



CELEBRATE SUCCESS!

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You are Your Own Fortune Cookie ...

by Dixie Stanforth, Ph.D., FACS and Chris Corral, B.S.

If you wrote a fortune for your cookie ... what would it be? Mine is "Do everything with excellence — nothing is wasted." Chris chooses "Imagination sets the mind free." Talking with Barry Franklin, Ph.D., FACS, director of Preventive Cardiology and Cardiac Rehabilitation at Corewell Health, William Beaumont University Hospital, Royal Oak, MI, is a conversation sprinkled with stories and a wealth of practical information that could create a full batch of fortune cookies! A renowned researcher and writer (writing or editing more than 700 publications, including 592 papers, 103 book chapters, and 27 books), Franklin was ranked ninth in the world in 2020 among scholars writing about exercise/physical activity over the past decade, and he has received honors and awards too numerous to mention. His secondary passion is a decades-long exploration studying the behaviors of highly successful people, integrating their advice into his life for an up close and personal anecdotal case study to identify what "works." He developed and taught a course titled *GPS for Success* at Central Michigan University from 2012 to 2017; that content is now available in a book by that same title published in 2022. Read on for an abbreviated overview of that advice ... and learn how to program your own GPS to write your fortune.

DEVELOPING "SOFT SKILLS"

Each year, excited students in the health sciences fill their minds to the brim with facts, working tirelessly to perfect lab techniques, memorize the Krebs cycle, and learn about the intricacies of the human body. These "hard skills," or field-specific information, are important to ensure competency. However, assuming every student passes their courses and stays in the field, how can someone be exceptional if everyone knows the same things? "Soft skills" are the secret sauce. While not typically taught in the classroom, they are critical determinants of success in life. Franklin talks about soft skills as actions we take when interacting with others and in goal planning. Examples include being a courteous and clear communicator and breaking down goals into

actionable steps. Soft skills are habits of excellence, and Franklin's career is full of examples on how our interactions are the catalysts that shape the future.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PEOPLE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE LIKE

When Franklin was an undergraduate at Kent State University, he had all the desire and determination to be successful. Greatly inspired by attending a guest lecture featuring the world-renowned cardiologist, Herman Hellerstein, M.D., Franklin decided he wanted to be like Hellerstein. Bravely, Franklin drove 1.5 hours to Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and asked to see Hellerstein ... without an appointment. Although denied (repeatedly) by Hellerstein's staff, Franklin bumped into the man while dejectedly leaving and had a life-changing 45-minute conversation with him that set his path toward the field of exercise science. Based on experiences like this, Franklin emphasizes the importance of meeting people you want to be like. Hellerstein gave him the motivation needed to persevere in school and encouraged Franklin to get an advanced degree.

Sidebar 1. Soft Skills

A large part of success comes from developing the way we think and interact with others and with our objectives. These soft skills, when embraced and regularly practiced, give professionals the extra sparkle needed for success:

- Collaboration
- People Skills
- Interviewing
- Problem-Solving
- Goal Setting
- Motivation
- Focus
- Commitment
- Serving Others
- Dealing with Setbacks
- Patience and Persistence
- Being Prepared
- Written and Oral Communication
- Taking Action

Read more about soft skills at <https://drbarryfranklin.com/writing/gps-for-success/>.



The journey, however, was easier said than done. Although Franklin had a 2.7 undergraduate GPA, he once again knocked boldly on the door of opportunity, this time at the University of Michigan. During a requested summer visit to the exercise physiology lab, Franklin demonstrated his communication skills, desire to work hard, and ingenuity, which likely played a role in his acceptance into the program. The experience revealed the “magic” of a face-to-face meeting! At Michigan, he also learned of the importance of joining professional organizations, like ACSM, to broaden connections with other successful people who also love the field of exercise. Franklin describes himself as someone who always volunteered to serve on committees and projects. His involvement has led him to many prestigious roles, like senior editor of *ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription* (6th ed), past president of ACSM, and, most recently, invited presenter of the 2024 Wolffe Lecture at the ACSM Annual Meeting. Franklin applied all the soft skills he discovered to get life changing opportunities and meet people who would become life-long collaborators, colleagues, and friends.

THE PRINCIPLE OF GOYA: GET OFF YOUR @\$\$!

Clearly, Franklin's life success demonstrates the importance of putting in the time no matter what you are working on. Our daily actions that compound over time make the magic happen.

