



The Formula: The Universal Laws of Success

Albert-László Barabási

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In this pioneering examination of the scientific principles behind success, a leading researcher reveals the surprising ways in which we can turn achievement into success.

Too often, accomplishment does not equate to success. We did the work but didn't get the promotion; we played hard but weren't recognized; we had the idea but didn't get the credit. We've always been told that talent and a strong work ethic are the key to getting ahead, but in today's world these efforts rarely translate into tangible results. Recognizing this disconnect, Laszlo Barabasi, one of the world's leading experts on the science of networks, uncovers what success really is: a collective phenomenon based on the thoughts and praise of those around you.

In *The Formula*, Barabasi highlights the vital importance of community respect and appreciation when connecting performance to recognition--the elusive link between performance and success. By leveraging the power of big data and historic case studies, Barabasi reveals the unspoken rules behind who truly gets ahead and why, and outlines the twelve laws that govern this phenomenon and how we can use them to our own advantage.

Unveiling the scientific principles that drive success, this trailblazing book offers a new understanding of the very foundation of how people excel in today's society.

The Formula: The Universal Laws of Success Details

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Author : Albert-László Barabási

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It's really interesting to see a theoretical physicist's take on success through the lens of network sciences. And I'm incredibly impressed at how easily palatable this book is for anyone. Written like a web of different stories, this book is very hard to put down.

However, I'm not too convinced about the 'laws' and the 'formula'. He has looked at many fields, and deciphered some (obvious) trends [i.e. networking amplifies success] and some seemingly rash generalisations [i.e. constant/unchangeable inherent talents]. The basis of all these laws is his empirical research, but he does not mention anything about the methodology of the research. It's like hearing a chef say, "Oh I just threw in all these great ingredients and et voila!". But how were these ingredients weighted? His analysis is a bit salty for my taste.

I wonder if it's a classic case of "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence". A particularly striking conclusion that he draws is how every human being has a constant 'Q factor' or ability to translate and idea into a discovery. This, according to Barabasi, means that our abilities in life are predetermined. So it's a matter of being persistent at encountering a good idea to work on. Here I would beg to differ. One's talent is not a has-been. If honed by the right mentors, one can bring forth tremendous potential. In fact, many 'superstars' in their respective fields were written off in early stages of their lives. Yet they worked hard enough to turn their lives, and their fields, around. Barabasi's research here seems to only focus on academics and their citations. Scholarly ability might be a given, but can this truly apply as an irrefutable law in every area of life?

Being such a quick read, this is worth a glance. But, not sure of the merit.

Denis Vasilev says

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Bryan Hairston II says

This book is one of the best books I've ever read on success. As someone who loves self help books, it's apparent there are things I often read in this genre that don't truly explain how to achieve success but instead touch more on self motivation and hard work and changing your mindset.

While that is true to a sense, the author states how our success isn't truly about us and our performance but rather it's about the community and how the community perceives our performance. In other words, success is collective phenomena.

He breaks down 5 laws that are universal and backs it up with a significant amount of data and real life situations. Being an analytical person, I will admit I did some research on some of his claims to ensure they were actually true and all stories panned out, from Albert Einstein to Tiger Woods and even to people I've never heard of.

This will definitely be on a yearly rotation from now on, to remind me that we have to be careful when reading self help books that claim we just need to work harder, sleep less, be more motivated and ultimately we will then be successful.

This was a great book and I highly recommend!

Stevo Brock says

This book was Stevo's Business Book of the Week for the week of 1/13, as selected by Stevo's Book Reviews on the Internet. You can find me at <http://forums.delphiforums.com/stevo1> or search for me on Google for many more reviews and recommendations.

Orban says

It disclosed the universal laws of success in a truly scientific manner. :) It will empower us with tools how to help each other or how to help ourselves...

Boris Limpopo says

Barabási , Albert-László (2018) – The Formula: The Universal Laws of Success. New York NY: Little, Brown and Co. ISBN: 9780316505475. Pagine 321. 9,99 €.

Seguo Barabási da quando uscì Linked nel 2003 (il libro mi era piaciuto tantissimo, e ha ispirato un mio duraturo interesse per la network analysis e anche qualche sua applicazione scientifica e analitica). Con un po' meno di entusiasmo, ma sempre con molto interesse, avevo poi letto Bursts: l'ho recensito qui, dove do conto delle mie perplessità.

Se possibile, questo The Formula mi ha lasciato ancora più perplesso. Barabási e il suo gruppo studiano la scienza del successo (anzi, the Science of Success: proprio così, maiuscole e tutto, e senza nemmeno scoppiare a ridere subito dopo). E il libro presenta i risultati cui sono pervenuti: niente meno che le leggi universali del successo. Scusate se è poco.

