring of progress. It addresses the fundamental questions of whether you have achieved what you set out to do and whether you have been successful. Your yardstick is your set of goals. The details specified in the plans may have changed, actions may have been modified, but the goals can still be achieved.

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Reviews are also an opportunity to celebrate. Celebration allows you to stop, enjoy the feeling of success and share it with others. It also signifies that you are moving-on. Celebration is rewarding, motivational and confidence building.

After you have reviewed what you have achieved, and celebrated, you can start the cycle again - sharpen your vision, check it is still as desirable and maybe even create a more ambitious desired future.

The three balance relationships

The balance relationships provide the Success Cycle with its cohesion, integrity and robustness.

When the Success Cycle is used for collective visions, the balance relationships give it a capacity to bring together, into one project or enterprise, people with different styles, or preferred ways of thinking and working. It values opposites, rather than dismisses them.

On the Success Cycle diagram, the lines with the two-way arrows indicate the balance relationships.

The first balance relationship, between the upper and lower orientations, is that between future and present. It allows you to be stay focussed on the long-term and also deal with the present, and everything in between.

The second balance relationship is that between your goals and reviewing, or measuring, success. This balance allows you to define, in clear and unequivocal terms, and then recognise (and be recognised for) your success. It also enables you to enjoy and celebrate that success and build your confidence for the future.

The third balance relationship is that between your plans and monitoring progress. This balance allows you to recognise when actions are slipping out of alignment, keeps you in control, helps you to modify plans and to manage resources.

Using the Success Cycle

I have been using the Success Cycle since 2006 to great effect for myself, in my personal and business life, working as a personal coach supporting others and as a corporate facilitator with boards of companies and other teams.

To find out more about how to use The Success Cycle, please see my book, "Introducing the Success Cycle: six-steps to achieving your dreams." To discuss The Success Cycle and how it can help you, your team or organisation to succeed, please contact me.

I wish you every success!

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References

Tony Harvey (2006), "The Secret of Success". Training Journal, October 2006, pp 40-46.

Tony Harvey (2018), "Introducing The Success Cycle: six-steps to achieving your dreams". Carrfields Publications. Available for [Kindle](#) and in [paperback](#).