

## **A kinder, gentler philosophy of success**

[listening comprehension questions]

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Check these words before listening:

### **Key vocabulary**

1. A career crisis
2. To weep into a pillow (phrase)
3. Career anxiety
4. A snob / snobbery
5. A correlation between...
6. Social hierarchy
7. Materialistic
8. An emotional reward
9. Acquisition
10. Paradoxical
11. The caste system
12. The spirit of equality
13. Incidentally,
14. French aristocracy
15. Low self-esteem
16. Meritocracy / meritocratic
17. Socialist – Emil Durkheim (google him)
18. Suicide
19. St Augustine's book – The city of God
20. A loss of status
21. Othello
22. Shopaholic adulteress
23. A tabloid newspaper
24. Extraordinary
25. Psychoanalysis
26. To reconcile
27. Randomness
28. Cruel

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## **A kinder, gentler philosophy of success**

TED TALK: Alain de Botton [Jul 2009. 16:51]

*Explain what you understand*

1. What is a career crisis?
2. What is snobbery and why does that affect us?
3. Why is material so important to us?
4. How has society changed compared to the past in terms of equality?
5. What is significant about envy?
6. What is the negative consequence of a society that tells us we can do anything?
7. Is Meritocracy a good idea? What is the example of 'loser' to support?

8. Why has the suicide rate increased?
9. What is significant about the St Augustine quote?
10. Why is the tragic art concept important in today's world?
11. What is meant by a 'non-human society'?
12. Do we know what success is? And who influences in the nature of success?
13. What is the overall summary?

Critical Thinking: Does he offer any kind of idea in this lecture on how to achieve success or is it a description? Can we find success on our own? How can we stop the influence of the media on our lives? We have equality but we also have competition – isn't life a fight to survive? What do you think?

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## **The philosophy of success ANSWERS**

### **1) What is a career crisis?**

Crisis: We live in an age when our lives are regularly punctuated by career crises, by moments when what we thought we knew, about our lives, about our careers, comes into contact with a threatening sort of reality.

### **2) What is snobbery and why does that affect us?**

Snobbery: Easier to make a good living / harder to stay calm, to be free of career anxiety.

Some reasons = snobbery

What is a snob? A snob is anybody who takes a small part of you and uses that to come to a complete vision of who you are. That is snobbery.

Dominant kind of snobbery = job snobbery. At a party: "What do you do?" excited or walk away / Social hierarchy defined as how much time someone will give you (love)

### **3) Why is material so important to us?**

Reasons for materialism: We care so much about our careers and material goods is what other people think of us. / Society which has simply pegged certain emotional rewards to the acquisition of material goods / not the material goods we want / It's the rewards we want.

### **4) How has society changed compared to the past in terms of equality?**

Expectations: Never before have expectations been so high about what human beings can achieve with their lifespan / we can achieve anything / no caste system / anyone can rise to any position / spirit of equality / we're all basically equal / no strictly defined kind of hierarchies.

### **5) What is significant about envy?**

Envy: Taboo to mention envy / it's a dominant emotion in modern society / linked to the spirit of equality. Ex. The Queen (Weird)

Ex. The closer two people are, in age, in background, in the process of identification, the more there is a danger of envy / modern society is similar to a school. Everybody is wearing jeans, everybody is the same. And yet, they're not.

Media outlets: Magazines, TV etc... Promote amazingness / However, There is a real correlation between a society that tells people that they can do anything and the existence of low self-esteem

### **6) Is Meritocracy a good idea? What is the example of 'loser' to support?**

Meritocracy: Politicians agree that meritocracy is a great thing for societies. (if you've got talent and energy and skill, you will get to the top.) However, the opposite is true too: those who deserve to get to the bottom and stay. / Ex. Middle Ages / England, a very poor person, was described as an "unfortunate". In the USA a person at the bottom of society is a 'loser'. There's a definite difference here and it's us who have changed the meaning.

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### 7) Why has the suicide rate increased?

Suicide: Analysis of a sociologist like Emil Durkheim. There are more suicides in developed individualistic countries than in any other part of the world. They own their success. But they also own their failure.

Relief: Meritocratic. It's an impossible dream. Too many random factors (accidents, birth problems, illnesses) for people to be graded 'good at top' and 'bad at bottom'

### 8) What is significant about the St Augustine quote?

Quote: St. Augustine in "The City of God," where he says, "It's a sin to judge any man by his post." In other words, hold your horses when you're coming to judge people. You don't necessarily know what someone's true value is.

Failure: Failing in life, is not just a loss of income, a loss of status / we fear the judgment and ridicule of others.

Newspapers: number one organ of ridicule is the newspaper. Whatever smt has done wrong it is fit for ridicule. In other words, they have failed. And they are described as "losers." The alternative is tragedy.

### 9) Why is the tragic art concept important in today's world?

Tragic art: Ancient Greece, 5C, an art form devoted to tracing how people fail, and also according them a level of sympathy, which ordinary life would not necessarily accord them. Ex. Hamlet is not a loser.

### 10) What is meant by a 'non-human society'?

Non-human society: Modern society causes anxiety is that we have nothing at its center that is non-human / first society to be living in a world where we don't worship anything other than ourselves. Our heroes are human heroes. No transcendent – God, spirits, the universe like societies before us. What is more important is to keep in contact with nature.

### 11) Do we know what success is?

Do we know what success is?: Success and failure. If I said to you that there is somebody behind the screen who is very very successful, certain ideas would immediately come to mind. You would think that person might have made a lot of money, achieved renown in some field. You can't be successful at everything. So any vision of success has to admit what it's losing out on, where the element of loss is.

### 12) Who influences in the nature of success?

Our own ideas of success: How to live successfully are not our own / from other people: man, your father, a woman, your mother. Psychoanalysis has presented this idea for about 80 years. From everything from the television, to advertising, to marketing, etc. These are hugely powerful forces that define what we want and how we view ourselves. We are highly open to suggestion. Ex. Banking popular – not popular

### 13) What is the overall summary?

Summary: our ideas of success = our own. Be the authors of our own ambitions. Don't want to end the journey to realize these ideas are not what you wanted.