



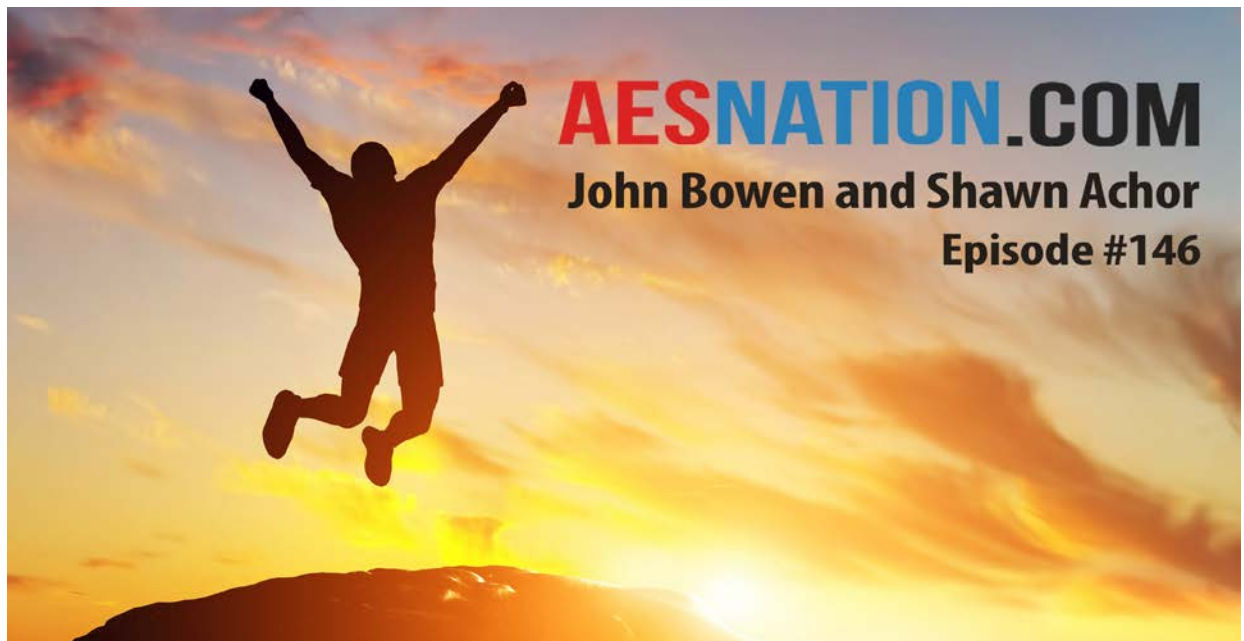
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ACCELERATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS PODCAST

EPIISODE  
**146**

**Shawn Achor**

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/146>



Dear Fellow Entrepreneur,

We are thrilled that you have joined us here at AES Nation, where we're dedicated to accelerating entrepreneurial success—your success.

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Best of success,



John Bowen  
Co-founder, AES Nation

**John Bowen:** As entrepreneurs, we all want to make a huge difference. One of the ways we can do is be extremely productive. Now, one of the concepts that most of us aren't really familiar with is happiness and a happiness advantage, and how that can increase our success as an entrepreneur not only in the increased productivity, but in a great life. We're all in business not for more business, but for a great life.

I have a remarkable, talented individual. He's a bestselling author, speaker, trainer, coach, really serial entrepreneur as well. Shawn Achor is an amazing guy. I've had the opportunity to get to know him over the years, read all his books. I'll tell you, you are in for a special treat of getting a huge advantage.

I'm John Bowen. We're at AES Nation. It's all about accelerating your success. Stay tuned. You don't want to miss any of this.

Shawn, I am so excited to have you here. I had you speak three or four years ago to my mastermind group of tough financial advisors. After reading your book, The Happiness Advantage, and I just saw that there was ... I'm going to be honest with you, I was a little scared bringing you in front of all these left-brain dominant, logical guys and so on, and you were such a hit because you did what so many other people who talk about positive psychology can't do is you really related to how big of impact it could have on their life and the life of everyone around them. Thank you for joining us and sharing your insights today.

