

## What Does "Success" Look Like?

Who would you judge is more successful?

- a) Someone who drives a 1979 Ford pickup truck or someone who drives a brand-new Mercedes sedan?
- b) Someone who has lived in the same house in Omaha, Nebraska since 1958 or someone who has just traded up to a custom home on 5 acres in an exclusive development?

If the man driving the pickup truck was Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, he would definitely be more successful than whoever was driving the Mercedes. If Sam were alive today, he would be the richest man on earth with a net worth of \$80 billion, surpassing even Bill Gates (at a paltry \$59 billion). Even after Sam made his fortune, you would never pick him out of a crowd as a rich man. He still drove his 1979 Ford pickup truck and wore Wal-Mart clothes.

The second-richest man in the world, Warren Buffet, is worth \$52 billion and has lived in the same house in Omaha, Nebraska since 1958.

These examples illustrate that it is difficult to judge a person's success by appearance alone. Even so, TV shows, newspapers and magazines never tire of telling us that we're not successful unless we live in a big home, drive an expensive car, and wear a certain brand of clothing.

The culprit behind all this is what I like to call the Giant Marketing Machine (GMM), otherwise known as the advertising industry. The GMM is a multi-billion dollar industry and its sole purpose is to manipulate us into spending our money on their clients' products. They do this by:

- Trying to convince us that we can't live without their product.
- Trying to convince us that buying their product will improve our lives. Often, products are linked to desirable lifestyles and/or beautiful people. The GMM will say "If you buy my product, you can be beautiful too!" and "If you buy our product, look at all the fun you can have!"
- Constantly exposing us to advertising. Advertising exists:
  - o On the radio.
  - o On TV.
  - o In the movie theater before the previews.
  - o On the sides of public buses.
  - o On billboards.
  - o On clothing.

- In magazines and newspapers.
- On almost every webpage on the Internet.

Advertising even exists in movies and TV shows. The next time you see a movie character drinking Coke instead of Pepsi, realize that Coke probably paid a hefty fee to have their product prominently displayed. This is called "product placement".

If you ever visit Texas, you might hear someone say, "He's big hat and no cattle". Someone is "big hat and no cattle" when they look successful and prosperous (by wearing a big hat), but aren't (they don't own any cattle). Just because someone drives a BMW doesn't mean they're successful. Anyone can lease a BMW for a few hundred dollars a month. There are a lot of people who drive Mercedes Benzes but live in shacks. They wear Rolexes and fashionable clothing but can barely pay their electric bill.

There's nothing wrong with driving a Mercedes as long as you can afford it. The problem lies with people who take on huge amounts of debt trying to present a façade of success. The big homes come with big mortgages, the fancy cars are leased, and the fashionable clothes are purchased with credit cards. Little do people know that taking on debt subjects them to financial servitude - a form of slavery - where their debt determines how much they have to work, often at jobs they don't enjoy.

By allowing others to define success for us, we give them power over our lives. If we let them tell us how to spend our money and go into debt buying their products, we let them control how much time we spend at our jobs. We should all strive to be "no hat, but lots of cattle". There's a certain power that comes from driving a 10-year-old car but knowing that, if you wanted to, you could walk into a car dealership and write a check for a new car.

We can't stop the deluge of advertising that saturates our lives. However, by being aware of the GMM and its methods, we can minimize the destructive impact on our finances. Don't let others do your thinking for you. Control your mind and your thoughts, and you can control your money and your life.

Michael Mihalik is the author of ***Debt is Slavery: and 9 Other Things I Wish My Dad Had Taught Me About Money***. Learn how to gain control of your finances, pay off your debt and create financial security using the same techniques Mike used to triumph over a paralyzing amount of debt. ***Debt is Slavery*** is available at Amazon.com, your local bookstore, or at [www.octobermist.com](http://www.octobermist.com).