

HOW TO

SUCCEED

IN 12



CREATING  
A LIFE  
YOU  
LOVE

MONTHS

SERENA STAR-LEONARD



Wrightbooks  
A Wiley Brand

HOW TO   
**SUCCEED**  
  
IN **12**  
**MONTHS**

**CREATING A LIFE YOU LOVE**

**SERENA  
STAR-LEONARD**



**Wrightbooks**  
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*For Dorothy*

*For once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk with  
your eyes turned skywards.*

**Anonymous**

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# About the author



Serena Star-Leonard is passionate about helping people fulfil their big goals and dreams in life.

She is a Kiwi business coach, blogger and presenter, and the author of *How to Retire in 12 Months*. As well as coaching and writing, Serena runs 'Website Launchpad' courses, teaching people how to create lifestyle and income opportunities through blogging: [www.in12months.com](http://www.in12months.com).



She is also one of the founders of Grassroots Internet Strategy, a small business resource for website owners: [www.grassrootsinternetstrategy.com.au](http://www.grassrootsinternetstrategy.com.au).

Serena is a keen amateur photographer, is inspired by the potential of the human spirit and is passionate about cooking and travel. She is always ready to jump in with her



energy, her heart and a hot meal for those in need and is a blog ambassador for World Vision (Australia).

In hot climates, Serena loves to swim, scuba dive, snorkel and frolic in the water every chance she gets, which is pretty often as she has been travelling the world with her husband John since April 2012.

They have true location freedom and split their time between filming inspiring mini-documentaries and travel reviews for their passion project, 'Five Point Five' ([www.fivepointfive.org](http://www.fivepointfive.org)), travelling, having adventures and writing blogs and books.

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# Acknowledgements



This book follows our journey to create a passion project and design a life that I have daydreamed about for over a decade. We are now living that life, but appreciate that none of this would be possible without a whole community of people who have supported us at each step along the way.

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Last, but in no way least, my soul mate, husband, business partner, documentary film director and lifelong travel buddy John Leonard. Thanks for making every day an adventure.

# Preface



In 2011, my book *How to Retire in 12 Months* came out in Australasia. It is a motivational business book that focuses on the art of blogging as a means of creating an income. Blogging is not for everyone, however, and I have many clients who are looking for alternative options for retiring, creating their dream lifestyle, or achieving important goals they are afraid to embark upon.

This sequel, *How to Succeed in 12 Months: Creating a Life You Love*, is designed to enable you to achieve all your big dreams. Whether you want to travel the world, start a business, make a difference or change the way you live your life, this book is for you.

The strategy behind my success (and yours) is based around acting on the big goals and dreams that many people ignore. It is taking action that will enable you to achieve the things that are important to you.

The book is designed to share what I learned through hard work, luck and dogged persistence. I have a passion for making complex, seemingly impossible ideas and dreams achievable, and I am thrilled to share what I have learned with you.

**Serena Star-Leonard**

# Introduction



Why this book?

I dream of a world where this book is not necessary. Where people know from an early age that anything is possible if they only try and don't give up. We are born with this notion, yet somewhere along the way we stop believing in ourselves and, as a result, we stop living like we can achieve anything.

Instead, we look up to people who are successful and who have confidence in their abilities. We aspire to be like these people, but at the same time we hold ourselves back by not believing that maybe we could achieve our own big goals too.

The main reasons why many of us don't achieve our lifelong dreams are because we either don't start, or we give up too quickly. It is no surprise, therefore, that the most successful people are often the most persistent.

This book is for anyone looking for a fulfilling life. It is for people who want to create the things most people only dream of. It is for people who want to achieve exciting goals, or at least be satisfied that they gave those goals their best shot. It is not about waiting for the right time or for any ducks or planets to align before becoming someone who makes those dreams a reality; it is about being that person right now. I hope that by sharing the things I learned along the way and the things I wish I had known when I wanted to start realising my own dreams, I can save you some of the effort and angst I experienced in my own journey.

If you are ready, we are going to take a journey along the road to creating and living your dream life. To assist you, I set out all the steps you will need to take and introduce practical resources along the way.

*Note:* Throughout the book I have included tasks that you can do to work directly on your life-changing project. Find an exercise book or open a folder on your computer to keep your project 'work' in one place. I have set up a page with additional resources to complement the exercises in this book. Visit [www.in12months.com/readers](http://www.in12months.com/readers) and use the password 'success'.

## **Why 12 months?**

Considering the name and theme of both of my books, you can correctly assume that I am a big fan of 12-month projects. Twelve months is long enough to completely alter your life, but not so long that you grow old in the process (physically anyway!). You can achieve great things in 12 months, but it will go by really quickly when you are in the heart of the action.

Of course, you could fulfil some of your dreams much sooner than 12 months, while others may take years to come to fruition. There is no right amount of time. What you can be certain of is that if you give yourself 12 months to make

a big, exciting dream project a reality, it may just happen and you will be living the life you always dreamed of—or at least you will be much closer to it than if you had done nothing at all.