**Shawn Achor:** John, it's a thrill. Thank you so much for having me...

**John:** Shawn, this is a message that's really resonated, just as we're getting ready for the podcast. Your TED Talk has now had over 12 million views. Your books are bestsellers. You're working with Oprah, too, with a course. We're going to talk about this. Give me a little bit of the back story of ... You're a pretty happy guy. I've seen you in many settings now, but the research on happiness and sharing it with the world, how did this all come about?

**Shawn:** I fell into it backwards. I am a happy person and I am getting I believe happier each day, but it was work. It took effort to be able to do. I was planning on being an academic and I was actually at the Divinity School studying Christian and Buddhist Ethics at Harvard Divinity School. While I was there, some people in the psychology department said we can now quantify if somebody's becoming more compassionate or if they have greater meaning in their life or they feel happier. I had no idea how you measure some of those things, but as soon as I saw that you could, I got fascinated by it.

The thing that, and you were talking about getting to come and speak at your mastermind group, is that we could do all this research in a laboratory where we could control all the variables, but that's not what life looks like at all. If you're an entrepreneur, you can't control

most variables, right, like what the market's doing, what's going on in your family, what's going on with other entrepreneurs? Part of what I wanted to do is to test this happiness research out in the midst of the messiness of life and what we found was that...

The very first place I started taking this research out to was banks in the middle of a banking crisis. You're talking about left-brain people who are looking at...

**John:** That was 2008-2009. I'm in the financial services industry, my main business. This was not a happy time. We all talk about life intruding, this slammed in here.

**Shawn:** Yeah. My sister went to the business school there and I told her I wanted to start a happiness company in the middle of a banking collapse and she said, "This is the worst idea I've ever heard. You're a terrible entrepreneur."

What I've realized was that people still wanted to be happy and happiness is a luxury item when things are going well, but in tough times, it becomes a necessity because the human brain actually performs significantly better if you can get the brain to become positive. What we wanted to do was find out a way of can you create happiness in the midst of stress, in the midst of high work load, can you do it in the midst of the uncertainty of life?

What we saw in the banking industry we've seen replicated in the mortgage industry, with the healthcare industry, with all the changes that are occurring. We've seen it with technology changing every two to three years in terms of the speed. What we've been finding is that every aspect of business has this element of uncertainty and what's incredible is there's some universals about how we could not only quantify levels of happiness, but we could actually raise people's levels of happiness, in doing so, raise every single business outcome we know how to test for. That's when I started to get really excited.

**John:** That's where I love your book. I read a number of books prior to it, Shawn, on happiness and different positive psychology, and was really enjoyed the research, but it was kind of I guess because I live in Northern California, I'm in California, a little soft type thing, even though I grew up at upstate New York in a rural area.

I'm loving it, but when I read your book and I started seeing the statistics of I'll use the one, a 31% increase in productivity, it was like wow, this is ... You can actually do something that's going to make you feel really good about yourself, your clients, your teammates, your partners, and be more successful. That's what we're all about as entrepreneurs is being more successful. This is a real big change because most of us ... When I think of psychology, the positive part doesn't come up. It's all the negative things we talk about.

**Shawn:** Yeah, you're so right. Most of the research for the past four decades has been on depression disorder. What I want to research is what causes the human brain to thrive? What we've been finding is incredible. When I first got into doing this when I was in academia, when I was back at Harvard, when I was trying to start up a business, I thought if you work harder and work really hard and just put your nose to the grindstone and do everything you're supposed to do, go to every conference and do every email, if you do all this, work harder, you'll be more successful. If you're more successful, then think how happy I'm going to be.

That formula as I started speaking to business leaders and professional athletes and celebrities, that formula doesn't work at all. The success actually doesn't lead to greater levels of happiness when we researched it. We think it does. We keep telling ourselves, "I'm going to be incredibly happy when I sell a company for \$100 million. I'm going to be incredibly happy when I get my kid into the right school," but 80% of those Harvard students were going through a depression and 10% of them contemplated suicide, and that's a fantastic school. When I got out into the working world, the people that are paid the most were not necessarily happier than other people around them. They weren't happier.

**John:** Let's just stop for a second. I want to capture that because this is so important. I remember when you first told me this. My undergraduate's a state school and I'm going, "Geez, I didn't apply to Harvard, but I wouldn't have got in, but if I got there, that would've been a big deal." Boy, excited, I'm there. Life is great or geez, I'm making \$1 million on Wall Street and millions in this and that.

