

“How Do You Define Success” By Regina Marchionda

Success may be defined by selecting a task and doing it well. To some, success is not found merely in the achievement of a final result, but also in the attempt. Success can be identified by goals as well as definitions. However, goals are frequently not our own and definitions found in the dictionary often do not relate to our personal life experience. If you choose to pursue a set of goals which define success for someone else, those goals may hold a different meaning for you, a meaning which might not define your personal success.

Becoming aware of success and setting goals was one of my first challenges. I was diagnosed with autism and Aspergers syndrome at the age of six. Since I was considered disabled because of mental illness, I was placed in special education classes and gradually introduced into regular classes through a process called mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming was a long and difficult process that lasted for me until the tenth grade. It was difficult on many levels. A “special ed” student in a regular class was marked as being different from the other students as soon as he or she walked into the classroom. The work was difficult, and there was virtually no meaningful social interaction with the other students. Mainstreaming meant that we were separated from friends and classmates we had shared the same classroom and felt safe with for nearly six years.

The first goal that I set for myself was to earn my way out of special education classes entirely. Even though my grades earned me Honor Roll recognition throughout middle school, it was not until I entered the tenth grade that the test proved that I was qualified for regular education classes, and that I was also ready for honors classes. Achieving the first goal defined success for me as a student and as a person, but that one success led to a desire to succeed again.

My goal now was to graduate with a regular education diploma. During my years in high school, I earned admission to the Beta Club and the National Honor Society. Because of these achievements, my old classmates in the special education classes avoid me. They no longer considered me as part of their group. The regular students knew I had just come out of special education classes, and used that as an excuse to do things to embarrass and intimidate me.

I did graduate from high school by earning a regular diploma. I was not just a successful student, I was an honor student. Success was now the regular education diploma in my hands, and the gold National Honor Society tassel and cords which I wore proudly at my graduation.

After leaving high school, I did not adjust well to change. My attention span became so short that I could not concentrate or focus on anything and I suddenly feared college. Finally, after nine years of staying home and doing whatever volunteer jobs I could handle, a new medication was prescribed for me. The new medication started to work and I was suddenly able to focus and concentrate. I decided to apply to college, and I am now at the end of my first semester and doing well. I once again have a goal and I am once again on the road to success.

My definition of success is my very own life experience. The ability to set a goal and make progress working toward it is my success. If the goal is actually achieved, so much the better. The American author Christopher Morley wrote, “There is only one success, to be able to spend you life in your own way.” My life, my own way, is a successful journey, not a destination.