In 2009 I began my first 12-month, life-changing project: to create an income I could earn working one day a week from anywhere in the world. Achieving this goal allowed me to create exciting, new 12-month goals.

Throughout the book I am going to share my progress on a 12-month adventure my husband and I conceived that resulted in us living a creative travel lifestyle we have designed for ourselves.

It is more than just an adventure; we now—for the first time in our lives—choose every part of our lives. Even though we are both very liberal in our philosophies and open-minded about how we live, we have until recently spent our lives working hard in normal jobs/small businesses, renting apartments and generally being stuck in a (comfortable) rut. We were conforming non-conformists, where our lifestyle did not fit our ideals, but we didn't notice how much it didn't fit because we were so busy conforming!

This latest 12-month project was based on our thirst to be inspired, see the world and make a difference. We created a project and website called 'Five Point Five', which seeks out inspirational people and their wonderful community projects throughout the world.

We share their stories using five-minute documentaries so that our audience can have a quick shot of inspiration, to see people from all walks of life making a difference.

We wanted to create and use mobile incomes to cover our costs, and to review hotels and tours to cut our expenses and enable us to stay in amazing places and enjoy exciting adventures year round. Before we started, we had no experience with any of what we were about to do, but 12 months in, we have achieved our goal and have since continued living the dream.



It took a few months of this new life and lifestyle before we started to notice how creative, calm and happy we had become. Not just because we are travelling through wonderful places, but because we have taken control of how we live our lives. The change has given us far more freedom than we had ever imagined possible.

Whether you are 25, 49, 63 or 90, you have a unique opportunity to take control of the direction of your life over the next 12 months. If you really go for it, what happens may completely change your experience of yourself, your life and the world around you.

## **Outrageous expectations**

We live in a society where our expectations about life are heavily influenced by television, movies, magazines, newspapers and the internet. There is a growing youth culture looking for something for nothing and the easy way to get it—and it is not only the youth who are affected by it. Some of the most popular shows on television showcase super-rich kids, or glorify the lifestyle of super-rich actors, sports stars and entrepreneurs. You can see fancy cars, perfect bodies and young divas whose only claim to fame is the bank balance of their parents.

I see pre-teens watch talent shows and fixate on the possibility of instant global fame and fortune. In past generations one might have hoped to win the lottery, but there is a new message for today's youth: you can be an overnight success, recognised as the amazing, talented and immensely special person that you really are. Add to that the messages of the majority of commercial music, music videos and Hollywood films and I think the reality of hard slog in entry-level jobs may make adulthood look like a major comedown.

As adults, we tend to follow big success stories. Many years ago it was Silicon Valley, dotcoms and the promise of

multilevel marketing. More recently it is the makers of the big apps, search engines and social media websites.

These stories make front-page news because many people are looking for overnight success — the easy win and the big money. Sadly though, the majority of people will not reach these dreams.

The thing with outrageous expectations is that if you are not doing everything you can to live up to them, they are going to leave you unfulfilled, unhappy and looking for an escape. Unfortunately many people do escape, but not in a healthy way, instead using drugs, alcohol, television or excess food, becoming cynical or resigned, or all of the above.

There is nothing wrong with having huge goals if you are willing to do what it takes to make them a reality. If your expectations come with any false sense of entitlement or hope that they will fall in your lap, you are going to be disappointed.

Spend a few years disappointed with your life and, like most people, you will tend to go the same way, sinking into a quiet malaise of resignation. Even some of the most confident, happy and positive people have an underlying resignation about what is possible in their own lives.

## **Make friends with failure**

It may seem weird to talk about failure before we get to the juicy stuff. However, I think our attitudes to failure are so important that we just have to talk about it now.

The fact is, you will fail sometimes. It happens. Then you will succeed sometimes, then you will fail sometimes, then you will succeed. The important thing is that failure is integral to success, but for the most part, in modern society we are trained to avoid it. As such, many of us spend our lives actively avoiding our big dreams in case we work towards them and fail. This leaves us in a bind because life when you are ignoring your dreams is very unsatisfying.

After a few years of living this way, most of us become resigned to accepting what we have and making the best of life with our self-imposed limitations. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, but it means that our dream lives never become a reality and our dreams are seldom fulfilled.

In order to be someone who feels the freedom to follow your dreams, you need to retrain your attitude to failure. To do so, you will need to embrace failure as just part of the journey. Although it can be a very painful part of the journey sometimes, it has its benefits, which include:

- ➞ learning what not to do and what doesn't work
- ➞ learning important lessons that you wouldn't otherwise learn
- ➞ getting a chance to start again, or in a different way
- ➞ seeing how determined, strong and persistent you really are.

I am sure you can think of plenty more benefits of failure. If you scratch the surface of every success story you will find many failures. Some people will fail at some things while succeeding at others. For example, some people fail at sustaining intimate relationships, while having great success in business.

