

Today, in the era of post-9/11, post-dot-com bomb, post-Enron, post-gut-checking recession, post-war in Afghanistan and Iraq, we are told that success is supposed to be about more than money and power and stuff. These days we're told the definition of success needs to include words like balance and flexibility and independence and giving back. While noble, these ideas make success always one of life's Mt. Everests - sound even more impossible to achieve.

Maybe this confusion is nothing new Americans have traditionally had a paradoxical relationship with the whole notion of success: We love the underdog who overcomes unimaginable adversity to reach the unreachable star. But then, watch out if you're the one holding the stardust. The rest of us will decide that it's only a matter of time before you crash down from that high horse you're riding. In a subtle way only other Americans can understand, we too often worship success while enviously cursing those more successful.

But you don't have to apologize to us for your definition of success - at least for this article. We're not going to judge you for having a definition of success different than the next small business owner. Fortune. Fame. Charity Independence. Whatever works for you.

Perhaps the only correct definition of success, the following small business owners remind us, is merely the group of words you need to keep telling yourself each day to provide the passion necessary to achieve your goals.

And here's a secret you'll discover. Once you've used that definition as the necessary rocket fuel to help you reach it, success will likely change the definition into something that even the political correctness police can't fault.

Success is Making a Difference Cordia Flarrington wants to make more money, but not so that she can buy a Mercedes or a bigger house. The owner of Tennessee Bun Company (www.buncompany.com) in Nashville, Term., wants to grow her resources to help others.

"The bigger my business gets and the more money I make, the more people I can affect every week," says Harrington, whose facility bakes 60,000 buns an hour for distribution to regional and overseas McDonald's and Pepperidge Farms.

Harrington gives thanks daily for her bread company and what it allows her to do. As a single mother of three boys for many years, she lived a difficult life before she became a business owner. Now that she is a success, Harrington feels obligated to help others.

"My passion is to help other people discover the incredible potential in themselves," says Harrington, who has guided families

out of debt and into business as McDonald's franchise owners. Before her baking business, Harrington owned several McDonald's franchises herself.

Harrington doesn't deny the thrill of acquiring nice stuff. "I really enjoy material things," she admits. "But getting something is usually more exciting in the time leading up to the purchase than after you've actually bought it."

To her, buying more things no longer brings the same satisfaction as helping employees or acquaintances change their financial futures.

"I've been on the frontlines and fought some incredibly tough circumstances," she says. "By God's grace, I've grown a lot. And I've got a sincere story to tell that can help others live better."

Jane Hileman sells success at her King of Prussia, Pa.-based business. A veteran school teacher, Hileman developed a new method of teaching kids to read. As she worked on reading at home with her own children, she realized the importance of categorizing books and, more importantly, the power of parental involvement.

First she taught the method in her own classroom. And now Hileman and 30 employees at 100 Book Challenge (www.100bookchallenge.com) sell the program to school districts across the country.

Money is not her motivator. Instead, Hileman says she wants to teach the habits of success to children whose backgrounds might not encourage it.

"I'm not looking to make a million dollars," says Hileman, who describes her lifestyle as very modest. "I just want to pay my mortgage and put my kids through college."

Content with her home in a working-class neighborhood, Hileman says she feels more than compensated when parents thank her.

"I was at a conference recently when a mother of six children came up to me, took my hand and told me her story She said, 'I had to leave school at the age of 16 because I was pregnant. Now my first grader is getting a real education. She's reading like crazy She's at the top of her class. You changed our life.'

"Who could want more than that?"