

From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life

Talk about bad news/good news! Here it is, wrapped up in *From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life*, written by Harvard professor and bestselling author Arthur Brooks.

Take a look at the essence of his book:

Here is the bottom line, fellow striver: when it comes to the enviable skills that you worked so hard to attain and that made you successful in your field, you can expect significant decline to come as soon as your thirties, or as late as your early fifties. That's the deal, and it's not fun. Sorry...

So what are you going to do about it? There are really only three doors you can go through here: 1. You can deny the facts and rage against decline—setting yourself up for frustration and disappointment. 2. You can shrug and give in to decline—and experience your aging as an unavoidable tragedy. 3. You can accept that what got you to this point won't work to get you into the future—that you need to build some new strengths and skills. If you choose door number 3, congratulations. There's a bright future ahead. But it requires a bunch of new skills and a new way of thinking.

While this reality check stings, thankfully, throughout its pages, you will find practical guidance on how to make your most significant contribution in life during the second half.

Chuck Olson
Founder | Lead With Your Life

Title: From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life

Author: Arthur C. Brooks

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Book Description:

The roadmap for finding purpose, meaning, and success as we age, from bestselling author, Harvard professor, and the *Atlantic's* happiness columnist Arthur Brooks.

Many of us assume that the more successful we are, the less susceptible we become to the sense of professional and social irrelevance that often accompanies aging. But the truth is, the greater our achievements and our attachment to them, the more we notice our decline, and the more painful it is when it occurs.

What can we do, starting now, to make our older years a time of happiness, purpose, and yes, success?

At the height of his career at the age of 50, Arthur Brooks embarked on a seven-year journey to discover how to transform his future from one of disappointment over waning abilities into an opportunity for progress. From *Strength to Strength* is the result, a practical roadmap for the rest of your life.

Book Quotes:

What I found was a hidden source of anguish that wasn't just widespread but nearly universal among people who have done well in their careers. I came to call this the "striver's curse": people who strive to be excellent at what they do often wind up finding their inevitable decline terrifying, their successes increasingly unsatisfying, and their relationships lacking. LOCATION: 108

The good news is that I also discovered what I was looking for: a way to escape the curse. Methodically, I built a strategic plan for the rest of my life, giving me the chance to have a second half of adulthood that is not only not disappointing but happier and more meaningful than the first. LOCATION: 110

Here is the reality: in practically every high-skill profession, decline sets in sometime between one's late thirties and early fifties. Sorry, I know that stings. And it gets worse: the more accomplished one is at the peak of one's career, the more pronounced decline seems once it has set in. LOCATION: 178

For most people, decline is not just an unwelcome surprise; it is also a huge mystery. LOCATION: 292

We might call this the "principle of psychoprofessional gravitation": the idea that the agony of decline is directly related to prestige previously achieved, and to one's emotional attachment to that prestige. If you have low expectations and never do much (or do a lot but maintain a Buddha-like level of nonattachment to your professional prestige), you probably won't suffer much when you decline. But if you attain excellence and are deeply invested in it, you can feel pretty irrelevant when you inevitably fall from those heights. And that is agony. LOCATION: 378

Great gifts and achievements early in life are simply not an insurance policy against suffering later on. On the contrary, studies show that people who have chased power and achievement in their professional lives tend to be unhappier after retirement than people who did not. LOCATION: 383

The fact that we can't store up our glories and enjoy them when they are long past gets to the problem of dissatisfaction—a problem we will confront later in this book. Humans simply aren't wired to enjoy an achievement long past. It is as if we were on a moving treadmill; satisfaction from success lasts but an instant. We can't stop to enjoy it; if we do, we zip off the back of the treadmill and wipe out. So we run and run, hoping that the next success, greater than the last, will bring the enduring satisfaction we crave. LOCATION: 399

The decline problem is a double whammy, then: we need ever-greater success to avoid dissatisfaction, yet our abilities to stay even are declining. No, it's actually a triple whammy, because as we try to stay even, we wind up in patterns of addictive behavior such as workaholism, which puts strivers into unhealthy relationship patterns at the cost of deep connection to spouses, children, and friends. By the time the wipeout occurs, there's no one there to help us get up and dust off. LOCATION: 403

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and skills. If you choose door number 3, congratulations. There's a bright future ahead. But it requires a bunch of new skills and a new way of thinking. LOCATION: 414

