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AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

Success has a lot to do with being true to your life's purpose, vision, and goals. Often, that means running counter to what our culture's definition of success is, because so often in our society, success is defined by your material worth or the initials behind your name. Making money is important on a certain level, but what's *really* important is to know your heart, to find your passion. Shakespeare wrote, "To thine own self be true." Like so many things in life, it seems so simple, but there's probably nothing harder to do.

When considering success I prefer to think in terms of fulfillment rather than material goods. One of my fondest possessions during my college years was a little refrigerator that I had in my dorm room. If you had one of those, it was a big deal. I recently bought a new home with one of those great big, fancy refrigerators; but my sense of success, pride, and

fulfillment with that new big fridge paled in comparison to the feelings I had when I was able to get that little fridge.

Our society emphasizes having more, being more, getting more: it might be a new car. But as soon as you get that new car, someone down the street is going to get a better car, and it's never ending. If you're trying to keep up with the Joneses, you're in an ongoing battle. There's a saying: "If you know what you want, you don't want everything," which reminds me of the importance of personal truth.

Finding that alignment between your head and your heart, while at the same time not getting caught up in external pressures, is critical. Some of the happiest days of my life were when I took three months off from work to bicycle across the United States. During those three months, all I had was 30 pounds of gear, and I was at the mercy of all the forces of nature: the weather, the wind, the rain, the hail. I didn't have much to protect myself. But that bike ride was the fulfillment of a long-held passion and dream. There was no question that my head and my heart were fully aligned.

I believe there are people whom our society might look upon as unsuccessful or assume that they are unhappy. For instance, three years ago I became a care partner with Interfaith Care Alliance. The man I've been caring for is bed-bound and has lost most of his speech and vision. He reminds me of what's truly important in life and to let go of the clutter. He is truly successful in his living with grace and resilience through his illness.

My passion for helping others began during my nursing career. I'd often hear patients express regret about their lifestyle habits that led to whatever illness put them in the hospital. They'd say, "If I'd only known that my smoking would cause me so much distress, things might have been different." When I worked in cardiac care, those people would look back on their lives of excessive eating, lack of exercise, or lots of stress and say, "If only I'd known that my lifestyle was going to contribute to this heart attack, things might have been different!" So that experience really helped to form my commitment to creating environments that are supportive of healthy behaviors. Often, we're victims of our culture — if everyone around you is eating fast food, driving 90 mph without their seatbelts on and drinking while doing it, it's easy to fall into that trap. But there are consequences. I hope to remind people of what we all learned about health when they were 8 years old.

Young people looking to be successful need to ask the tough questions about what they are most passionate about, what kind of difference they want to make in the world, what they want their legacy to be — and then pursue it with all the vigor that they can.

The "Success to Me" series is prepared by Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, an entrepreneur, and Pam Losefsky, an Austin writer and editor.