This is a thing that we all struggle with is it doesn't. I've sold a couple businesses that were fairly big hits and then it's kind of like now what? I'm there. So what type thing. It's an amazing that we all get caught in this and you're seeing this over and over again. I want everyone, our viewers, and our listeners to just think about that because we're all chasing this journey to get happier and be successful, but it's not the number type thing.

**Shawn:** Yeah. First of all, John, Harvard would've been lucky to have you given all the successes that you've had. You're right, those successes, you're a very positive person, but the successes don't necessarily make you into a happy person. Happiness is something we have to work for. It's something we have to cultivate. It's that type of optimism that we have to ... It's not something you find. It's something you create, but what's amazing is once you put the science on it, it starts to break down our beliefs, especially as entrepreneurs, which is if I can get through all this work, then I'm going to feel happier. As soon as I get that deal, I'll feel happier. As soon as I get to the weekend or as soon as I can stop working 80, 90 hours a week, then I'll feel happier.

It turns out in each one of those moments, it doesn't work scientifically because the human brain, every time you have a success, changes the goal post of what success looks like. You

get a win today, but you change the goal post. If you hit your sales target, you double your sales target for the next quarter, right. You had double growth earnings this year, we can double them again next year. We can do this. If that's the case, if happiness exists on the opposite side of success for an entrepreneur, our brain never gets there.

**John:** There's always a gap because we double the number, we only go up 90%. We're disappointed that we missed it, but it's a huge success with just a little different framing.

**Shawn:** Here's the incredible part. Switch it around and what we've been finding in neuroscience and positive psychology is if you actually start by cultivating not just greater levels of success, but actually cultivating the things that lead to happiness, that's deeper social connection. You cultivate an optimistic mind-set. You cultivate gratitude. You change the way you view stress from a threat to a challenge, turns out every single business outcome rises dramatically and we can quantify it.

You're right, 31% increase in productivity when the human brain goes from neutral to positive; 40% higher likelihood of a promotion, turns out your brain is three times more creative at seeing solutions to problems you're dealing with. Our sales rise by 37%, we're 39% more likely to live to age 94. The list goes on and on. This is my favorite one, the same level of stress has a 23% lower negative effect upon your body if your brain is positive.

What that means is the human brain is designed to work best at positive. The problem is most people work at negative or neutral hoping to get positive in the future and that actually hampers your brain's performance over the next couple years. To summarize it in a very quick way is that if you're right, if someone is listening to this that's more successful for the next five years, their happiness level has actually flat-lined. They don't move. Flip it around, raise your levels of happiness, every single success rate rises and we know how to test for.

**John:** Let's go to your book. What I loved about the way you think of happiness is number one, it's a choice. To me, this is something that quite honestly, I didn't get, Shawn, until I read your book. Then it's one of those blindingly obvious things once you start doing it. Maybe can you expand, because this is such a powerful concept?

**Shawn:** If you ask somebody why they're not happy, they'll tell you it's something about their genes or their environment. That's what we've been taught in school Science classes, right. If you aren't happy is because you have genes for depression or you have genes for obesity or alcoholism. We do have genes that set the initial baseline, but it turns out, that initial baseline is not the end of the story. You ask somebody why they're unhappy and they'll say, "I'm unhappy because I didn't get my bonus. I'm unhappy because I'm in debt right now. I'm unhappy because I have something that's going on outside of their control." It turns out in both of those situations, genes and environment, is very easy and it's actually comforting for



us to be able to blame those because they're outside of our control. The problem is we're victims of both of those. We're victims of our environment and victims of our genes.

When we started doing the research, we realized that we had actually created a cultural myth that was creating a tyranny over people's belief that change was possible. What we realize now is that there is a third choice. By making small conscious habit changes or small changes to your mind-set, we can actually trump not only your genes, but eight decades of experience, not only in terms of happiness, but intelligence, creativity, and optimism as well. What we're finding is these things that we thought we didn't have control over, that we were buffeted by life, turns out, we could actually consciously choose to be better than our genes.

**John:** It is amazing because, Shawn, I think of it when I was a financial advisor for a lot of my professional career and I had the privilege of working with some extremely successful billionaires as well as really some average people that were going through unbelievable crisis, and it wasn't that rare for the people that were struggling to be much happier than the multi-billionaire and it was a choice. I recognize it now with your work and so on, how they've done it, but they had, and you use the term advantage, happiness advantage, they have a huge advantage when they choose happiness and then, really leverage this. Again, walk us through how this happiness advantage because I can't imagine anybody listening to us or watching us, I want some of that. I'd like actually a double scoop of that if I could.

