

CEO of Your Life

How to prepare for success and happiness

By Marsha Haygood

I often think of the line in the movie “Forrest Gump”: “Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.” While it’s true that each day brings an element of the unknown, we can choose how we live our lives and how we prepare for the life we want. It starts with becoming the CEO of your life — being self-aware and taking care of yourself mentally, physically, spiritually and financially. It means developing a career and life plan to be happy and successful, equipping yourself with what I call “Triple S”: Strategy — new ways of thinking and doing; Skill — new learnings and new ideas; and Success — new accomplishments.

Your big idea equals your success plan

Your big ideas set your path to success. Although they may seem overwhelming, they are achievable with a plan. Once you have given thought to your big idea, begin to focus on the

areas that may need improvement.

- Boost your self-awareness and confidence. Note past accomplishments and celebrate new ones. Learn from your positive experiences and from those that did not turn out as you wished. Nurture yourself by reflecting on all the good things in your life, some of which you may have taken for granted.
- Engage others. Surround yourself with positive, like-minded people. Identify and engage a coach, mentor or others who can help to elevate, support and guide you. Ask yourself: Whom do I know? Whom do I need to know? Who needs to know me?
- Invest in yourself. Invest time and money in your own self-development. If you are serious about your career growth, the investment will pay off.
- Start where you are. Divide your plan into doable action steps. Starting with what you know, building on what you already accomplished. For example, review and update your résumé and

improvements, and be open to making adjustments while continually building your self-confidence and self-worth.

As busy as we are, however, it’s easy to be overwhelmed, unorganized, distracted and forgetful. We may even postpone personal priorities, goals and good intentions. To avoid getting off track, I recommend going back to basics: writing things down in a dedicated, organized location. My “go-to tool” is my personal leadership notebook, or PLN, which I carry with me almost all the time. Big enough to write legibly in and small enough to fit in my bag, it’s divided into sections labeled according to areas I deem important to my success, such as personal and professional goals; weekly, monthly, quarterly accomplishments; people/organizations to follow up with; good ideas to review; and recommendations for people, books, websites or apps.

Change to move forward

If you aren’t feeling empowered, but feel stuck or bored, you have the ability to make changes. Change your mindset, your routine, and possibly your attitude if you want to change your life. Reflect on your day and week, noting what went well and what you can do differently. Change takes time, so the sooner you start, the sooner you will see results. Take the lead and be determined to make things happen! Consistency and persistence will pay off. Be prepared for surprises. You control your destiny, but it requires action to move ahead.

As an optimist, I believe that when you focus and put action toward what you want, the universe conspires to help you achieve it. TNJ

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basics of giving it life. First things first:

- Visualize. Clarify your goals and visualize what being happy and successful really looks like for you. Start with the end in mind: Are you seeking a specific job title, work in a specific industry, a certain salary or a certain lifestyle? Being specific and setting a time frame are important first steps in your success plan.
- Conduct a self-assessment. Do you already have the skill, experience and know-how to achieve the success you visualize? If you don’t, what must you do to acquire them?
- Add to your tool kit. No- and low-cost resources are available to get you started. Identify your strengths as well as

LinkedIn profile; join or start an online group and connect with like-minded people; or attend a networking event in your area of interest.

Staying on track

When my co-authors and I wrote *The Little Black Book of Success: Laws of Leadership for Black Women*, our goal was to help others strive for excellence, move past self-defeating behavior, and take strategic steps to tap into their leadership potential and move forward with purpose. We stressed that in order to successfully navigate your career path, you must identify and utilize your strengths, understand that there will be areas for

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