



Finding
THE MAGICAL
REALM OF
HAPPINESS

JASON CAI

FINDING THE MAGICAL REALM OF HAPPINESS

MOTIVATIONAL BOOK ON FINDING HAPPINESS,
POSITIVITY AND INSPIRATION IN LIFE

BY JASON CAI

© Jason Cai 2019. All Rights Reserved.

First Edition, 2019

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system – except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine or newspaper – without permission in writing from the author.

Permission should be addressed in writing to
jasoncaimotivationalwritings@gmail.com

Disclaimer:

Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

Published in Singapore

Publisher/ Author: Jason Cai

Editors: Jessie, Karen, Novi, Clarice, Vicknes

Copy Editor: Tonya Blust

ISBN: 978-981-11-7767-5 Paperback

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to my lovely wife, who is always supportive of what I do, and to my son, who inspires me to be a better person every day.

To all my Facebook friends and followers who have always encouraged me to write a book: This is a dream come true, not just for me but for all of us. Thank you for being part of this amazing journey.

I would like to thank a few contributors, namely, Marie, Dilah, Valerie, Jane, Joanne, Shurn Heng and Arly, for their beautiful sharings, which I have included as guest posts in this book.

I also want to thank a group of people whom I never thought I would thank. They are the people who have been unkind, difficult and mean to me. Through every encounter with them, I have learnt to be wiser in managing my emotions and to achieve a positive outcome. Thank you for helping me become stronger and appreciate the wonderful people around me.

To everyone who purchased a copy of this book, I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude for your support. May this book be beneficial to you in many ways. May this book also inspire you towards a meaningful life filled with happiness, love and peace.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

"Jason is able to reach out to everyone with his simplistic yet inspirational words. "Finding the Magical Realm of Happiness" is a book that gives a deeper understanding of how you make decisions and react to certain things in your life. It is a book that I can go to again and again. Very good read! Thank you, Jason!"

~ Belinda Yap

"Insightful and inspirational! Thank you for writing this wonderful book that shares your own experiences. It truly helps others understand the reasons behind different emotions that can be felt, so we can learn to be more empathetic about what others may be going through".

~ Lynn Tay

"Jason's writing reminds me of how being simple is also a blessing and how we should be grateful for what we have. A very inspirational book which I strongly recommend. Keep up the good work and please continue writing more for the benefit of all".

~Jeannie Huang

"Thanks for writing this book. It is such an inspirational and enjoyable read. It reminds me of how simple life can be, and how we should appreciate and feel blessed with what we have. An easy-to-read book with many real-life examples; I would urge all to read it".

~ Celine Hapdia

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Cai is a kindness advocate, a messenger of positivity and a motivational writer. Despite being an ordinary person, Jason aspires to change the world through acts of random kindness, one at a time. With that dream, he started Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.), an initiative to encourage friends in Singapore to engage in simple acts of kindness for one another, thereby making the community a more heart-warming place for us to live in.

P.A.R.K. is the first of many ground-up community projects that Jason initiated. He started a community group called P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P), a platform that shares kindness opportunities, thus making it easier for like-minded friends to start giving. The group has more than 13,000 members to date and is actively giving love and support to the underprivileged, both young and old. The group also plays a key role in helping volunteer groups and non-profit organisations find volunteer resources and sponsorships.

In view of the public outcry over frequent train breakdowns, Jason initiated a support group called The Alternate Transport Advisory & Singapore Magnificent Rescue Team (TATA SMRT). The group helps frustrated commuters cope with the breakdowns by alerting them, through crowdsource reporting, to real-time situations on the ground, as well as by offering advice about alternate transportation options and routes. The group has more than 9,000 members to date and has been featured by the mainstream media. Through this

project, Jason hopes to reduce the anger and frustrations felt by affected commuters and, in turn, create more positivity by giving people the opportunity to help one another work around the transport issue.

Jason is also the founder of the interest group What Makes Us Happy in Singapore, through which he encourages friends to share what makes them happy about living in Singapore. Jason hopes that the group members will be constantly reminded of their blessings and that they will influence one another to be happy.