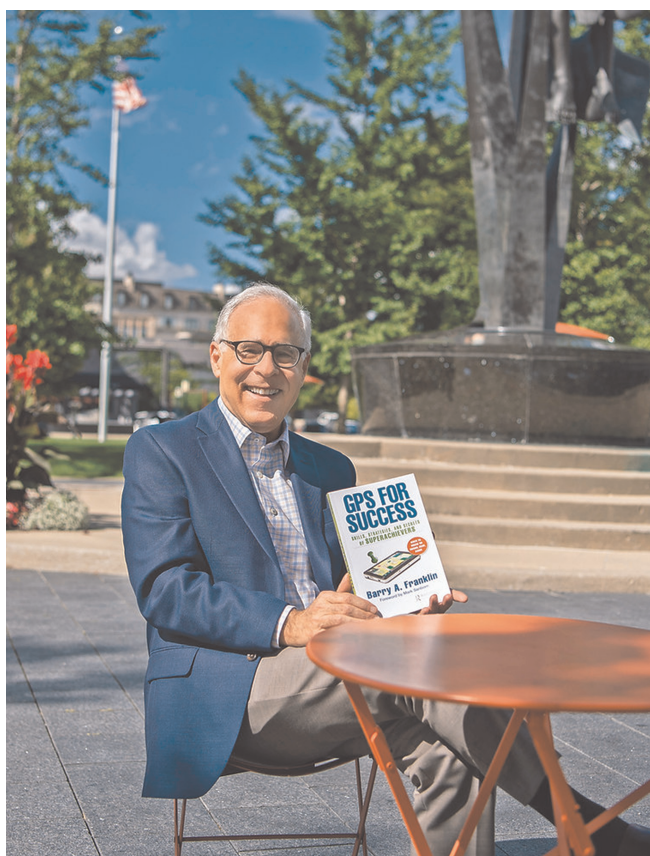


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Following Franklin's example, students can increase the likelihood of finding golden opportunities by creating a robust professional network. Volunteering for events and leadership positions within organizations like ACSM allows others to know your excellence. Experiential learning opportunities, like an internship, provide the additional benefit of being trained in a hands-on environment. It is important to note that mentors often learn as much from their interns as the interns learn from them. Some of these relationships will be pathways to collaboration, professional development, and friendship. Holding on to these relationships also will be invaluable for productivity and creativity. Franklin firmly believes that more minds think better than one ... and in order to meet those minds, you need to take positive steps and go say “hi” or volunteer to serve or offer to help a colleague accomplish their goal.

THE UNIVERSE REWARDS ACTION

Intimidating as it may seem, putting yourself out there is the way to success; as Franklin says, “the universe rewards action.” The thoughts in our minds do not become a reality until we act (GOYA!) on them. However, we must be realistic about what is achievable with our current resources. One simply does not wake up and finish a triathlon having never trained. The key is to focus on consistency and small tasks that build up to the identified “big goal.” For example, when writing, Franklin focuses on producing a certain number of pages per day. In the same way, a student may do two practice problems per day, or a beginning exerciser may go for a 10-minute walk every day. The main objective is to overcome inertia (... a body at rest ...) and consistently make steady progress. Franklin contends that consistency is more important than intensity. Including a small part of your goal in a daily “to do” list ensures your goals guide your everyday choices. It also is important to be flexible when necessary. A paragraph is better than a blank page. Doing jumping jacks for 1 minute is better than nothing at all. Do one thing every day that affirms your commitment to your goals ... and watch change begin to happen.

REJECT REJECTION

Most of what we have looked at so far implies positive outcomes will happen ... but most of us can attest to the fact that life can be filled with challenging situations and people. Even if you have set your GPS for success, your trajectory may not be linear or always in the direction you expect or hope to travel. One principle of the universe is that the one thing that is under our control is how we respond. Let's say you are doing something every day

Sidebar 2. The Franklin Method for Achieving Goals

1. Find a goal you are passionate about and WRITE IT DOWN.
2. Break down the goal into smaller, manageable tasks.
3. Do one of these “tasks” every day. Consistent daily action is the “yellow brick road” to achieving desired objectives.

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to practice your soft skills, reaching your goals, meeting new people ... and BAM! Rejection stops you in your tracks. There may be times you do not connect with people you want to connect with, times when you are not given the job you applied for, and times when no matter how much you prepare, something unexpected happens. These are all part of life. When asked how he was so productive in research, Franklin simply answered “I am the King of Rejection ... people do not see all of the rejected manuscripts, only those that were published.” Successful people are successful because they keep trying to find a way that works by learning from their mistakes. You have probably heard that we would not have light bulbs if Thomas Edison gave up after his first couple hundred attempts! Having a growth mindset, the belief that we can continually learn new things is what keeps us moving forward through setbacks. It also puts us in a place of constant self-improvement. With a growth mindset, we see that there is always something new to learn, and that with every rejection comes a new opportunity.

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SUCCESS DOES NOT HAPPEN BY CHANCE

Franklin has acted on his belief, based on years of examining the available evidence, that “80% to 85% of success in life comes from developing soft skills.” Noting that we can learn these soft

skills through intentional commitment to learn and then act, he states forcefully that “success doesn't happen by chance,” shifting the responsibility to each of us to embrace the journey and GOYA! His conclusion is worth ending here ... and provides words for all of us to thoughtfully consider: “Your life is not about what you say you're going to do ... it's what you do.” Does this remind you of three little words that would make a great fortune cookie? Yup ... Just Do It.

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