



# Success Isn't Just About What You Do

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Successful people are action oriented. They are quick to seize opportunities and solve problems. They are decisive and responsive. To the more risk averse, they appear reckless at times. They are perceived to “ready, fire, aim” as if they haven’t properly planned their actions. Yet people who are successful over the long term also know when not to take action. Like seasoned leaders, they can be patient and still.

Successful people like great leaders know when to talk but also when to listen. They know when to let an argument go rather than fight every battle that comes their way. They don’t need to review each task their team performs. They don’t change their organization’s structure, strategy, or plan just because they have the authority to do so. Their track record is full of important decisions—including deciding to say and do nothing. Counterintuitively, their success and compensation are based as much on what they do as what they don’t do.

The value of patience applies to everyone. Great sales people know there are times to say or do nothing. When a prospect has accepted their proposal, they know it is time to shut up and stop selling. They say thanks and turn their attention to fulfilling their promise. Collaborative co-workers know when to be patient. When working with an emotionally charged and upset colleague, they know to just listen and empathize.

Parents too know there are times to say or do nothing. As a parent, one of my biggest challenges has been to sit still and allow my kids to make a mistake. Like when they were assigned school science projects, I wanted to help them be their best, yet I knew my most valuable parenting was sometimes to sit on the sidelines and do nothing. Mistakes are a great teacher. Of course I never let them hurt themselves or make a mistake they couldn’t recover from. The same applies to employees. Great leaders don’t automatically intervene in every issue. They don’t let their employees make a catastrophic mistake, but they allow minor mistakes when the value of the learning is greater than the cost of the mistake.

If you find it difficult to be still and exercise patience, consider these principles:

- People learn more from doing than from being told what to do. Guide and encourage people, but resist the temptation to control and direct them. Be a coach rather than a commander.
- The power of influence is more effective than the power of authority. Rather than use the power that comes with your position, develop your ability to motivate and inspire people intrinsically.
- The world in which you work and live is a shared place. Others need to talk, act, learn, and enjoy a sense of accomplishment as much as you do. Let others have their moment too.
- Your ability to talk and act is as much a strength as it is a weakness. There are situations where your ability to listen and restrain yourself is more valuable. Be slow to speak and quick to understand before taking action.
- Timing is everything. Great ideas are only great if their time is right. Being late or early turns good ideas into bad ones. Consider not just the idea, but the timing of it.
- Great decision making involves evaluating alternatives. Ensure doing nothing is one of them. Doing nothing may be the worst decision you could make, but it could also be the best.
- Having money in the bank, time on the calendar, and access to resources makes it tempting to buy, build, or do something with it. However, idle resources are better than wasted resources. Ensure resources are put to good use, not merely use.



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If your circumstances require action, then take action. Be ready to decide, engage, talk, do, buy, build, and debate as much as you are ready to listen, wait, be still, defer, and restrain yourself. To be successful over the long term, be able to use both tools in your proverbial tool belt—the action tool as well as the patience tool.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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