



Dream No Small Dreams

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“Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of men.”

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The American Dream may mean something different to each of us. At its best, it affords each American the freedom and opportunity to pursue happiness according to one’s own priorities. At its worst, the American Dream can be squandered on hollow goals that offer little substance or satisfaction. For these reasons, when choosing your version of the American Dream, be realistic about your choices and bold in your actions.

Some people define the American Dream as living “a better and richer life” where everyone should strive to live glamorously like characters in *The Great Gatsby*, where materialism and excess flourish. For others it could mean living a life of self-sacrifice, such as pursuing a career that helps others or offers their children a better life than they had growing up. Still others may equate the American Dream with being the first member of their family to go to college, found a small business, run a marathon, write a novel, conquer a disease, or overcome an addiction. The possibilities are endless.

Others might view the American Dream as being more about the journey than the destination. That might include being a good spouse and parent, fostering a supportive relationship with co-workers, or simply maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Fortunately, our country doesn’t define the American Dream for us, nor does it limit the number of people who can achieve success — despite what some say.

Whatever your definition, realizing the American Dream isn’t always easy. While, in principle, the American Dream offers each person an “equal opportunity” to succeed, it does

not guarantee “equal outcomes” — nor is everyone ultimately successful in their quest. So don’t expect to wake up one morning and find out that you’ve become an overnight success. It just doesn’t work that way.

Sure . . . some people are born with a knack for languages or math, while other folks are gifted artists or natural athletes, and still others are born with financial advantages or “special connections.” BUT, even these advantages don’t guarantee success. Our country is filled with people born with similar gifts, but even the gifted won’t succeed if they don’t exhibit the passion, self-assurance, and the fortitude to pursue their dreams. As someone once said, “Those at the top of the mountain didn’t fall there.”

Yes, some folks have had a head start. They had the basic necessities of life: nurturing parents, access to a good education, wonderful role models to emulate, and an upbringing that embraced good values. Yet the country is also packed with people who did not have these advantages but instead, overcame numerous adversities to realize their dreams.

Be prepared (to work to succeed). Many successful people have traits in common — integrity, common sense,

confidence, determination, and a strong work ethic. As Colin Powell once said, “A dream doesn’t become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.” Developing a successful career, raising kids with great values, or creating a good work-life balance doesn’t just happen.

Success often requires hard work and sacrifice. If you want something badly enough, you must be willing to work hard for it. As someone once said, “All the so-called ‘secrets of success’ will not work unless you do.” There’s no free lunch in life.

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Be persistent. Be prepared, though, to face a long, bumpy road in your pursuit of success. For example, there will be the naysayers who'll tell you that your ambitions are a pipe dream. If you surrender your zeal to them, your dreams will never become a reality. **Roadblocks** will challenge you every step of the way. To be successful, you'll learn to navigate your way around them. If you fail a few times before you achieve success, you'll be running about average. And it's important to remember that even if you don't achieve the results you envisioned — success is never guaranteed — you'll still know that you gave it your best. But as Lucille Ball said, "I'd rather regret the things I've done than regret the things I haven't done."

Be optimistic. Dreams can come with a heavy price. Listening to a chorus of successful people, you hear, "I got up long before the crack of dawn and returned in the dark," "I worked two jobs to give my kids a good shot," "We put everything we had on the line," "I was miserable at times, but found the will to continue," and "I failed three times before I finally succeeded." Remember, the American Dream is not like an apple pie that gets smaller with every bite. The American Dream provides unlimited opportunity for anyone who chooses to pursue it. And it may as well be you.

Be honest. The truth is, rewards constitute only half the prize for success. The other half is the satisfaction of knowing how hard you worked to reach your goals. Unfortunately, some people are deprived of this experience because they've taken the easy way out by cheating, cutting corners, or demanding something for nothing. They're robbed of the satisfaction of knowing that their rewards were earned with their own blood, sweat, and sometimes, tears.

Be yourself. There will be times in history when the concept of the American Dream, and its unlimited possibilities, will be tested — or even declared dead. Some might even say that this is one of those times. But they'd be wrong. Despite the naysayers, Americans thrive on optimism. Nothing worthwhile in life is easy to attain without effort. The American Dream gives each of us the freedom and opportunity to shape the course of our future. So be yourself, commit to success, and pursue your own version of the American Dream.

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