The trick to improving as we age is to understand, develop, and practice these new strengths. If you can—and I am going to show you how, don't worry—you can transform decline into incredible new success. LOCATION: 425

In 1971, Cattell published a book entitled *Abilities: Their Structure, Growth, and Action*. In it, he posited that there were two types of intelligence that people possess, but at greater abundance at different points in life...The first is fluid intelligence, which Cattell defined as the ability to reason, think flexibly, and solve novel problems. LOCATION: 456

That's not the end of the story, however, and this is where Cattell's work matters. Fluid intelligence isn't the only kind—there is also crystallized intelligence. This is defined as the ability to use a stock of knowledge learned in the past. LOCATION: 469

Crystallized intelligence, relying as it does on a stock of knowledge, tends to increase with age through one's forties, fifties, and sixties—and does not diminish until quite late in life, if at all. LOCATION: 473

Cattell himself described the two intelligences in this way: “[Fluid intelligence] is conceptualized as the decontextualized ability to solve abstract problems, while crystallized intelligence represents a person's knowledge gained during life by acculturation and learning.” Translation: When you are young, you have raw smarts; when you are old, you have wisdom. When you are young, you can generate lots of facts; when you are old, you know what they mean and how to use them. LOCATION: 475

This is a big finding for you and me—huge, actually. It says that if your career relies solely on fluid intelligence, it's true that you will peak and decline pretty early. But if your career requires crystallized intelligence—or if you can repurpose your professional life to rely more on crystallized intelligence—your peak will come later but your decline will happen much, much later, if ever. And if you can go from one type to the other—well, then you have cracked the code. LOCATION: 485

If you're experiencing decline in fluid intelligence—and if you are my age, you are—it doesn't mean you are washed up. It means it is time to jump off the fluid intelligence curve and onto the crystallized intelligence curve. Those who fight against time are trying to bend the old curve instead of getting onto the new one. But it is almost impossible to bend, which is why people are so frustrated, and usually unsuccessful. LOCATION: 552

No matter how you find your passion, early on, pursue it with a white-hot flame, dedicating it to the good of the world. But hold your success lightly—be ready to change as your abilities change. Even if your worldly prestige falls, lean into the changes. Remember, every change of circumstances is a chance to learn, grow, and create value. This chapter shows that it is not a question of making the best of a bad situation; it is not missing out on a huge opportunity that only comes later in life. LOCATION: 641

Devote the back half of your life to serving others with your wisdom. Get old sharing the things you believe are most important. Excellence is always its own reward, and this is how you can be most excellent as you age. LOCATION: 648

So here's the secret, fellow striver: Get on your second curve. Jump from what rewards fluid intelligence to what rewards crystallized intelligence. Learn to use your wisdom. LOCATION: 650

“Maybe I would prefer to be special rather than happy.”...That's when it struck me: people who choose being special over happy are addicts. Maybe that sounds strange to you. Picture a person desperately hooked on

booze. Probably the person you envision is down and out, self-medicating against the traumas of a harsh world. You probably don't envision someone who is successful and hardworking. They are less likely to fall prey to addictions, right? Wrong. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the likelihood of drinking rises with education level and socioeconomic status. Some believe—and I agree, based on my work—that people in high-pressure jobs tend to self-medicate with alcohol, including drinking at hazardous levels, which can turn off the sensation of anxiety like a switch—temporarily. LOCATION: 702

Before we look for solutions, we need to dig a little deeper still. Alcoholics are addicted to alcohol, it's true. But in reality, they are hooked on what alcohol does to their brains. And so it is with workaholism. What workaholics truly crave isn't work per se; it is success. They kill themselves working for money, power, and prestige because these are forms of approval, applause, and compliments—which, like all addictive things, from cocaine to social media, stimulate the neurotransmitter dopamine. LOCATION: 758

But the goal can't be satisfied; the success addict is never "successful enough." The high only lasts a day or two, and then it's on to the next success hit. "Unhappy is he who depends on success to be happy," wrote Alex Dias Ribeiro, a former famous Formula 1 race car driver. LOCATION: 790

Pride is sneaky: it hides inside good things. Saint Augustine astutely observed that "every other kind of sin has to do with the commission of evil deeds, whereas pride lurks even in good works in order to destroy them." So true—work, which is a source of meaning and purpose, becomes workaholism, which hurts our relationships. Success, the fruit of excellence, becomes an addiction. All because of pride. LOCATION: 849

A cousin of pride is fear. A lot of people addicted to drugs and alcohol say they stay addicted because they are afraid of "normal" life, with its struggles, stresses, and boredom. Success addicts frequently have a lot of fear, too—fear of failure. LOCATION: 853

An early twentieth-century Spanish Catholic cardinal, Rafael Merry del Val y Zulueta, composed a beautiful prayer called the "Litany of Humility."

