

PSYCHOLOGIES  
MAGAZINE

“An indispensable guide to formulating goals in line with your deepest values – and then actually making them happen.”

Oliver Burkeman, author of  
*The Antidote: Happiness for People  
Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking*

# REAL AMBITION

Quit dreaming and  
create success *your* way



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success your way

**PSYCHOLOGIES**  
MAGAZINE

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# FOREWORD

by Suzy Greaves, Editor, *Psychologies*

**O**ur ethos at *Psychologies* magazine is 'your life, your way.' This book is how to live that ethos. Real ambition is about defining success on your own terms. We are all unique and when we tune into what we *really* want versus the world's definition of success, it's the ultimate ticket to freedom. Why? Because then you can start to build a life around your values and what you love instead of wasting your energy comparing and competing for something you never really wanted in the first place.

To discover your real ambition, you *do* need to spend some time working on your life versus being in it. This book invites you to dig deep and work out what really does inspire and fulfil you. It's a space to press pause while you complete the exercises and quizzes to discover what is your real ambition and then to create a new life plan from there – be it changing career, learning how to create your own business or writing a novel.

*Real Ambition* will help you get clear about goals that make sense to you. But it's not just about doing, but being. It's an invitation to make a leap to be your best self, to create a life that inspires you versus just making do, to have the courage to learn something new, to risk failing so you can create a life that reflects your real values.

When you have real ambition, life feels easier because you are comfortable in your own skin and living life authentically. You inspire, you lead and excel because you are living a successful life – defined by you.

Are you ready? Let's make it happen.

**Suzy Greaves, Editor, *Psychologies***





# INTRODUCTION

**W**e're so pleased you decided to buy this book about Real Ambition because at *Psychologies* magazine we believe that the link between ambition and success is the word *real*. And by real we mean what feels good for you. We want to kick off by telling you that your interest in *real* ambition indicates that your mind is tuned to the right wavelength for determining your success.

At this point we know that you have established a need to find out how to achieve success. Perhaps you sense that you need to learn more about how ambition works and what steps you can take to harness your own ambition. You may have one particular ambition in your life, but maybe something makes you feel unsure about whether it's possible to achieve this. Or maybe ambition for you isn't based on a singular mission and instead is about figuring out how to be successful. Or you might be at a dead end and want to know how to get out of this and what else might be possible. You may even be doing perfectly OK, but don't want to live an OK life — you want to know if and how it's feasible to achieve an amazing life.

So there are all sorts of reasons why you might have bought this book. At *Psychologies* magazine we know that the one thing our readers have in common is that they are striving for better lives all round. A better life for our readers isn't just about external and conventional marks of success. A better life is as much about inner wellbeing. We know from the therapists and life coaches who write for us, as well as those we interview every month for the magazine, that success is a huge preoccupation for their clients. People get caught up in feeling they haven't achieved 'enough', or they beat themselves up because they feel they are inadequate.

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How to be successful has been a big question since the eighties. There are countless books about this. So what makes *Real Ambition* any different? We have for some time sensed both from the experts we have access to, the academic research we follow, and the feedback from our readers, that there is a major cultural shift in what constitutes success. We've had the 'yuppies' (young upwardly mobile) of the eighties, the high-flyers of the nineties, and the mass consumerism of the noughties. In more recent years, success in our culture has come to be associated with how high-flying city figures and reality TV stars behave. But now that we're slowly exiting a recession in the UK, we believe that there's a strong sense of wanting to rewrite the meaning of ambition and success.

*Real Ambition* aims to help you create your own meaning of success and to encourage you to create a model of ambition that suits you. This involves first understanding who you are at this point.

We believe that ambition is that desire to make the inner leap to be your best self so that you can live your best life. Instead of 'making do', it's all about the doing. And of course that comes down to courage. Our job is to help you find that courage, show you how to harness and maximize it so that you don't turn back, or give up. Right now it's like you're looking at a map, your eyes are on your destination, and you're questioning the transport. We want to encourage you to look further than your destination, to create a journey to that point that enriches your life from day one, a journey that's fascinating and opens up your mind constantly.

