

ARE YOU SUCCESSFUL?

Richard St. John tells us how he decided to start researching about what leads to success. Complete his story below with the verbs in parenthesis. Decide between the Present Perfect and Simple Past.

My story ... (start) over ten years ago on a plane. I ... (be) on my way to the TED conference in California. And in the seat next to me ... (be) a teenage girl. And she ... (come) from a really poor family, but she ... (want) to get somewhere in life. And as I ... (tap) away in my computer, she ... (keep) asking me questions. Then out of the blue she ... (ask) "Are you successful?" I ... (say) "No, I'm not successful." Terry Fox, my hero, now there's a big success. He ... (lose) a leg to cancer, then ... (run) thousands of miles and raised millions for cancer research. Or Bill Gates. The guy owns his own plane, doesn't have to sit next to some kid asking him questions. But then I ... (tell) her about some of the stuff I'd done. I love communications and I ... (win) lots of awards in Marketing. I love running, and I still sometimes win my age group – old farts over sixty. My fastest Marathon is 2 hours and 43 minutes to run a 26 miles or 42 kilometers. I ... (run) over fifty marathons in all seven continents. This ... (be) a run my wife and I ... (do) up the Inca trail in Machu Picchu in Peru. And to qualify for the seven continents we ... (have) to run a Marathon in Antarctica. But when we ... (get) there it ... (not look) nice and calm like this. It ... (look) like this. The waves ... (be) so high we couldn't get to shore. So we ... (sail) two hundred miles further south to where the seas ... (be) calm and ... (run) the entire 26 mile marathon on the boat, four hundred and twenty two laps around the deck of that little boat. My wife and I ... (climb) two of the world's seven summits, the highest mountains on each continents. We ... (climb) Aconcagua, the highest mountain on the American continent, and Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. Well, to be honest, I ... (puke) my way to the top of Kilimanjaro. I ... (get) altitude sickness. I ... (get) no sympathy from my wife. She ... (pass) me and ... (do) a lap around the top while I ... (be) still struggling up there. And in spite of that, we're still together and have been for over thirty five years. I'd say that's a success these days. So I ... (say) to the girl "Well, you know, I guess I ... (have) some success." And then she said "Ok, so are you a millionaire?" Now I ... (not know) what to say. Because when I ... (grow) up it ... (be) bad manners to talk about money. But I ... (figure) I'd better be honest, and I ... (say) "Yeah, I'm a millionaire, but I don't know how it ... (happen). I never ... (go) after the money and it's not that important to me." She ... (say) "Maybe not to you, but it is to me. I don't want to be poor all my life. I want to get somewhere, but it's never going to happen." I ... (say) "well, why not?" She ... (say) "Well, you know, I'm not very smart. I'm not doing great at school." I ... (say) "So what? I'm not very smart, I barely ... (pass) high school. I ... (have) absolutely nothing going for me. I was never voted most popular or most likely to succeed. I ... (start) a whole new category: most likely to fail, but in the end I ... (do) okay. So if I can do it, you can do it." And then she ...

(ask) me the big question “Okay, so what really leads to success?” I ... (say) “Gee, sorry. I don’t know. I guess somehow I ... (do) it. I don’t know how I ... (do) it.”

Watch the [video](#) and check your answers. Click [here](#) to see the transcript with answers.

Present Perfect or Simple Past

In some sentences where Richard uses the Simple Past, it seems like it would be possible to use the Present Perfect. These are the two sentences:

He (Terry Fox) **lost** a leg to cancer.

I love communications and I **won** lots of awards in Marketing.

The grammar rule says: use **Present Perfect** to talk about actions in the past that are over now, if we do **not** know or want to stay **when** they happened (because it is **not important**), and to talk about actions that **influence the present situation**. So let’s take a closer look at these two sentences.

1. He (Terry Fox) **lost** a leg to cancer.

Terry Fox lived from 1958 to 1981, so we know he lost his leg any time between those years. In addition, this has no influence in the **present** because he ran thousands of miles and raised millions for cancer research between 1958 and 1981 as well. To sum up, use the **Simple Past** to talk about people that passed away.

2. I love communications and I **won** lots of awards in Marketing.

It sounds like the days of winning lots of awards in Marketing are over for Richard St John, so he prefers to talk about it using the **Simple Past**. In contrast, look at the sentences in his speech where he uses the **Present Perfect**:

I’ve run over fifty marathons in all seven continents.

My wife and I have climbed two of the world's seven summits, the highest mountains on each continents.

I guess I have had some success.

Richard uses the **Present Perfect** because running marathons and climbing the world's seven summits are probably activities he **still engages**. And I am pretty sure he is still a successful man, which must influence his life now. So notice that we also use the **Present Perfect** to talk about situations that are **not exactly over**, but are **not simple present** because they **started in the past**.

I am sure you noticed that most of what he said was in the Simple Past. Do you remember why? We usually use the **Simple Past** to explain or talk about **details** of past events. When students learn about Present Perfect, they want to use it all the time to talk about everything, but be careful with that because as you probably noticed, simple past should be in your speech much more often than Present Perfect.

PRACTICE!

Do you have a successful story? Write about it. Use the Simple Past and Present Perfect accordingly.