From putting my career before the people in my life, deliver me. From distracting myself from life with work, deliver me. From my drive to be superior to others, deliver me. From the allure of the world's empty promises, deliver me. From my feelings of professional superiority, deliver me. From allowing my pride to supplant my love, deliver me. From the pains of withdrawing from my addiction, deliver me. From the dread of falling into decline and being forgotten, deliver me. LOCATION: 928

Like most strivers, you likely spent decades trying to be successful in worldly terms, and now I am telling you to go against those instincts. But once you start on this journey, you will find that a lot of things in your life were there really only to build up your image—to yourself and others—to signify that you were successful and special. LOCATION: 935

In other words, satisfaction from success requires not just that you continually run in place on the hedonic treadmill, but that you run slightly faster than other people are running on theirs...But it gets worse. On your treadmill, you're not just pursuing something in a grand exercise in futility. Something is pursuing you, too: failure. You may know perfectly well that you are not actually moving forward on your treadmill. But if you stop running, you know that you'll go flying off the back like in some terrible, hilarious social media meme. That looks increasingly likely, because the inevitable decline in abilities means that even when you run faster, you gradually fall behind. LOCATION: 1164

Even more powerful than our urge for more is our resistance to less. We try even harder to avoid losses than we do to achieve gains. That's the insight that earned the Nobel Prize in Economics for Princeton University's

Daniel Kahneman, for work he did with Amos Tversky on prospect theory. Prospect theory challenges the assumption that people are rational agents who assess gains and losses the same way; in fact, it asserts that people are much more affected emotionally by losing something than they are by gaining the same thing.

LOCATION: 1170

Your satisfaction is what you have, divided by what you want. Notice the difference from the earlier equations? All of the evolutionary and biological formulas focus us on the numerator of our haves. If you are unsatisfied in life, that's what you most likely have been doing all these years. But that ignores the denominator of the equation—the wants. As you increase your haves without managing your wants, your wants will proliferate and sprawl. You can easily be less and less satisfied as you move up the success ladder, because your wants will always outstrip your haves. And when they do, your satisfaction will fall. LOCATION: 1226

If you are ready to manage your wants—to start chipping away—the first step is to ask what exactly needs chipping. And that raises the question “What is my why?” The bestselling author and speaker Simon Sinek always gives people in search of true success in work and life the advice that they need to find their why. That is, he tells them that to unlock their true potential and happiness, they need to articulate their deep purpose in life and shed the activities that are not in service of that purpose. Your why is the sculpture inside the block of jade. LOCATION: 1244

I have heard this story over and over: people don't realize their unhealthy attachments in life until they suffer a loss or illness that makes the important things come into focus. Researchers have consistently found that most survivors of illness and loss experience post-traumatic growth. Indeed, cancer survivors tend to report higher happiness levels than demographically matched people who did not have cancer. Talk to them, and they will tell you that they no longer bother with the stupid attachments that used to weigh them down, whether possessions, or worries about money, or unproductive relationships. The threat of losing their lives prematurely took a jackhammer to the jade encasing their true selves—the why of their lives. LOCATION: 1265

Satisfaction comes not from chasing bigger and bigger things, but paying attention to smaller and smaller things. LOCATION: 1311

But no matter, that's not my point. Rather, it's this: Have you ever said, “My work is my life”? If you have, then your fear of decline is actually a type of fear of death. If you live to work—if your work is your life, or at least the source of your identity—proof of being fully alive is your professional ability and achievement. So when it declines, you are in the process of dying.

