

Go from Being Outwardly Cocky and Unfulfilled to Confident, Prepared, and More Successful

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Have you ever felt somewhat at a loss for how to respond to a question, yet you wanted to look like you knew what you were doing? That happened to me after meeting a young woman on a blind date. She had heard that I liked movies and asked me if I had ever seen a certain film. Not wanting to appear ignorant of what interested her and trying to be friendly, I assured her I had seen the movie even though I had not.

Then she asked me a philosophical question about the last scene. Being unwilling to admit I had lied about seeing the film, I shrugged my shoulders and hoped that reaction would be the end of the topic. She began to question me closely about aspects of the scene, hoping for some response. I wanted to climb into a hole and pull dirt over my head. Why, oh why, had I pretended? I stubbornly sat there feeling like a complete idiot rather than admit my fault.

I often see equally inexplicable behavior on the part of others. A teenager used to tell me that he didn't need to learn anything new. Why? He said that he had already gained all of the knowledge that anyone would ever need to be successful. I often wondered how he could believe that. His seeming self satisfaction, despite massive ignorance and frequent mistakes in making purchases, defied all my experience.

What was going on in these situations? I gained important insights some years later when I had the privilege of meeting several adults who had been secretly illiterate for most of their lives. These late-learning readers told me that such cocky seeming statements are a sure sign of someone who is unprepared and insecure . . . and desperately doesn't want anyone else to notice the vulnerabilities. I remembered my movie "discussion" and immediately appreciated what they were saying.

Such acute discomfort in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges can lead to a lifetime of painfully covering up one's well-understood deficiencies, awkward relationships, and failed dreams. Alternatively, the discomfort can become a spur to seek out what's missing

in knowledge and skill in order to enjoy success. What are the pros and cons of these two paths?

Let's consider someone who tried both approaches in his business career. Mr. Nick Mirras is a fourth generation Greek-American who recently wrote his own eulogy as part of an exercise to help see his life more objectively and reset his goals. In the course of thinking about what he had done, Mr. Mirras was struck by how much he had handicapped his career success through procrastination: He had waited far too long to learn how senior-level business people think and act in approaching work-related opportunities and problems. He shared his story with me in hopes that your eulogy, when it is spoken many years from now, will reflect the accomplishment of all the good things you would like for your family, your friends, and who and what you care about.

At the age of 16 or 17, Mr. Mirras looked at business opportunities with his grandmother. They considered a snack shack on a golf course, a diner in a bowling alley, and a breakfast-and-lunch counter in a business park. If you are wondering about the common foodservice aspect to these ideas, Mr. Mirras would be quick to remind you somewhat facetiously that he is a Greek-American with an ancestor on his father's side who had owned and operated a diner.

With the benefit of hindsight these three choices were excellent opportunities, but his grandmother never pulled the trigger to start or acquire one of them. He attributes their reluctance to being afraid of what they didn't know and how that ignorance might sabotage their success.

With plenty of encouragement from his parents, Mr. Mirras entered college with a strong desire to develop practical knowledge. He graduated from California State College, Northridge after majoring in geography with an emphasis on economics, a combination of subjects that he describes as being a lot like urban planning.

With his college degree in hand, Mr. Mirras found a job processing home mortgage loans, his entry point into residential lending, an industry he worked in for the next 20 years . . . except for a few detours such as installing commercial fire alarms for his father's company. After earning an electrical contractor's license, Mr. Mirras discovered that he liked planning, designing, and managing these fire alarm installations a lot more than

processing or underwriting residential loans . . . or working with homeowners to originate loan applications. At about the same time, he also noticed that there was an important perspective missing from his dad's business: The company's focus was on installing alarms rather than running the company better and expanding it.

These perspectives about what he enjoyed and his continuing desire to succeed caused Mr. Mirras to decide to gain management insights into operating a business well and added skills for doing so. Up to this point, he had always performed a laborer's job in his work, whether in processing or originating residential loans or in installing fire alarms.

Mr. Mirras decided that earning an MBA degree would help add the management insights and skills he needed. By looking at opportunities from a knowledgeable executive's vantage point, he hoped to gain the ability to articulate and successfully develop his many business ideas.

Being practical, Mr. Mirras immediately looked for where he could gain the most applicable knowledge from an MBA degree program at an affordable price while maintaining a hectic work schedule. He also realized that the opportunity to learn was more important than the pedigree of the university granting the MBA.

As a result, Mr. Mirras cast his search broadly among all the schools offering MBA degrees that permitted flexible schedules for working adults. Many cost \$80,000 or more. That seemed like way too much. However, at Rushmore University he found a perfect combination: a curriculum tailored to his level of knowledge and experience, that would meet his needs at a fair cost, and effective oversight from professors to help him learn more.

After being exposed to so many helpful new ideas and directions in graduate school, Mr. Mirras began to see himself differently: He realized that he had felt miserable throughout his life because he was so far away from fulfilling his business potential. What happiness he had enjoyed usually didn't last long. Here's how he described himself before earning an MBA:

“I was not 'the man I wanted to be.' I was cocky instead of confident.”

Completing his MBA studies left him feeling much differently:

“Now, I am confident because of what I know and an awareness of what I don't know.”

By the objective measure of earnings, his success has markedly improved. Within two years after graduating with an MBA degree, Mr. Mirras had almost doubled his income. The best he had ever done before then was to increase his total income by 50 percent over a ten-year period.

What's more, he believes his earnings will continue to increase:

“I am now confident that I can double my income again within the next four years and put systems and processes in place so that half of my earnings are passive, or come from endeavors requiring little oversight.”

With confidence in his earning ability, he doesn't worry about money. In fact, he has two contingency plans to earn a living should his current activities falter. Instead being stressed about keeping money coming in, his energy goes into planning and implementing his business plans.

What does he do differently now?

“The Rushmore experience taught me so much more than what could be found on the thousands of pages I read during the many hours I spent researching. My MBA training taught me to respond effectively to my ignorance.”

What plans does he have for the future? Not surprisingly, there is more practical education on his immediate agenda:

“In what very little time I have, I am studying for a Chartered Realty Investor (CRI) certification. Down the road, I hope to complete my work concerning self realization or, more specifically, eliminating self-sabotage, the ways we undermine our success potential. I am considering a return to Rushmore to study business psychology as the culmination of that body of work, the product of which will be a book that I will write on the subject.”

Do you ever appear cocky, yet feel unfulfilled? Here are some questions designed to help you gain more success from being confidently prepared:

1. Have you ever pretended to know things about business that you didn't?
2. Why didn't you know those things?
3. What would you have to learn in order to be confident and more competent in business?
4. How could you learn what would be most beneficial to you?
5. What are you waiting for?

Good luck as you get past the kind of bluffing that I did on that blind date when it comes to your business career. I hope you are more honest with yourself than I was with that young woman.

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