

Redefining Success - Success Blog

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The biggest lesson in recovery for me was not that I could succeed, but what success really was for me. During the darkest hours of my illness, the word success was not in my vocabulary.

Not only did I feel like I was unsuccessful, but I felt success was so far from my reach that life was not worth living. I loathed myself for who I thought I was, a weak person, a failure, and a burden to others.

The best way to describe Clinical Depression is to imagine putting dark blinders on either side of your face that restrict you from seeing anything but black. Then add dark glasses that also put what you see out of focus. If that wasn't enough, add earphones that continuously play nothing but negative messages back to you about who you are and the world around you. With Clinical Depression there are no visible blinders, glasses, or earphones – but the affects are all there.

On the flip side, mania is a drug and like many drugs you can never get enough until it owns you and you can't get out. The problem with mania is that the high doesn't wear off, the train keeps rolling, and the destruction builds as it tears up the tracks and everything around them until you crash, often taking others with you.

But I want to talk about success. For me success started small. There were the small successes in my daily life, but in my recovery there were also points where, for example, I didn't have to fear an annual relapse or look over my shoulder for the next hospitalization.

I have always been driven and as I got better my accomplishments started lining up. I starting working in the Mental Health field, was asked to serve on committees and received awards. I started speaking at conferences all over the country about my personal and professional experiences.

I directed a short documentary on work, mental illness, and community. In my personal life I recorded a CD of original music and started playing out professionally. This even lead to a weekly music column in the local newspaper.

But what I learned most from these experiences is that I could push these projects and ideas as far as I wanted to go. I could also pull in the reigns, slow down, and even walk away. I could choose to define my own level of success.

I could chase dreams but also learn when to let go. I didn't have to be famous in any of the lines of work I chose. Instead I could be happy with the opportunities that I had to meet new and interesting people and learn from them as well.

I also learned that it's O.K. for me to have limits. I do not have to be a "superman" and it is impossible to please everyone. I need to learn to take care of myself, to maintain my health, and to be O.K. with however successful I choose to be.