LOCATION: 1348

As a striver, it was your force of will and indefatigable work ethic that got you to the top of your fluid intelligence curve—and profession—in the first place. Raging is what you know best. But it fails at work, just as it does in life. Ability based on fluid intelligence increases, and then declines, in every profession. Some earlier, and some later; there are some key differences, but it is a misconception that decline can be delayed indefinitely in a profession just because it doesn't require physical strength. We saw that “idea professions” see decline, too—generally, decades before any dementia or senility. LOCATION: 1351

Only when you face the truth of your professional decline—a kind of death—can you get on with your progress to the second curve. If you don't, you will be like my friend, trying to fight the inevitable, or at least hoping that there is some way around it. And to face this truth means defeating the fear of your own demise—literal and professional. This fear handcuffs you to your fluid intelligence curve. If you can master it, the reward is incalculable: it will set you free. But the only way to do it is by facing it head-on. LOCATION: 1355

There is one way to leave a legacy that will help you live better right now. In his book *The Road to Character*, the writer David Brooks (a friend, but no relation) distinguishes between “résumé virtues” and “eulogy virtues.”

Résumé virtues are professional and oriented toward earthly success. They require comparison with others. Eulogy virtues are ethical and spiritual and require no comparison. Your eulogy virtues are what you really would want people to talk about at your funeral. As in, “He was kind and deeply spiritual,” and not, “He had a lot of frequent flier miles.” LOCATION: 1439

Loneliness at the top doesn’t come from physical isolation—who spends more time in meetings than a CEO?—but from an inability to make deep human connections at work as a result of the leader’s position. At work, successful people are lonely in a crowd. LOCATION: 1699

The relationships that best mitigate loneliness—the aspens closest to us that we need to cultivate—are romantic partnerships and close friendships. Let’s take a look at each, and then see why strivers so often neglect them. There is a lot of research on why some romantic relationships are stable and others are not. It is well-known that a big percentage of all marriages in the United States end in divorce or separation (about 39 percent, according to the latest data). But staying together is not what really counts. Analysis of the Harvard Study data shows that marriage per se accounts for only 2 percent of subjective well-being later in life. The important thing for health and well-being is relationship satisfaction. LOCATION: 1724

The secret to happiness isn’t falling in love; it’s staying in love, which depends on what psychologists call “companionate love”—love based less on passionate highs and lows and more on stable affection, mutual understanding, and commitment. You might think “companionate love” sounds a little, well, disappointing. I certainly did the first time I heard it, on the heels of great efforts to win my future wife’s love. But over the past thirty years, it turns out that we don’t just love each other; we like each other, too. Once and always my romantic love, she is also my best friend. LOCATION: 1739

Here’s the bottom-line summary about your relationships—the key points for cultivating your aspen grove:

- You need strong human connections to help you get on the second curve and flourish.
- No matter how introverted you are, you cannot expect to thrive into old age without healthy, intimate relationships.
- For married people, a loving, companionate spousal relationship is key to thriving.
- Marriage and family are not an adequate substitute for close friendships, which should not be left up to chance.
- Friendship is a skill that requires practice, time, and commitment.
- Work friendships are not a substitute for real friendships, although they can also be satisfying, if designed purposively. LOCATION: 1846

Successful people are good at marginal thinking: making sure each hour is spent on its best use at that moment. The trouble is that this always marginalizes the things in life that don’t have a clear payoff in the short run—like relationships. This is why an extra hour at work, even when we are exhausted and unproductive, can crowd out the first hour at home, day after day, year after year—leading to the problems of loneliness and alienation. LOCATION: 1919

In the lives of strivers, no one goes around bragging that they don’t have good ideas anymore, or that they lack the energy they once had. The fact that weakness and loss are bad might be the reason you picked up this book in the first place. Decline is loss; loss is bad. Remediate it or hide it, but certainly don’t talk about it! Right? Wrong. Paul was right. The secret to going from strength to strength is to recognize that your

weakness—your loss, your decline—can be a gift to you and others. LOCATION: 2347

To go from strength to strength requires learning a new set of life skills. We need to adopt a new formula, which I have laid out in detail in this book, chapter by chapter. But of course you are unlikely to memorize the last sixty thousand words. So let me summarize the whole book in seven—a formula that encapsulates all the lessons I have learned and now strive to live: Use things. Love people. Worship the divine. LOCATION: 2863

Take love up one level and we have worship. The writer David Foster Wallace once said, astutely, “There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” If you love things, you will strive to objectify yourself in terms of money, power, pleasure, and prestige—idols all. You will worship yourself—or, at least, a two-dimensional cutout of yourself. LOCATION: 2875

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.