



10.1 A kinder, gentler philosophy of success

TED TALKS Watch at home

1 ▶ **10.1** Watch the first part (0.00–3.13) of the edited TED Talk. Complete the sentences using one word in each space. The first letter is given for you.

- 1 Alain de Botton wants to address the question: 'Why are we feeling a _____ about our c _____?'
- 2 One reason is that we are surrounded by s _____.
- 3 The amount of time and r _____ that most people are willing to give you is determined by your position in the s _____ hierarchy.
- 4 He suggests that people who chase after luxury goods deserve our l _____ and s _____.

2 Work in pairs. Answer the questions.

- 1 What realization often hits Alain de Botton on a Sunday evening?
- 2 What is Alain de Botton's definition of a snob?
- 3 Why does he say our mothers are not snobs?
- 4 What does he say we really want when we acquire material goods?

3 ▶ **10.1** Watch the second part (3.13–5.53) of the talk. Choose the correct option to complete the sentences.

- 1 The next reason we can't feel calm is that we are told we can *achieve / own* anything and that we are all *excellent / equal*.
- 2 The problem with the idea of equality is *empathy / envy*.
- 3 When people do not achieve success, they suffer *poor health / low self-esteem*.

4 Work in pairs. Discuss why Alain de Botton mentions these people and things.

- a the Queen of England
- b old school friends
- c Bill Gates
- d self-help books

5 ▶ **10.1** Watch the third part (5.53–8.55) of the edited talk. Complete the summary with these adjectives.

accidental	crushing	losers	responsible
talented	unfortunate	wrong	

In a meritocratic society, people who are ¹ _____ and hard-working get to the top; the others stay at the bottom. So your position in life is not ² _____, but deserved. In the Middle Ages people at the bottom were considered to be ³ _____. Nowadays they are called ⁴ _____, because they are seen as personally ⁵ _____ for failing. That can be very ⁶ _____. The idea of meritocracy is crazy because there are too many random factors in our lives. So it is ⁷ _____ to judge people by how successful they are.

6 ▶ **10.1** Read the quotations. Then watch the fourth part (8.55 to the end) of the talk and choose the correct options to complete the quotations.

- 1 '... one of the reasons why we fear failing is ... the judgement and *ridicule of / comparison with* others.'
- 2 'He [Hamlet] is not a loser, though he has *failed / lost*.'
- 3 'Here's an insight that I've had about success: You can't be *lucky in / successful at* everything.'
- 4 '... our ideas of what it would mean to live successfully are not our own. They're sucked in from *other people / psychoanalysts*.'
- 5 '... not that we should give up on our ideas of success, but we should make sure that they are *our own / achievable*.'

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

7 ▶ **10.2** Watch the clips from the TED Talk. Choose the correct meaning of the words and phrases.

8 ▶ **10.3** Watch the clips from the talk. Complete the collocations. Then discuss your answers.

9 Complete the sentences in your own words. Then compare your sentences with a partner.

- 1 I was very upset when I messed up ...
- 2 In my opinion, ... can be very exhilarating.
- 3 My friend is fixated on ... – she spends all his / her time ...
- 4 My attitude to material goods is that ...

CRITICAL THINKING The message you take away

10 Sometimes a talk contains a single message; at other times, as in this talk, there are numerous ideas to process. Work in pairs. What do you think was Alain de Botton's central message (the one he summarized at the end)? Discuss your ideas.

11 Look at these comments* from the talk. Which of these other messages was the one that you found most thought-provoking? Or was it something else he said? Give reasons.

Viewers' comments

D Dario – I found this talk very thought-provoking, particularly the point he made about luck. I think in modern society we underestimate the role that luck and circumstance – where you are born, who your parents are, what teachers you have – plays in success. It's something both the successful and the unsuccessful should keep in mind.

M Martha – I loved the point he made about people who get themselves into the trap of envying what others have. I know I do.

K Kevin – You hear so much advice about work-life balance these days. So glad to hear someone telling the truth: 'You can't have it all.'

Y Yu – Thank you, Mr Alain. I liked your talk very much. Everybody is wearing jeans, everybody seems the same. But they're not.

*The comments were created for this activity.

PRESENTATION SKILLS Remembering what you want to say

12 Work in pairs. When giving a talk, how can a speaker remember what they want to say? Write down three suggestions.

13 Work with another pair. Compare your ideas from Exercise 12. Then look at the Presentation tips box. Are your ideas mentioned in the box? Which technique do you think is best for you?

TIPS

One of the biggest fears for many speakers is forgetting what they are going to say, or realizing that they have left out an important point. How can this be avoided? You can read from a script or notes, you can use prompt cards or you can memorize the whole speech, just as an actor memorizes their lines. Whichever method you choose, remember these tips.

- Rehearse your speech a lot. Say it aloud so you know what sounds right and practise in front of other people.
- Always memorize the opening lines and the last few lines so that you can establish eye contact with your audience at these points.
- Visuals are 100 per cent for your audience and not for you. Don't simply read from slides or use them to help you remember what you want to say.

14 ▶ **10.4** Watch the beginning of the talk again. Which technique from the Presentation tips box does Alain de Botton use?

15 You are going to give the introduction to a presentation on one of the topics (a–c) below. Think of how you would start the presentation and write the first paragraph of your talk. Memorize at least the first line and practise presenting the introduction.

- a 'My greatest success'
- b 'You make your own luck in life'
- c 'Is it possible to have a good work-life balance?'

16 Work in small groups. Take turns to present your introduction. Did you find that memorizing the first line(s) of your talk made you feel more confident?