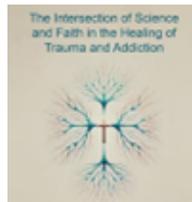


Why the More You Want Success, the Less You Get It: A Personal Reflection on Schopenhauer, Strength, and Letting Go

Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.



There's something cruelly ironic about the modern chase for success. The more you want it, the further it seems to slip from your grasp. That's not just some pop-psychology slogan. It's something the 19th-century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote about long before the first TED Talk or self-help bestseller. He believed that *will* — our striving, endless, burning desire — was the source of our suffering. And I've come to believe he was right.

Like so many others, I got caught in that game. Performing. Striving. Always onto the next goalpost. More letters after my name. More people in the audience. More accolades, more acknowledgment. For a while, it worked. I was achieving, producing, hustling. But underneath it all, I wasn't really *being*. And I wasn't alone.

My brother Gregg and I grew up in the same household, endured the same early traumas, absorbed the same unspoken lesson: achieve or you're nothing. He was a star — athletics, academics, you name it. And the world gave him all the applause. But inside, he was chasing ghosts. He couldn't stop performing long enough to ask, *what am I performing for?* And when life demanded a shift — when it asked him to let go of performance and instead anchor himself in connection, love, acceptance — he couldn't make the leap. And that heartbreak eventually swallowed him whole. I lost my brother to mental illness. But I also lost him to a society that rewards hustle and punishes introspection.

Arthur Brooks — not Schopenhauer, but channeling some of the same insight — writes in *From Strength to Strength* about the transition we all must make in the second half of life. He calls it the move from fluid intelligence — the fast, adaptive, competitive brain — to crystallized intelligence: wisdom, compassion, teaching, and mentoring. That shift is fueled by serotonin and oxytocin, not dopamine and adrenaline. It's a shift from "what can I achieve?" to "who can I bless?" And man, is it hard.



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But it's necessary. Because otherwise, you keep grinding away at a game that no longer has meaning. You keep trying to sprint through a marathon. You try to be the person you *used to* be, and you fail — and it hurts like hell.

For me, that shift has been slow and painful. Letting go of identity as performer, rescuer, fixer. Learning to say *enough*. Learning to value presence over productivity, relationship over recognition. Learning to see success as not something I chase, but something I invite by simply living well, loving well, being *real*.

And so I circle back to Schopenhauer. He believed that the only true freedom comes from detachment — from releasing our compulsive craving. That doesn't mean apathy. It means learning to *want well* — to order our desires, not be enslaved by them. It means recognizing that sometimes, peace arrives not when we get everything we want, but when we stop needing everything we want.

That's the journey I'm on. And honestly, it's the one Gregg never got to complete. But maybe by telling his story, I can carry it forward. Maybe his life, his struggle, his legacy — and the love we shared — can become part of my own healing, and maybe yours, too.

So if you find yourself tired of the hustle, confused by the constant pressure to *be more, do more, achieve more* — just stop. Breathe. You're not alone. And you're not broken. Maybe the truth about success isn't in chasing it harder. Maybe it's in letting go of the chase altogether.

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