In effetti, Barabási dice di rifuggere dagli aneddoti e di volersi distaccare dagli innumerevoli libri di self-help che affollano gli scaffali di management delle librerie. È proprio convinto di avere scoperto cinque leggi scientifiche, universali. Ma poi racconta, racconta... Certamente bene: Barabási ha talento per questo. E le leggi le espone, e le commenta, e le arricchisce di aneddoti spesso gustosi. Racconta le ricerche fatte da lui e dal suo gruppo; racconta il quando e il come dei momenti “eureka”, le false partenze e il lieto fine. Quello che non ho trovato è la “divulgazione” o, meglio, la “comunicazione della scienza”. Le 5 leggi universali sembrano davvero “consigli” da libro di self-help, e non leggi scientifiche. E – anche se in nota ci sono riferimenti alla letteratura scientifica a sostegno di queste tesi – la trattazione è esortativa, se non “motivazionale”.

A questo punto vi sarete incuriositi. Eccovi le cinque leggi:

Performance drives success, but when performance can't be measured, networks drive success.

Performance is bounded, but success is unbounded.

Previous success x fitness = future success.

While team success requires diversity and balance, a single individual will receive credit for the group's achievements.

With persistence success can come at any time.

Una curiosità: non sapevo che tandem in inglese si potesse usare anche per più persone, non soltanto due (“[...] six key collaborators: [...] They work in tandem” – p. 178)

Barabási è bravo e quindi, nonostante tutto, il libro è ricco di spunti interessanti:

Seemingly, it's the last person who makes a discovery that really matters, not the first. (p. 24)

Context matters when we assess value. (p. 60)

The Duchampian reality is that these cues shape our perception, frame our understanding, and set the market price. (p. 62)

[...] the bigger the team was, the more lopsided were the individual contributions to the final product. [...] The more they were dominated by a single leader, the more successful they were. (p. 184; il corsivo è dell'autore)

[...] female economists pay an enormous penalty for collaborating. To be clear, men pay no price for collaborative work. They can work alone, in partnerships, or in groups, and their chances of tenure will remain the same. Women, on the other hand, collaborate at their own peril. From a tenure perspective, if you're a female economist publishing with men, you might as well not publish at all. (p. 214; i corsivi sono dell'autore)

Success wanes because everything ages, falling victim to an “attention economy.” (p. 238)

Nadine says

I stumbled on this one as it was linked to another book I'd been listening to and I'm really glad I did. I nearly didn't start it, thinking it would be one of those self-help American style "you can do it if you want to do it" type books, but it was quite different. Barabási is a Hungarian immigrant who has done real scientific research into networks and success and crunched substantial volumes of data in his quest to understand what makes the difference between for instance a Nobel prize winner and one of the other 50 co-authors on the papers that he wrote (I say he, because most Nobel winners are men, and he uncovers the reasons for this too - hint - if you're a woman, never collaborate in your research, you'll be shafted). It's a positive forward looking book and an enjoyable read / listen

Dori Ban says

Scientific explanation of our intuitions on success.

Chris Esposito says

A pretty good summary on recent network theoretic work with respect to the notion of career success, mostly

in the field of academia, but some extensions in business. The books high-level findings are simple to state:

1. Career success is proportional not only to what one does but also one's position in the topology of their professional network
2. The process of preferential-attachment with respect to credit-assignment on citations-network results in a "feedback" effect on success, but also if credit-assignment misattributes true credit, this will increase the difference between the true value of work and perception, which because of the nature of the phenomenon could be an outsized (nonlinear) difference
3. One's potential productive capacity, the "Q factor", is invariant up to a person's entire life. Thus, the differential observed in productive output at earlier life vs. later life in most biographical data of eminent individuals seems to more appropriately be attributed to the frequency of attempted output vs a "rusting mind".

Of all the findings the author claims, the last would probably be most surprising, especially in the technical fields, where much folk-wisdom has stated the early 40s is the latest, one could be truly innovative, with the age of 30 often being quoted by many throughout history. What Barabasi is saying is that structural life events, related to age, like family development, age-related disease, and other age-related time-sinks, account for most of the dearth in observation for innovation in older cohorts. It's something that is plausible, but the author does not provide much detail in the book on how they concluded this methodologically. I presume it's some kind of regression, but more detail on this part would have been welcomed in the text.

