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The Heart Of A Dragon – Lessons On Success

By [Ottawa Business Journal Staff](#)

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Several weeks ago, Ottawa hosted the Eastern Ontario Economic Showcase, which welcomed a powerhouse of speakers, including Donald Trump, Sir Terence Matthews, Brett Wilson, Linda Duxbury, and Don Drummond.

The only headline speaker with whom I was unfamiliar was Brett Wilson, from CBC's hit show, "The Dragon's Den." Although I had not seen the show since Brett's arrival, I had heard of his philanthropic efforts through various media.

Following this event, I felt compelled to write this column, as there were several key outcomes that highlight some intriguing and potentially alarming aspects of our views on success.

What is "success"?

Perhaps one of the more expected, yet intriguing results of the day was the media focus on Donald Trump and Sir Terence Matthews. A quick look at the reactions and columns from local media showed a similar message:

"... it was Mr. Trump who was the real showstopper"

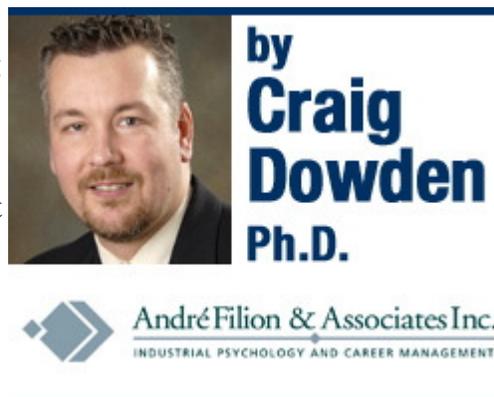
"At first glance, the billionaires couldn't be less alike..... But it was their underlying similarities that led to their invitations to speak at the EOES.... Both are self-made businessmen who fought through adversity to build their empires. Both own golf courses and swanky resorts. And when it comes to achieving success, both men have the same message. Hard work and perseverance are half of the equation. Loving what you do is the other half."

This message is fairly well entrenched in entrepreneurial and business lore. The key, according to the adherents of this school of thought, is to drive after success at all costs. Remove any and all barriers and embrace a single-mindedness of focus on the desired outcome.

What was interesting from this set-up was how Brett Wilson was positioned. More specifically, although Mr. Wilson was acknowledged for attaining "domestic-grade rock star status," this was the extent of the media coverage he received. However, this characterization did not do justice to the audience reaction to his message.

Success is what we make of it - A cautionary tale of getting what we (think we) want:

Mr. Wilson spent the first part of his speech outlining how he rose from the ranks to "make it." He



talked about various business ventures he was a part of and the support he received along the way. The audience was intrigued by these details, as they were gaining insight into a world very few could imagine.

The presentation turned when Mr. Wilson talked about difficulties with and the ultimate dissolution of his marriage, as well as his disintegrating relationship with his children. He concluded by saying that although he had achieved every observable indicator of success, he still felt empty during that time.

When he was finished, the audience immediately came to its feet. With all due respect to the other speakers of the day, it appeared to me that Mr. Wilson was the only one who received a genuine standing ovation from the crowd. Indeed, it seemed the audience responded to his extreme humility and humanity. His overt emotional reactions to the pains of his own story struck a chord with the audience.

Interestingly, his message was not captured by our local media. The focus was placed on words like drive, persistence, 'self-made' and 'making it at all costs'. Despite the intense audience reaction, a curious outcome was that this genuine connection did not even get a brief mention in the article. Which raises the question: "Why not?"

The answer may be found in our own disjointed beliefs about success. More specifically, although the vast majority of us are busy pursuing happiness (e.g., buying/doing things that we think will make us happy), the evidence overwhelmingly suggests happiness comes from the inside. In other words, happiness is a state of being rather than a state of having ¹.

Several examples support this idea. Perhaps the strongest evidence comes from the World Values Survey, which has, since 1974, examined the relationship between income and happiness. The size and scope of this survey is impressive, as it includes citizens from 60 countries that are representative of approximately 75 percent of the world's population. In a relatively recent article written by Ronald Inglehart, one of the lead authors of the project, he concluded:

"Among advanced industrial societies, there is practically no relationship between income level and subjective well-being..... The Irish are happier than the Germans, although the Germans are twice as wealthy. And the Taiwanese are as happy as the Japanese although the Japanese are three times as wealthy" (pages 217-218).

There are also innumerable studies that highlight how, despite our ever-increasing quality of life, our level of happiness has stayed the same, or even slightly decreased. As David Myers ² summarized:

"We are better paid, better fed, better housed, better educated, and healthier than ever before, and with more human rights, faster communication, and more convenient transportation than we have ever known. Ironically, however, for 30-plus years..... since 1960..... the divorce rate has doubled, the teen suicide rates has tripled, the recorded violent crime rate has quadrupled ³."

Clearly, Mr. Wilson's words concerning the link between "having it all" financially but struggling emotionally and personally fit incredibly well with the above findings.

A recent "Quality of Working Life ⁴" survey also provides chilling insight into some of the challenges Mr. Wilson discussed. This study examined the impacts of extended working hours on our personal and professional lives. Once again, we can see the links to his message:

- a) 71% reported that it negatively affected their health
- b) 79% reported their spousal/partner relationship was significantly impacted
- c) 86% reported that their relationships with their children were worsened

Perhaps the most troubling outcome of the above study was that almost half of those managers surveyed felt they had no choice but to work longer hours. In fact, they believed this was a necessary sacrifice. An important reflection for each of us may be to what extent these factors impact each of us.

Concluding thoughts

The Eastern Ontario Economic Showcase provided an opportunity to examine how we define success in our daily lives. Interestingly, messages of drive and perseverance overshadowed a humble and personal appeal to a more spiritual message. Our traditional approach to pursuing success and happiness may subject us to risks that few of us rarely consider, but probably should.

Sometimes, it is tempting and easier to push away the evidence and refuse to look at ourselves in the mirror. However, failing to do so may lead us to difficulties we could have avoided. Keeping this in mind, to conclude, I will paraphrase a powerful statement made by Mr. Wilson that may provoke a moment of reflection:

If anyone in the audience could find a way to bring me back in time and allow me to change some of the things I have done and the decisions I have made, I would gladly give my wealth away.

Words that may be worth considering when determining how we define our own success and happiness.

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André Fillion & Associates is an industrial psychology and career management firm that assists organizations and individuals in leadership development, selection support, succession planning, and career transition/outplacement services. Through Verity Fillion, our national career management company, we provide bilingual services to clients across Canada including locations in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Mississauga, Québec City, Montreal, and Halifax.

References

¹*For a discussion of this idea, please read: Robert Holden (2008): Success Intelligence (pages 38-44). Other books on this topic include - Daniel Gilbert (2007): Stumbling on Happiness; Sonja Lyubomirsky (2008): The How of Happiness; Martin Seligman (2004): Authentic Happiness.*

²*David Myers (2000). The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty (page 374).*

³Indeed the World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that depression/mental health issues will be the second leading cause of mortality by the year 2020.

⁴Les Worrall and Cary Cooper, Institute of Management (1999). *The Quality of Working Life: 1999 Survey of Managers' Changing Experience*.

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