

Great Britons on success is edited by Alan Coppin.

Reviewed by Roger Green, Principal Reviewer, U K Defence Forum

This book incorporates the ideas, thoughts, quotations and stories of 264 Great Britons, 68 of whom have donated original contributions and the rest have been compiled from archival research. The majority of names both familiar and the less well known are contemporary Britons whilst a number are now remembered in history. The book is above all a collection of insights of timely and timeless winning ways.

It features the great, the good and the unsung heroes reflecting on that very un-British concept of "success". It is a wonderful resource for personal use at engaging, motivating and sustaining our on-going personal development, whether as individuals, family members or employees.

Every so often a book is published that when reading it you get a warm feeling towards your fellow countrymen; this is one such book. It represents a novel approach in that Alan Coppin wrote to a number of contemporary Britons seeking their formulae for success and provided a format for their contribution. Some were uncomfortable about subscribing to a personal association with "success" and instead provided inspirational quotes, poems and insights to support the book. It is these personal contributions, reproduced as submitted, that form the core of the book.

At the beginning Alan Coppin endeavours to define what is meant and understood by "success". It is very evident from the diverse definitions and arguments on what constitutes success as demonstrated by the number of authoritative quotes offered to the reader it is clear that "success" has a very personal perspective. That is true whether the "success" relates to an individual or a group endeavour. It is also apparent that most people do not regard success as being a major aspect or influence in their lives; indeed, they do not consider what "success" is in relation to their personal circumstances. More important to them are the goals and achievements that they set themselves and they are quite self-deprecating when considering their personal success.

This disassociated view of success is reflected in the personal contributions. Although they offer a range of parameters in terms of their formula for success, it is notable that they are primarily focussed on achievement and almost embarrassed to consider these achievements as success. Many of the parameters offered contain contradictions that only serve to indicate to the reader that there is no universal formula for being successful. That said, some of the insights that support these 'formulae' do have some degree of coherence and commonality that it might be argued they provide a more beneficial guide to those who may seek such direction. By far the majority of the contributors are concerned with achieving their personal goals and they tend to regard their success as being a judgement made by others. It was clear from the formula for success offered by a small minority that they had decided what constituted success for themselves in their particular circumstances. From an external perspective it is possible that their peers might regard their level of success as not being on a par with others who have

attained greater absolute achievements. As to whether a standard of success set by an individual as their personal goal is any more or less meaningful than an acclamation of success by their peers is for the reader to judge.

The poem 'If' by Rudyard Kipling and quotations by Winston Churchill are a primary source of inspiration to a number of Great Britons, whilst many claim equal inspiration through a range of more obscure poems as well as quotations from other famous and lesser-known names. Some of the quotations are quite erudite, others are political and a number are of a lighter vein. A range of insights and quotations with respect to a number of present-day Great Britons have been drawn from books, the media and internet research to form contributions to the book. To provide a historic dimension the success traits of a select number of historic Great Britons were sourced from the biographies of the individuals. Many of these insights and traits reflect a depth of understanding; some are simply mundane, others demonstrate clarity of purpose whilst some are bordering on the frivolous or are just plain amusing. However, this spectrum creates a rich vein that can be mined for reflection, meditation and motivation.

Because the contributions and inputs are so diverse and distinct in their nature, it is difficult to anticipate the style of conclusion that would be appropriate to this novel book. Alan Coppin admits that surprisingly there is no clear-cut formula for success that can be deduced from the contributions of the great and the good. At most he is able to identify attributes such as hard work and perseverance that are recognisable from the frequency of their mention. In lieu of a conventional conclusion he has expanded the last chapter to include elements of outline strategies that are largely American in origin and, in the spirit of the British sense of humour, can be read as amusing or insightful. Some elements of these strategies might be considered as blinding glimpses of the obvious, whilst others articulate sound common sense and a number are quite profound. However, right at the end of the last paragraph Coppin poses the unanswered question regarding the nature of success. It is a quite appropriate and relevant way in which to draw this book to a thoughtful close.

Foreword by Air Marshal Sir Robert Wright KBE AFC FRAeS FCMI, Controller of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund.

Co-publishers: Kingsham Press & the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund.
(ISBN: 978-1-904235-64-4).

The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund supported this publishing venture, the aim of which is to raise funds for the RAF family. Alan Coppin has generously donated his royalties to the Fund and equally generously Kingsham Press is matching his donation. Readers who may wish to make a personal or corporate donation can do so through the Fund website at www.rafbf.org/

Defence Viewpoints supports RAF BF (see badge in editor's lapel!) and urges your support too.