

A key to a successful life in death of a salesman american dream

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Is popularity truly the key to a successful life? Throughout Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the desire to be well liked becomes an obsession for the main character, Willy Loman. Willy is a sixty-three year old salesman who constantly strives for success in order to provide for his wife, Linda, and his two sons, Biff and Happy. However, his idea of success comes from a flawed vision of the American Dream that focuses on being popular and attractive. The confused father is so determined to create the perfect family of the American Dream that he becomes incapable of accepting the difference between the Dream and his own life. Consequently, Willy Loman's need to be well liked leads him to develop a misunderstanding of reality regarding his career, the care of his sons, and the love that his family offers him.

By believing that popularity leads to success, Willy becomes delusional as to how the business world actually works. Instead of working hard and earning success, the aging salesman relies on his likability. When their bills begin to pile up, Willy states to his wife, " I'll knock ' em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford" (23). This attitude causes Mr. Loman to lose sight of the need for hard work in business. Also, when trying to figure out why he is not making many sales and earning more money, Willy blames it on his weight and that he may not be " dressing to advantage" (24). He avoids the fact that he does mediocre work and even feels worthy enough to ask his boss, Howard, for an easier, non-traveling job. While asking for the job, Willy mentions his friendship with Howard's father in the hopes that their close relationship gives him an advantage. Even after Howard responds, " It's a business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own

weight,” (60), Willy fights for the job. He believes that he deserves it but his lack of hard work leads his boss to fire him. Confused, the newly unemployed man questions the decision and explains, “ I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked that nothing—” (75). The salesman constantly depends on his popularity and physical appearance to get ahead at work but, in the end, his warped idea of the business world leads him to lose his job.

In addition to his troubles with work, Willy’s flawed way of life makes him become a misguided father. Despite what is actually right, he teaches his sons, Biff and Happy, that popularity is essential for success and grades do not matter. When Biff’s intelligent classmate, Bernard, pushes Biff to study, Willy assures his sons that they will do much better in the business world than Bernard because “ the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want” (21). The disoriented father even says that Biff’s football coach would not be mad about Biff stealing a ball “ because he likes you” (18). Willy never yells at Biff for stealing or earning poor grades because he wants his sons to like him and have faith in the lessons they are taught. At times, Biff and Happy’s father even encourages their thefts by declaring, “ I got a couple of fearless characters there” (35). Also, he often tells them the story of how his brother, Ben, gains his riches “ on the basis of being well liked” (65-6). Willy teaches Biff and Happy these lessons in order for them to be successful but, ironically, his teachings lead them to fail just like him. He remains so warped by his beliefs that they shield him from thinking logically as a good father.

Above all, Willy Loman's desire to be well liked becomes so crucial that he is unable to accept love from his family. Despite the fact that Willy yells at his wife, Linda, and orders her around frequently, she shows a deep love for him. Linda regularly encourages her husband by proclaiming, " Well, next week you'll do better," (23) and, " Darling, you're the handsomest man in the world" (24). She understands the difference between Willy as a provider and Willy as her husband, something that he is never able to recognize in his warped reality. He lives in a world where he needs to be well liked, not well loved. Therefore, he disregards Linda's love and looks at his reality with her as him simply being " the salesman" with a wife and two sons. For this reason, Willy cheats on Linda with the woman, who is nothing more than a tool for him to feel well liked. Finally, at a very momentous part of the play, the father discovers, " Biff—he likes me" (106) but is soon corrected by Linda who claims, " He loves you, Willy" (106). This inability to understand Biff's love truly shows how delusional Willy has become. Therefore, the salesman's obsession with being liked makes him have a difficult time understanding love.

Due to his flawed idea of the key to success, Willy Loman develops a warped reality of his work, fatherhood and love in general. He becomes a failure in the business world because he puts no effort into his job. The salesman also disappoints as a father by raising his sons with the same foolish morals that he lives by. Eventually, Willy is even unable to accept the love from his own family. He has taught himself to live in a world where he must be liked by everyone to triumph, but, in reality, this leads him to fail as a businessman, a

father, and a husband. By believing that popularity is essential in accomplishing the American Dream, Willy and many others lose sight of the true key to success. The need to be well liked gets in the way of hard work for the salesman and keeps him from becoming someone better. In this way, Death of a Salesman teaches a valuable lesson that popularity can only get a person so far in life. He or she must earn the rest through their dedication, commitment and overall hard work.