If you have formed the belief that ambition is about being a certain personality type, and you think this book will be about becoming that personality – well, we don't believe this is the case. Ambition is not about those people you read about, or certain people you know. We won't be advocating that you must fake being anything you're not.

Healthy ambition and a successful life are based on feeling fulfilled: it's about what makes you want to get-up-and-go every day,

what makes you feel the best you. It's about knowing what really nourishes your life. And that might very well be different to what nourishes (and inspires) all your friends, your colleagues, your family and everyone else around you.

The foundation of healthy ambition is the belief that you deserve the best life for you, and then creating a plan to make it happen. It's about knowing how to be equipped so that you can follow the plan or, if necessary, change the plan to a better one. The plan won't be in your head. Think in terms of planning an adventure that you fully intend to enjoy.

## **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

We've divided this book into three parts:

- 1.** What Does Ambition Mean to You?
- 2.** What's Stopping You from Achieving Your Ambitions?
- 3.** How Can You Achieve Your Ambitions?

In Part 1 you'll gain an overview of ambition and success in our culture, how this is changing, and what this means to you. You may discover that you're more successful than you think. You'll be inspired to create your own model of success rather than accepting what's given to you by the media, celebrity culture or people around you.

In Part 2 we'll help you understand why you feel you're not achieving your dreams and how to turn things around. In Part 3 we show you how to engage your mind to go from goals to action and give you advice that you can apply in every area of your life. We don't want to keep you waiting until the final part to start making things happen though, so throughout the book you'll find tips designed to act as ambition boosters that you can try out immediately to help fuel your dreams.

At the end of Chapters 1–3 and 5 there are tests so that you can assess yourself. We've also included key 'Ask Yourself' questions

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for you to reflect on, so that you can relate each chapter to your personal experience. You will also find case studies from real people (with names and identifying circumstances changed). We chose these case studies so that you can see how ambition and success differ from person to person.

We carefully selected a panel of five leading experts to interview, each one with a different specialization, perspective and background. Two of our experts started their professional lives as actors, two have business backgrounds and one is an academic. Choosing a mix of experts is always exciting because although we know the individual experts well, we have no idea how what they say individually on the subject will gel collectively. We set out to give you a mix that will maximize the advice available to you. What turned out to be fascinating for us is that all our experts were on the same page as us: our culture is changing to one based on being individuals, rather than toeing a line fed to us.

We hope you will be inspired to believe that you can create your vision of success, that you will take the actions to make this happen, and that the process will be rewarding.

## **THE EXPERTS INTERVIEWED FOR REAL AMBITION**

### **Kele Baker, mind-body-movement coach**

Kele Baker helps people take control of their health and wellbeing by teaching body awareness, coordination, relaxation, self-discovery and self-healthcare through tai chi, qigong, the Alexander Technique and mindfulness.

She is a former co-director of Kensington Dance Studio with over 20 years' experience teaching and choreographing for

stage and television. Baker is the author of *Strictly Come Dancing: Step By Step Dance Class* (BBC Books) and director of the Life Force Chi Centre.

<http://www.kelebaker.com>

<http://www.lifeforcechicentre.com>

### **Chris Baréz-Brown, creative and business beatnik**

Chris Baréz-Brown and his consultancy Upping Your Elvis show corporate teams how to unleash their creativity for more successful branding and a happy workplace. His background includes helping turn Carling Black Label into a billion-pound brand.

Baréz-Brown is the author of three bestselling books: *How to Have Kick Ass Ideas* (Harper Collins), *Shine. How to Survive and Thrive at Work* (Penguin), *Free! Love Your Work, Love Your Life* (Penguin) and the latest *Wake Up!* (Penguin Life, 2016).

