

# The Thrill of Incompetence and the Agony of Success



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**S**uccess is often mistaken for a condition that can be sustained indefinitely. But success is an event rather than a condition, more like a good party than a good marriage. The thrill of accomplishment is always transitory. New interests, aspirations, and projects must constantly replace those that have been fulfilled or else a nonspecific despair can develop. Ironically, this is most likely at the peak of a successful career, where the growth curve starts to level off.

This is half the despair that underlies the standard midlife crisis. The other half is a sudden awareness of the ticking clock. Now you have terror and despair at the height of adult achievement, neither of which has any apparent external cause. The roots of the midlife crisis are therefore invisible and your public often cannot empathize with you because nothing appears to have changed. Even *you* may have a hard time accounting for the crisis and everyone is therefore likely to come up with their own explanation for what your problem *really* is. Such explanations are often inadequate or mistaken.

Long after its shelf life has expired, success often continues to provide material and other rewards that make it difficult to try anything else. In order to get the thrill back it is necessary to try something new, something really substantial and something at which you must probably start off relatively incompetent. Otherwise you are likely to find yourself with an expensive sports car and a sweet young thing, still in despair. This will not do. Your situation is unique, but not *that* unique. Trust me. Call me.

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