If you are ready to reconsider your attitude to failure and accept it as part of the journey, then we are at the right place to proceed in designing your life and making your dreams come true.

## Success

The reason we need to be willing to risk failure is that there is the possibility of great success! The greater your goal, the greater the risk, and the greater the reward if you make it work.

What makes success so sweet is that it is not guaranteed, so the more times you fail, the sweeter it is when you are successful. Success looks completely different for different people, and often it doesn't end up looking how you imagined it.

The experience of succeeding in your goals and projects helps you grow in confidence and courage, and it can open up a whole new world of amazing goals and projects to take on!

When I started a blog I had no idea what to expect, but when people started to follow it and read it, the opportunity of a book deal was created. Writing and launching the book created the opportunity of running a course, which in turn created the opportunity of taking my business around the world. By travelling the world, the opportunity of reviewing exciting tours, cruises and lush hotels was created, along with the opportunity of visiting amazing community projects and producing mini-documentaries. None of this would have been possible if I had not taken action and started the first blog!

The success my husband and I now enjoy daily is that we live with a feeling of freedom and adventure. In my experience, however, each success is a fleeting cause for celebration; the real reward for us has been the lifestyle we now live and the exciting new opportunities that continue to open up along the way.

For some, success may look like creating their own space of peace where they can relax and meditate. For others, success may look like an intense, high-powered job or business where they get to make a lot of money or create and impact big things in the world.

Because success is completely subjective, we often have a terrible habit of looking at other 'successful' people and comparing ourselves to them. For many people, particularly in Western societies, there will always be more we can do and have. The opportunity you have is to set your own

dreams and goals, make them happen, and appreciate them when you reach them. Do this and you will find as much happiness and fulfillment as all the successful people you could ever compare yourself to.

## **Redefining success**

So this is the bit where I redefine success. I feel it is important to redefine *success* and *succeeding* because for most people the idea of success is tied to wealth and money. The problem with this idea of success is that the current financial systems and global resources are not designed to allow the majority of people to be wealthy, so most people in the world will not experience success the way it is sold through the mass media.

The systems do not work to enrich or empower the general population and this is where I take exception to the common notion of success.

When I started out in business, I had plenty of passion and big ideas. But with no experience, no mentors and a healthy dose of limiting beliefs, it was likely I was going to have a roller-coaster of an experience. I did. At one point I ran a festival with a group of volunteers and I was hoping for 1500 people to attend. When more than 8000 people came, it took me a couple of days to allow myself to feel that it was a success, because I was focused on how it could have been better. But once I reviewed it objectively, I saw that it probably could not have gone much better and I realised I had run a successful festival!

The following year we ran the festival again with big plans to expand, but we didn't have some of the important factors we had the year before and only 4000 people came. If the first year had not been so huge the second year would have been a fantastic result. But because fewer people attended than the previous year, I felt that I had failed and carried forward a huge sense of disappointment.

After this I set up a few charity projects, businesses and many other passion projects. Some of these I worked on very hard and they failed. Some I lost my passion for. Some were successful and have become the core of my lifestyle today. Some I didn't really have the capacity for, but I was so excited about all the things I could be part of that I would start far more projects than I had the time, energy or resources for.

In this period of wild energy, personal growth and sometimes fruitless hard work I met hundreds of people who came in and out of my projects, businesses and social life. I am sure that many of them have very different perceptions of me and my levels of success and failure.

I heard from one friend that I had tried too many things and she no longer thought I would ever *succeed*. The word cut through me like a knife—the sting of a world that is conditioned to be afraid to fail.

My dislike for the common notion of success is that it is all about the destination rather than the journey, and success as a destination is only short-lived. In the traditional sense, success is usually something you have reached—or not—and in the traditional sense, it can be outgrown, outlived, spent or taken away.

I believe that the journey, the adventure, striding boldly forth into the unknown, is where you develop lifelong skills for creating continued success. The journey is where the success lies because you are making every moment count.

True success is a measure of whether you are making the most of the life you have right now, today, in this moment. Today is where a life of happiness, adventure and fulfilment is possible. I love Anthony Robbins's quote, 'Success is doing what you want to do, when you want, where you want, with whom you want, as much as you want'.

Living with this level of freedom is a beautiful thing.





# What is lifestyle design?



The concept of lifestyle design has been around for decades, but it became a global phenomenon following the success of Timothy Ferriss's book *The 4-Hour Workweek*.

Lifestyle design is the art of creating a fulfilling lifestyle *now*, rather than waiting for retirement or some unexpected windfall.

Lifestyle design does not look the same for any two people, or even for any two different stages of life. Some people have a passion they can fulfil for their entire lives. Other people discover new passions over and over throughout their lives.

Right now my lifestyle is designed to enable me to travel long-term and have time to immerse myself in whatever project I am currently inspired by. In a couple of years my dream lifestyle will most likely be different because I will want to spend my time with the children I would like to have.