[www.uppingyourelvis.com](http://www.uppingyourelvis.com)

@BarezBrown

### **Dannie-Lu Carr, creativity specialist, communications consultant and creative practitioner**

Dannie-Lu Carr works with individuals and organizations on creativity and communications. She has worked with a wide range of corporate, media, PR, education and public sector companies, from Bloomberg through to the NHS.

Carr is the author of *Brilliant Assertiveness* (Pearson). She writes and directs for her production company Flaming Poppy, and runs acting workshops. Following a TEDx talk in 2015 she formed Reorientations to campaign for cultural change in the arts.

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### **John Purkiss, headhunter and coach**

John Purkiss runs workshops and coaches individuals on personal branding and personal development. He is the co-founder of Purkiss&Company where he recruits chief executives, finance directors and other board members.

Purkiss is the co-author of three books including *Brand You – Turn Your Unique Talents into a Winning Formula* (Pearson) which has been translated into five languages. He is working on a new book which will be called *The Art of Letting Go*.

[www.johnpurkiss.com](http://www.johnpurkiss.com)

[www.brandyou.info](http://www.brandyou.info)

### **Lisa Fortlouis Wood, Professor of Psychology and licensed clinical psychologist**

Professor Fortlouis Wood teaches clinical psychology (including psychotherapy) at the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington and also practises as a clinical psychologist. Her specializations include family communication, relationship therapy, community, psychology and social/personal identity.

Professor Fortlouis Wood is regularly invited to present her research findings at educational conferences all over the world. Her most recent research (with Galena K. Rhoades, University of Denver) was on the effect of emotional distress in the family on college students.

[www.pugetsound.edu](http://www.pugetsound.edu)

# **1** WHAT DOES AMBITION MEAN TO YOU?





# CHAPTER 1

## REDEFINING AMBITION AND SUCCESS

**T**he meaning of ambition and success is something that varies from person to person. What success means to you or what you want to see for yourself in the future might be completely different to someone else's interpretation. Perhaps you dream of making it in a highly competitive arts and entertainment field like Hollywood, the music charts, the *New York Times* bestseller list. You might want to escape a dreary no-status job for an exciting high-level career. You might be determined to make so much money you don't have to ever worry about it. Or you might have decided to totally change your life by moving to a different city or even another country.

Before we help you learn how to achieve your ambitions and create success in your life, you need to be clear about what ambition and success mean. If your definitions are simply the opposite of terms like unsuccessful, failure, mediocre or boring, you won't be clear about what exactly you are aiming to create. So what do ambition and success mean generally – and what do they mean to you?

## ARE DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS RIGHT?

We're starting with dictionary definitions of ambition and success because we want to strip them down from all the associations you may have made about both words. Think of a house that someone has painted over again and again, and that needs to be stripped back to a shell and rebuilt to achieve a home that's redesigned and redecorated properly as well as beautifully. The same has happened to these big concepts of ambition and success. They have become overloaded with the meanings you've absorbed around you. One of the things we're aiming to do is to help you redefine ambition and success on your terms.

So let's get to the basics. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* ambition is:

*A strong desire to do or achieve something*  
*Desire and determination to achieve success*

On the online Dictionary.com we find ambition described as:

*An earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as power, honor, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment*

In the Oxford Dictionary there are various definitions of success:

*The accomplishment of an aim or purpose*

*The attainment of fame, wealth, or social status*

*A person or thing that achieves desired aims or attains fame, wealth*

All the above definitions are food for thought aren't they? It's evident that the classic definitions of ambition are about wanting to accomplish an aim that is connected to success, and that the overall definitions of success are based on accomplishing goals that are invariably connected to wealth and status.

By flagging up these definitions we may have depressed you a teeny bit. There may be a thought at the back of your mind that there are people who have a knack of rising to the top and making money and having everything, but you're not that type. But you don't have to be that or any type.