**Shawn:** What's great is you can actually choose to have it. That happiness isn't just an inheritance from our genes. It's an intention. It's something we could cultivate. You're going to catch yourself after listening to this podcast of all the times you'd say, "I'll be happy when or I can't feel happy now because of X, something that's outside of my control."

I was working with Swiss bankers. I flew from Zurich down to Zimbabwe and worked with farmers who had lost their land. These were people who didn't just lose their bonus. They were pushing around their money in wheelbarrows. Their currency collapsed. They're living under military dictatorship and you could watch them, definitely, the position was terrible, political and economic instability, but if somebody in the midst of that could deepen their social connection and choose happiness, you could watch the positive people start to rebuild while the negative ones actually stayed stagnant or actually started to deteriorate.

What we found was that as we started setting this positive advantage, it turns out it led into something that we now call the happiness advantage, which is we found that dopamine which flows through the system when your brain is positive, it turns out it not only makes you happier, it turns on all the learning centers in your brain. As a result of that, what we're now finding is that happiness is actually one of the greatest competitive advantages in the modern economy that if you are comparing two entrepreneurs with similar skill sets, similar ideas, similar backgrounds, if you can get one to get a positive mind-set, that person pushes harder. The

resilience is higher. Their creativity is higher. Their success rates are higher, the better connecting to other people. People want to be around positive people.

What we're finding is that as we looked at it, we want our kids to be happy, but we also want them to be successful. As we're looking at standardized test scores in school that if you wait to get a good grade on the SAT, you waited too long that if you go into that with a positive brain, it turns out, your standardized test scores rise. You're likelihood of getting into the school you want rises.

Happiness is actually an incredible advantage. The problem is we keep thinking happiness is the bow on the package, right, that if I get everything I want, then I'll feel happier and that we keep pushing off happiness for the future. The key to getting everything you want, at least having a higher likelihood that happiness doesn't guarantee you're going to be a billionaire. It doesn't. I know tons of happy people that work part time below a living wage. We know that that happens. What we're finding is that if you have two people in the same situation, the positive person has a huge advantage over the person who's remaining neutral.

**John:** I was thinking, Shawn, as you're talking, it wasn't that long ago, I was in Switzerland a few months ago and I was giving a talk to some of the most successful financial people in the world. I think probably the average income's about 5 million. Prior to that I'd been in Kenya in mud huts. That was going to be really close, who was happier in the group. We took the average happiness. I don't know who would've won, but they're both pretty happy groups and they're successful in their own mind, their framing and so on.

What I love is that ... I always call it an unfair competitive advantage. You might call it it's a fair competitive advantage, but this happiness advantage is something that each of us can really use and once you start incorporating in your life, it's so powerful. Then, this is where when we start talking about not only in our own enlightened self-interest doing it, but you talk about spreading it around. The leverage that comes out of this is huge.

**Shawn:** Yeah, our brains are actually wirelessly connected to one another. People don't realize this because we don't see any wires connecting to our brains, but our brains are designed to be wirelessly connected through this mirror neuron network. Inside our brain are these small little neurons that basically, when you put them together into a system, if I see somebody yawn, I'm more likely to yawn myself. If I see somebody smile, my brain actually starts smiling before I do. What's interesting is that it's not just smiles and yawn that's spread, but negativity, stress, uncertainty, and anxiety is spread as well.

If we could find some way of helping people to choose to be resilient in the midst of the challenges they experience, it actually infuses with other people's ability to choose happiness and we can watch their brains actually tilt towards the belief that happiness is a choice for



them, which is why we see company cultures become so successful together that if ... An entrepreneur doesn't exist on an island. They're working with investors. They're working with partners. They're working with people on their teams. Find some way of getting one of those people positive and they have a dramatic impact upon the people around them and can shift a culture to actually not only become more positive, but actually become more successful.

**John:** As a matter of fact, Shawn, tomorrow, I'm going to my senior team retreat. I have a virtual company or companies and we're all flying together. This is something that as you think about just your whole team, particularly your senior team, but all your employees, your contractors, your clients, this is something that can be repeated over and over again.

