Chapter Eight

“WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?”

Depressions following Success

In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants and the other is getting it.

Oscar Wilde

S. Berglas, The Success Syndrome
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Climbing the ladder of success to reach the top rung is the most commonly used metaphor for pursuing a career goal. From it we derive the colloquial expressions that refer to “success,” including “reaching the top,” “the top,” or “arriving.” Rarely do we find people who consider the initial stages of the process leading to success—“climbing”—as having the same value or potential for reward as attaining the goal. Why should they? To achieve a truly valuable goal, one must climb a ladder splintered with severe trials and tribulations. (Recall Spinoza’s thought: “All excellent things are as difficult as they are rare.”) Who wants to dwell upon hardships once your rewards are in hand?

The number of successful people who do wax nostalgic about the hard times they had would surprise those readers who have not experienced The Success Sydrome. In my clinical practice, I have found that many successful individuals, most notably entrepreneurs and athletes, talk fondly about their climb to the top and the difficulties they encountered along the way. Their stories go well beyond the travel advertisement that “getting there is half the fun.” For a significant number of individuals wrecked by success, the road to their dream was a joyous struggle capped by an anxiety-ridden letdown once they arrived.