**“A definition of ambition based on seeking and aspiring to *something* gives each of us the opportunity to choose what we want to achieve.”**

Kele Baker, mind-body-movement coach

Who says we have to accept dictionary definitions? Think of all those modern words that only in recent years have entered

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dictionaries, like Google, text and smartphone. Who says ambition has to go hand in hand with success, or that success is dependent on a certain type of ambition? If ambition is the desire to achieve a goal and that goal is happiness, or fulfilment, isn't that success? How about if you substitute the word 'wealth' with 'prosperity', and the word 'fame' with 'recognition'? Think about this and it will click: you have an approachable vision of success that relates to *you*.

So let's look at how you can reformulate ambition and success in a way that works for you.

## REAL AMBITION ISN'T RUTHLESS

Over the decades, ambition has come to be associated with a type of ruthless, overconfident person who will stop at nothing to achieve what they're after. Ambition is associated with dog-eats-dog environments where people are hard-nosed and heartless, self-obsessed and egocentric.

But why should a desire to make a dream come true mean having to be a caricature of ambition? We're certainly not going to give you the secrets of ruthless successful people that work while leaving out the bad bits, because this book is about developing a holistic approach. When your ambition nurtures you, we believe that the rest follows.

Old-style ambition has simply fallen flat on its face. We know that thanks to one word: recession. The most ambitious people, those who were the most ruthless and the wealthiest, wiped out entire economies. We don't propose to get into a discussion on economics and politics here. But we hope the brief reminder of this period in our history will help to show that you don't need the traits traditionally associated with ambition. Being ruthless, cut-throat and hard won't serve you as a person or your wellbeing, and won't benefit humanity.

**“Ambition is often seen as achieving things at the expense of others.”**

John Purkiss, headhunter and coach

Whether you have a specific dream or you're looking for a way to create a specific life, you may be wondering whether you need a watered-down version of ruthless, some sort of healthy go-go-go. The problem with old-style ambition is that any form of go-go-go can lead to imbalance. Think of workaholics and anyone you know who works relentlessly and doesn't have a life and you'll get the picture.

One of the blocks stopping you might even be a fear that to make your dreams happen you'll have to give up friends and hobbies and isolate yourself. This certainly isn't the kind of success we have in mind.

## **OLD-STYLE AMBITION IS BURNOUT – REAL AMBITION IS BALANCE**

If you believe that success is either down to luck or working at your goals non-stop that's not surprising. This is the society we live in. Our TV is dominated by reality TV stars who've become famous for not really doing anything, the media is full of overnight success stories, yet all around us we see people working hard to find jobs or keep their jobs.

**“We live in a dynamic, forceful, moving, active society. We have to constantly *do* and *achieve*. Yet this is a burnt out and stressed society.”**

Kele Baker, mind-body-movement coach

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As somebody now working to help people find inner peace and maintain this peace in their outer lives, mind-body-movement coach Kele Baker is acutely aware of how stressed people are in modern lives. Her long-time interest in Chinese medicine and philosophy helped her deal with her own stress and breakdown as a young actress in New York and she maintained this interest through moving on to different occupations as a ballroom dance teacher, Alexander Technique practitioner, co-director of a dance school business, as a choreographer and working on one of the UK's most popular TV programmes.

Baker believes that our Western lives need ancient wisdom to realign them. 'We need balance, rest and rejuvenation.' It might seem odd to talk about resting in a book about achieving success. After all, shouldn't that come later? Might rest not turn into laziness? Does rest really fit in with ambition?

That's the thing about real ambition: you can evaluate what you want. If there's a way to achieve your dreams without burning out from exhaustion, wouldn't you rather do that?

**“Ambition needs balance and it might take a while to get there.”**

Dannie-Lu Carr, creativity specialist, communications consultant & creative practitioner

There's no doubt that the pace of our modern lives, especially in cities, is fast and demanding. It's also inevitable that one of your desires, more often than not work, will become all consuming,