The real problem with the book is that much of the wisdom Barabasi discovers with his techniques are fairly obvious. Especially all the bits about non-credited people of eminence, who for one reason or another were never lauded by society. This is the kind of game undergraduates play who are learning a field deeply for the first time. For me, it was late night conversations touting the greatness of Michael Faraday, both from a biographical standpoint and an impact standpoint. And observing how wrong history has been for never giving that person the due they deserved. Or maybe a cat-fight between two physics students on whether Einstein should be given so much claim when people in modern times barely know about Isaac Newton etc. A lot of his conclusions are just a fancier way of saying "it's not what you know, but who". Ironically, despite its name, there's not really any useful "formula" one can plug in various career control-variables in, and get some meaningful output that can improve one's career/output from, outside the vague notion of "keep on trying, and never give up". Barabasi does organize his case and the evidence nicely though.

The two cases that struck me the most were Douglas Prasher, a PhD from Ohio State, and Albert Einstein. Prasher was a sad case, he was unjustly not included in the 2008 Nobel Prize in biology, despite the fact that the seminal work celebrated that year, was produced by him. For his case, it can be traced back to a string of bad luck. Prior to being rediscovered, a journalist found him working as a used-car salesman.

The other case, Einstein, was used several times in the book. One as an example how age does not preclude amazing technical work, specifically citing the EPR paper he helped author at the twilight of his career, which is probably the most cited paper he's ever written because of its direct application to quantum information. Which is also an example of the unexpected effects one's work can have many decades after the work was completed, as I doubt the notion of a quantum computer ever entered any of the EPR-author's minds in the late 1930s. Another use of Einstein was to use him as an example of misattribution, specifically that his fame in the US occurred because the NYT journalist that covered his arrival in America misattributed why there were so many people showed up at the dock of his ship. Instead of wanting to meet Einstein, they were actually waiting to see Chaim Weizman, a prominent Zionist, but because the non-Jewish journalist did not recognize this individual, but did recognize Einstein, they attributed all the pomp and circumstance to him, which started his entry to popular fame in American media. Maybe, it seems like a strongly path-dependent phenomena Barabasi is describing, but from my memory preferential-attachment does result to exactly that sort of phenomena, so the data probably backs Barabasi up on this fact.

After reading the book, I was surprised that Barabasi also didn't leverage the example of Yitang Zhang, who a few years ago, in very advanced age, was discovered to have resolved a tremendously difficult mathematics problem, and could be used as an example of a strong mind, who was poorly connected, and had a relatively mediocre career until recently because of that fact. Another recent example could also be Grigori Perelman, who was discovered by the mathematics community much earlier than Zhang, but who've since seemed to have gone back into obscurity because of his lack of social connection.

Overall, not a bad book. Someone who is decently-read in network science, maybe taken a course, MOOC, or read another book on it (or a researcher in the field), you might find it all old-hat, also there's very little practical career advice here you wouldn't get in any business book on networking, except if you needed a mathematical argument for it, perhaps this provides that? Get it on sale

Emilie says

A remarkable and empowering read, and very much unlike anything I've picked up before on the topic. As Barabasi says early on, it's not a self-help book, but a science book in which the topic of study is success. It's 100% about following the data rather than relying on anecdotes. Expect some mind-shifting insights about how humans actually reward work or ignore it. I've already used a couple of its lessons to shift how I market myself and my consulting. Incredibly insightful.

Piotr Szymański says

I remember talking with Albert Barabasi in a hotel restaurant in Seoul about success and he told me about this book explaining a story about how Einstein became famous, the story that concludes this book. That's why I immediately bought the book at an airport once I saw it featured in a bookshop.

I practically finished the book over the ORD-WRO flight, with just a few pages left for home. It is written in a clear, engaging way, a set of narratives that set ground and explain laws governing success different researchers found in various datasets. It starts with a new take on success: not our performance but how people perceive our performance. While of course questions can be asked how well a certain data set is representative of real-world phenomena, what about survivor bias, or are these, mostly western examples replicable in other places, the laws are laid out clearly and argued convincingly. There's a lot of food for thought.

The book share a coherent, personal narrative, relating the laws of success to each other and does great job explaining how to use these laws to improve your actions and likelihood of success.

You will want to make a lot of notes while reading, I highly recommend buying an ebook and reading it on a kindle.

Carlos Gershenson says

This is not a self-help book. It presents to a general audience recent findings of the novel "science of success" and distills five "laws". Knowing how success works can give you an edge and a clearer goal in

whatever you do: sports, art, academia, business, etc. Witty and entertaining, this book is highly recommendable for anyone who wants to be the best at what they do.

After a careful read, one can see that Barabási applies the laws to the book itself, so it should be a success.

Adam says

Despite its title, this is not a self-help book. Barabosi is an accomplished scientist who has uncovered some surprising secrets to how the world works. It has changed my perspective on many things that I had taken for granted, and honestly inspired me to work harder toward my own success. I would recommend this book to everyone.

Amber Machado says

Great novel! Get ready to take notes! This novel gives the reader information to empower themselves in life! A definitely must read!
