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*We Help You Focus Clearly,  
Organize Effectively,  
And Act With Courage*

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### **Are You Trapped?**

- Do you find yourself in a frantic whirl of commitments?
- Do you compete out of habit? Is winning central to your identity?
- Have the symbols of success or status become crucial to your self-worth?
- Do you abuse or rely too much on your natural talents?
- Have you found yourself blaming problems on other people or external factors?
- Do you brood on bad news or criticism?
- Do you have almost a compulsive need to control?
- Do you find yourself getting angry over little things, or do you occasionally surprise yourself with intense emotions that seem out of proportion to the situation?
- Are you becoming rigid in your views, finding it hard to listen to other points of view?

If you answer yes to any of these, spend some time reflecting on what success means to you. If you don't find yourself in this list, look again. You may be denying some inner secrets that could hurt you if left untended.

*Adapted with permission from The Paradox of Success by John O'Neill, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1993, pp. 37-43.*

## **Getting TRAPPED in Your Success**

Like me, you've no doubt had successes in your life, achievements that make you proud, areas where you did your best and your effort was rewarded. It feels great, doesn't it? The question is; how do we sustain that feeling?

**What traps most of us is relying more and more on what *made us successful, without thinking about what success means.*** So we rely on knowledge, skills, or old formulas that may become increasingly overextended and out of touch. We stop learning. We become tired *and* tiring. It's like the old adage, "When all you've got is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Our strengths become our weaknesses and what caused our success now causes our failure.

**Organizations as well as people can be trapped in their own success.** When organizations believe that they have nothing more to learn, they begin to suffer what the Greeks called "hubris," loosely translated as "arrogance." In almost every Greek tragedy, the heroes overcame tremendous odds to succeed but failed in the end because their own ego blinded them to what was important.

**We need to view the need for change as a measure of success, not failure.** Change, learning, and growth are the only things that will ensure continued success. When we get to the point where we have *almost* mastered something, it's time to start learning something new.

**True danger lies in the zone between mastery and the next learning cycle.** Maybe we disengage and go into autopilot, or maybe we create crises for ourselves and others just to relieve boredom. Maybe we distract ourselves with meaningless activities. In any case, the decline starts here.

### **How do we as individuals and organizations stop this self-defeating cycle?**

- **First**, we need to watch for anomalies -- signs of boredom, little cracks in the facade, things that don't fit into our current worldview.
- **Second**, we need to continually set aside time to reflect on where we've been, where we're going, and how we feel about it. Reflection is an under-utilized, incredibly powerful tool. Most vacations, planning sessions, or training workshops are so busy that we really don't have time to reflect.
- **Third**, we need to have the discipline to leap to a new learning cycle even when things are going well.
- **Fourth**, we need to have the courage to learn deeply, to go to places within ourselves where we may feel totally confused and out-of-sorts, before emerging with new understandings and insights.