Let me go to a segment here and it's one called The Book of the Day. What I'd like to do, Shawn, I'm going to put up on the screen, I'm not going to give you a choice of recommending anybody else's book, but your own, and The Happiness Advantage because this has changed ... As a matter of fact, so many of the financial advisors in my mastermind group, Shawn, they bought quantities of this book because they wanted to spread it and share it, and they did workshops and they let it ... They got so much positive feedback from their clients. What I love as you go into some detail here and this is The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuel Success and Performance at Work. Shawn, tell us a little bit about what's in the book? We can't cover everything on this podcast. What are they going to get?

**Shawn:** I think people are spreading it out for the same reason that I wrote the book in the first place, which is as soon as I heard this research, I wanted everyone to know it because I realize that this could help my mom and my dad. This could help the people I'm working with. The more positive the people around me are, the easier it is for me to choose happiness. The book just validates who you are, John. It validates these people who are these positive outliers who are able to make these choices.

What I did in the book is looked at the research of somebody could actually choose to become more positive, regardless of their starting point. Maybe they have genes that make them optimistic and they want to strengthen it or maybe they're in a very dark place or their company is not doing well or they've had several businesses fail. Whatever it is, wherever they start with, this is the research we found to help them to move to help choose happiness.

What we were finding was if you can actually make some of these choices within two minutes a day, making two minute positive habits a day, a single positive habit could actually trump your genes and even [aid that gates of 20:31] experience and those were very simple things. We got people for 21 days in a row to think of three new things that they were grateful for over the past 24 hours and to be specific about it. Something like...

**John:** Shawn, I just want to stop you on that one. That was such an important one to me. I started keeping a journal after that and just writing down three. Anyone who's watching this podcast or listening to it, you have so much in life to be grateful for. It's not hard to come up with three at all and that [positive 21:07] framing, it takes you over. I think that's been one that you've helped an awful lot of people. You've got a whole bunch of others that they can use and really just make some big success on this change.

**Shawn:** Yeah. That's what the book focuses on. What I love about the gratitude one, it doesn't even matter what you're grateful for, what matters is your brain takes 45 seconds a day to scan the world for three new things you're grateful for. What it does is it trains your brain to not only get stronger in that, but when you go back to looking at all the problems you need to fix within your life, all the fires you need to put out, it turns your brain unconsciously scans the world for the positive as well and we can get people who are low level genetic pessimists to turn into low level optimists in just a six-week period of time, incredibly powerful.

We got people to journal about a positive experience each day for just two minutes, just one positive memory. We got people with chronic neuromuscular diseases to do this for six weeks in a row and six months later, they can drop their pain medication by 50%, which is incredible. A two-minute intervention could transform our health.

At Google, we're getting them to take their hands off of their keyboard for two minutes a day and just watch their breath go in and out. They're already sitting at the keyboard, which makes them watch their breath go in and out. If you do this, you're going to feel two minutes behind, but if you do this each day, but if you do it, turns out that small moment of just watching, single tasking causes your brain's accuracy rates to improve by 10% over the course of the day. Your mood improves, happiness levels improve, and stress levels drop.

The most powerful one we did out of Facebook, we had people for 21 days in a row, every day that they got into work, their first job was to write a two-minute positive email praising or thanking somebody they know. It's an external source of happiness, but what's great is not only do you get great emails back from people, but if I test your social connection 21 days later, your social connection score is off the chart. The reason why that's important to entrepreneurs and to all of us is the social connection is the greatest predictor of long-term happiness we have. The breadth, depth, and meaning in our social relationships trumps every other positive attempt that we make to create greater levels of happiness.

If we do this, if we can increase social connection, it is as predictive of how long we'll live as obesity, high blood pressure or smoking. We fight so hard against the negative. I know people that are watching this podcast are healthy. They're health conscious. They're trying to do all these things to live longer, and they get that, just that small edge, and they're looking at their olive oils and making sure it's organic food and all these types of things, when literally a two-

minute positive habit can extend your life as much as stopping smoking. If we got you to write the two-minute positive habit while you're at work or to start your day, it turns out, not only do your success rates rise over the course of the day, but your likelihood of losing weight rises dramatically. Your likelihood of smoking rises dramatically, and you create entire constellations of positive habits.

