



10 The meaning of success

BACKGROUND

1 You are going to watch an edited version of a TED Talk by Alain de Botton called *A kinder, gentler philosophy of success*. Read the text about the speaker and the talk. Then work in pairs and discuss the questions.

- 1 Why do you think Alain de Botton made the move from PhD student to writer?
- 2 What are 'self-help' books? Can you think of any examples?
- 3 What is your personal definition of success?

TED TALKS

ALAIN DE BOTTON is a Swiss-born, British-educated writer and philosopher. He gave up studying for his PhD in French philosophy to concentrate on writing practical philosophy for a wider public. His book *How Proust Can Change Your Life* became a best-seller in the 'self-help' category. In 2008, Alain de Botton helped start the School of Life in London, a social enterprise dedicated to helping people 'to live wisely and well'. He continues to write and speak about some of the fundamental worries of modern life (e.g. *Am I happy? Where exactly do I stand?*).

Alain de Botton's idea worth spreading is that some of our most cherished modern ideals – like equality, or success based on hard work and talent – can actually have harmful effects on how we view the successes and failures of ourselves and others.





Ferrari Pininfarina driving
in Mumbai, India

KEY WORDS


2 Read the questions (1–6). The words in bold are used in the TED Talk. Match the words with their definitions (a–f). Then discuss the questions with your partner.

- 1 What do you think this saying means: 'Laugh and the world laughs with you, **weep** and you weep alone'?
 - 2 Is there a strict social **hierarchy** in your culture or society?
 - 3 Do you think there is a **correlation** between how much money you have and your happiness? Why? / Why not?
 - 4 Do you believe that failure has a **crushing** effect or is it something that makes us stronger?
 - 5 In a company, is it right that people get promoted in a **meritocratic** way or should other factors, like age and length of service also play a part?
 - 6 Which people in society can be the target of jokes and **ridicule** by the media?
- a where people make progress (in an organization) according to their ability and achievements
 b to cry or shed tears (more literary / poetic word than cry)
 c a system where people or things are ranked at different levels
 d making someone the subject of laughter and contempt
 e a relationship or connection between two things
 f very demoralizing, completely breaking a person's spirit


AUTHENTIC LISTENING SKILLS Hedging

'Hedging' language consists of words or phrases which are used to soften the strength of opinions or to state facts in a more cautious way. As such, they are not content or information words. Examples are:

- modal verbs (*could, may, might*)
- adverbs and adverbial phrases (*probably, usually, generally, perhaps, to some extent*)
- phrases for giving opinions (*In my opinion, I think, It's often said that, That could well be true*)

3a  41 Look at the Authentic listening skills box. Read the extracts from the TED Talk. Listen and underline the words and phrases that make the ideas more cautious.

- 1 I want to look now, if I may, at some of the reasons why we might be feeling anxiety about our careers.
- 2 I don't think we are particularly materialistic.
- 3 So there is a spirit of equality, combined with deep inequalities. Which makes for a very – can make for a very stressful situation.

3b  42 Listen to two more extracts from Alain de Botton's introduction. Complete the phrases.

- 4 You _____ I'm _____ in this, but I think that we live in an age when our lives are ...
- 5 It's _____ easier now than ever before to make a good living.