



# A Tight Focus and a Single-Minded Pursuit

*Two necessities for reaching that goal*

By **David G. Jensen**  
Contributing Editor

MY RUNNING TOTAL IS NOW in excess of 7,000 in-depth pharmaceutical industry interviews, either as an executive recruiter or for my writing projects. This means that I've had a great opportunity to gather other people's impressions of what they have done right with their careers—and what they've done wrong as well. Some people seem to reach each rung on their ladder a lot faster than others, which has always fascinated me. As a result, I've made an informal study of "success secrets," many of which I report on here in my column for *Contract Pharma*.

Perhaps this discrepancy exists because some unique people have learned to make a "single-minded pursuit" out of their mission to moving up the career ladder. I must admit that, in my personal experience, I have always found that there is something about applying a very tight focus to achieving a goal—it brings all kinds of energy to the process that you didn't even know you have. (See the sidebar).

Just recently I was reminded of the power of single-minded pursuit when I read about an interesting character from my hometown. To those readers who know Sedona, AZ, you must admit that I am located in an unusual spot for a pharma consultant. This town is noted for its status as the unofficial capital of the New Age. We've got mystics and tarot card readers, red rock formations and vortexes, and even a cult or two. While I don't subscribe to any of that, I can tell you from personal experience that it all makes for a very interesting place to live. (Combined, of course, with the best weather you could ever ask for).

While most of the examples in my work come from science, in this case I want to introduce you to one of Sedona's more unusual residents, a fellow we simply call "The Waver."

The Waver first showed up five years ago, and he was quite a sight. He was a large guy in his 50s, weighing about 250 lbs., complete with a ragged beard and a colorful assortment of classic clothes from 1970s San Francisco. In other words, picture this very large Jerry Garcia lookalike whose sole activity is walking up and down Main Street Sedona waving at cars. Yes, that's right. A great big cheery wave. Not

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just every now and then, but thousands of times a day.

At first, I thought he was nuts. And then I read an interview with the fellow. He's as sane as you and I . . . He just happens to be on a mission. As a major tourist destination,

## Excerpt from "The Scottish Himalayan Expedition"

Until one is committed  
there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back,  
always ineffectiveness.  
Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation),  
there is one elementary truth,  
the ignorance of which kills countless ideas  
and splendid plans:  
that the moment one definitely commits oneself,  
then Providence moves too.  
All sorts of things occur to help one  
that would never otherwise have occurred.  
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,  
raising in one's favour all manner  
of unforeseen incidents and meetings  
and material assistance,  
which no man could have dreamt  
would come his way.

I have learned a deep respect  
for one of Goethe's couplets:  
'Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.'

—W. H. Murray

Sedona had three million visitors last year, and most of them came in cars. The Waver has a big job to do, and it certainly isn't as mundane as yours or mine: His single-minded pursuit is to cheer up humankind, one car at a time.

## What Exactly is a Single-Minded Pursuit?

We are taught that good science is based on the single-minded pursuit of truth. The ability to focus in this way is a quali-

ty that some special scientists can bring to their work. It isn't a necessary ingredient of daily life—and you'll never find it on a scientist's job description. And yet, whether it is Scientific Truth that you are seeking—or just a job—you will advance your personal mission tremendously by packaging it along with the boundless energy and passion that make up a "single-minded pursuit."

Read biographies of great people and you will find evidence of this on every path that was ever trod to ultimate success. The scientific world is full of examples of incredible determination and persistence as a result of some inventor's pursuit of a goal. How many different types of filaments did Thomas Edison try before lighting the room around him? Thousands.

And yet, many technical people seeking a new position begin to give up after a couple of dozen unproductive networking calls, or a few months of mailing résumés. Do you want to ultimately succeed in your pursuit? Of course you do! So let's dissect the key elements that you'll need to bring to the table.

### Six Key Ingredients of A Single-Minded Pursuit

- 1) **An unswerving faith that what you have set out to achieve is actually achievable.** This isn't the time for pie-in-the-sky goals. You can't find a job as Director of Research when coming out of a first-year supervisory position. But when your goal is within reach, one major ingredient in actually accomplishing it will be that you believe it is do-able.
- 2) **The ability to mentally focus on your pursuit at any opportune moment, and not just from 9 to 5.** Good ideas are all around you, all the time. You'll need to develop the ability to pick these up out of the ether. How do you do this? By thinking about your pursuit at other times than when you "should" be. One pharmaceutical process engineer I know told me that his best ideas always come to him when he is out walking the dog. To the job seeker, you never know where you are going to pick up a good lead or bump into someone who can help you.
- 3) **An open mind, because a single-minded pursuit is not a closed-minded pursuit.** If your goal were to land a job in business development at a major biotech company, and you are offered a job in that firm as a scientist, don't change your ultimate goal. Be flexible about the path you might take to get there.
- 4) **A large reserve of mental energy combined with mental toughness.** The ability to rebound again and again is at the core of any single-minded pursuit. You must develop the ability to move harmlessly away from walls that are thrown up in front of you. Sure, you'll bump squarely into a few of them, but you must keep moving.

Build up momentum.

- 5) **You must be powered by unbridled enthusiasm.** This isn't the typical job-hunting enthusiasm (I feel the same "excitement" when going to the dentist). And it certainly isn't the phony "rah rah" enthusiasm that hiring professionals can spot a mile away. Instead, unbridled enthusiasm has you waking up in the morning with a smile on your face because you know that it usually takes 30 random networking contacts to get an interview invitation, and you've already made 23.
- 6) **Planning and organizational skills: the ability to set timetables and monitor your goals against them.** Just like eating the 32 oz. sirloin down at Country Bob's Cowboy Steakhouse, you can't "swallow" a big goal in one bite. It has to be cut up into smaller pieces. Likewise, your single-minded pursuit has a series of individual elements that can be monitored along the way. Don't forget to celebrate after reaching each of them!

### How "The Waver" Changed My Attitude

When I first saw The Waver waving at passersby on our main highway, I told my wife that Sedona had reeled in another kook and forecast that he'd be gone in a day or two. We got a brief laugh out of his antics and then moved on to the more pressing matters of life. I remember catching a bit of his infectious smile and energy in that wave of his, but it didn't take effect immediately. Soon, however, I began seeing this strange fellow everywhere that I went. I'd go to the post office and there he was, waving away. My family would go out to dinner, and we'd see him there on Main Street doing his thing, with a gorgeous Arizona sunset as his backdrop. I found myself beginning to miss him if he wasn't there, and was subconsciously looking for him whenever I left the house.

Our attitude about The Waver changed very quickly. Each time we saw him, it put a smile on our faces, and our natural reaction was to start waving back. Things started changing for others, as well. People would slow down, roll down their windows, and everyone would lean out of the car, waving and honking the horn for our unlikely hero.

It was shortly after the local paper did an article about The Waver that he left town. I guess he felt that his mission had been accomplished. The reporter who interviewed Ed Carlson (yes, he has a name) spoke about Ed's single-minded pursuit of spreading love and peace throughout the country, one small town at a time. He's been doing just that since the 1970s.

Well, I can tell you that it worked in Sedona, and with luck he might be headed towards your town someday soon. Can you imagine what would happen to your work and dreams if you were to put even a small part of The Waver's passion into some single-minded pursuit of your own? ■