**John:** It's all free, too. You know what I mean? Yeah.

**Shawn:** Yeah, it's hard as a business person, right.

**John:** Yeah. Yeah, we've got some books and we're going to talk about, some resources, but the cost of doing this, to get that kind of ... We spend, many of us, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars to get little incremental improvements. This is amazing.

Shawn, let me go to the next segment, which is the app, application of the day that you would recommend on your smart phone. What jumps out that you would want to share with your fellow entrepreneurs?

**Shawn:** This isn't my app. This is one that I love though that I use called Happify, H-A-P-P-I-F-Y. They've just done a great job of taking a lot of this positive psychology information and making it in mobile format. People could actually go through mini courses on the app and they're just doing phenomenal work not only in happiness, but in the healthcare space as well. They're a great one.

**John:** Let me put it up on the screen so everybody has it. Remember, all the show notes and transcript and everything will be at [aesnation.com](http://aesnation.com). Then, Shawn, let's go to resources and you've got a bunch of resources you're working on that are really powerful. As a matter of fact, let me pull up ... What would be the first website I should show on the screen for those who are watching it on video?

**Shawn:** I think the main one, I know a lot of people that are watching this are probably interested in the research. If you are, if you want to get just the jumping off place to learn more about positive psychology, just [happinessadvantage.com](http://happinessadvantage.com). That brings you to my main website. From there, we've got links to the research that we were just talking about today in very short form. It's got new research we're doing. It's got a newsletter you could join if you want to just keep up with the research that's coming out. I'm on a couple of those newsletter lists myself just because there's so much research that's coming out. I think that that's a great starting place. There's a 12-minute free TED talk that you can see there.

The resource that I love, it's the other one we were talking about and you can get there from that website as well, but it's at [oprah.com/happiness](http://oprah.com/happiness). That is the course that we've been

working on with Oprah to get people to basically do what we were doing at Harvard. We create a semester long class and we try to make it push it down into just 21 days to get all this research and these videos out so 5 to 10 minutes, you watch a mini-lecture and then, you create these positive habits and you can track yourself over time and you get access to these video case studies of people I interviewed like the head of people at Google and senior marketers at Buick and McKenzie, and all these incredible places that are making these positive changes. It's the best thing we've created so far about if somebody wants to do this, if they want to move from information to transformation, it's been incredible.

**John:** This is great. Let me go over the key takeaways that I'm getting from this so that we can create some action here. When I look at this and looking at my notes, Shawn, this is just ... This message has resonated, 12 million TED talks is a huge viewing audience. Being invited to be on Oprah, but not only that, actually building a program with her, and I've seen you in some pretty tough audiences and you inspire everyone to action.

I want everybody to go over what we talked about. Number one, this is a choice. We get to make a happiness choice and boy, make the right choice. It's an unfair competitive advantage, the happiness advantage. Then spread it. This is not a limited resource. If you want to be more successful, and I'm going to encourage everyone, minimum, read Shawn's book. I will be, Shawn, signing up for the Oprah class because it's just ... What an inexpensive investment to get this kind of productivity increase and feel good about it, too.

Now, Shawn, with that, I want to thank you and I want to encourage everyone, go to [aesnation.com](http://aesnation.com). Download the transcript. There's so many pearls of wisdom here. Go to Shawn's site. Buy the book. Do the class. Let's make sure that we spread it. Our clients, our future clients, our strategic partners, our teammates, they're all counting on us. Don't let them down. We wish you the best of success.

**Shawn:** Thank you so much. Thank you for letting me come on.

## A Second Opinion on Your Finances

*A Complimentary Service from Financial Advisor Select for the Members of AES Nation*

Dear Fellow Entrepreneur,

Like many members of AESNation, I'm a serial entrepreneur. In addition to co-founding AESNation, I'm the founder and CEO of Financial Advisor Select, a firm dedicated to helping successful people make informed financial decisions by introducing them to top financial advisors.

If you're like many successful entrepreneurs, you and your family already have a relationship with a financial advisor. You may even work with several financial advisors. If you are completely satisfied with these relationships and confident that your finances are on track toward helping you achieve all that is most important to you, we congratulate you.

However, you may not be entirely satisfied. You may be wondering if there's a financial advisor who is better-suited to address your family's very specific financial challenges. If so, you are not alone. In today's uncertain economic climate, many successful entrepreneurs are wondering if they have the right financial advisor.

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Best of success,



John Bowen  
Founder and CEO  
Financial Advisor Select