In 2014, when Singapore experienced its longest drought in 60 years, Jason co-founded a community group called Let It Rain in Singapore, to encourage friends to reuse water as a means of saving dying plants and trees on the streets and in the parks. This initiative, which helps increase evaporation and transpiration from trees, also aims to bring about the rain that will end the rain-less spell. Jason believes that every citizen has a part to play in making things better, especially when Singapore is facing any national crisis.

Jason is also very passionate about writing motivational articles to encourage his friends to be positive and to live life to the fullest. He hopes that the experiences he shares in these articles can help readers better cope with their negative emotions and make happiness a choice. He believes that when one is positive and happy, one will be willing to do more for the world.

In his first-ever fundraising campaign, Jason shaved bald to create awareness of childhood cancer. To date, he has raised over SGD\$200,000 in donations for the beneficiaries of the Children Cancer Foundation (CCF).

Jason also founded The Encouragements for Little Fighters (ELF) Project, through which he gathered a group of like-minded friends to send encouragements and well-wishes to young children battling terminal illnesses and suffering in pain. The goal was to give much-needed moral support to these children and their parents.

"Jason's a total star – giving, loving, generous and always advocating for meaningful and heartfelt projects".

~ Amanda Blum

"A wonderful individual who inspires many more to create value in everyday difficulties and challenges".

~ Sebastian Ho

"An intellectual writer; his stories, life experience and personal thoughts are very encouraging, full of passion and inspiration. Thumbs up!"

~ Mandy Law

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1

VOLUME 1: THE MIST OF NEGATIVITY

CHAPTER 1

TAMING THE ANGRY MONSTERSAURUS (ANGER MANAGEMENT)

5

CHAPTER 2

CATCHING THE GREEN-EYED ELF (ENVY)

30

CHAPTER 3

THE UNICORN RIDER (AT WORK)

46

CHAPTER 4

MINING THE GOBLIN'S GOLD (MONEY)

70

CHAPTER 5

FINDING THE HEALING FAIRY (DEATH, LOSS & SADNESS)

90

VOLUME 2: THE LIGHT OF POSITIVITY

CHAPTER 6

THE MAGICAL WAND (OF JOY & CONTENTMENT)

109

CHAPTER 7

INSPIRING GEMSTONES (OF POSITIVE ENERGY)

142

CHAPTER 8
DRAGON'S HEART (LOVE & KINDNESS)
172

CHAPTER 9
PHOENIX'S FLAME (MARRIAGE)
203

CHAPTER 10
PEGASUS BOOK (OF PARENTING)
226

VOLUME 3: THE PINNACLE OF THE REALM

CHAPTER 11
SEEKING THE WHITE-BEARDED WIZARD (MEANING & PURPOSE)
261

CHAPTER 12
THE SPELL FACTORY (OF INSPIRATION & MOTIVATION)
309

CHAPTER 13
SCALING THE MOUNTAIN OF GIANTS (OVERCOMING ISSUES)
344

CHAPTER 14
ELIXIR OF IMMORTALITY (INSPIRATIONAL FALLEN HEROES)
367

BONUS CHAPTER: MOTIVATIONAL QUOTES
383

RESOURCES & CONTACT
390

INTRODUCTION

We are all searching for the magical realm of happiness, the place where, and the time when, we will finally be happy and contented. Being happy is what gives life its meaning, so we aspire to achieve it.

We look around and start comparing ourselves with people living in other countries. We see the good things happening over there and conclude that their lifestyles are much better than ours. The idea of migration comes to our minds. We also envisage the day when we can break free of the routine cycle of work, debts and commitments, so we tag retirement and financial freedom to this magical realm of happiness. The earlier we can retire, the sooner we will be happy.

After years of hard work and anticipation, the day finally arrives when we get to the desired place or stage in our lives where we have always wanted to be. We have finally reached the magical realm of happiness.

However, we start to realise that things are not as rosy as we thought they would. The country in which we had always hoped to settle down for the long term begins showing us the disadvantages of living there. We then realise that we took many things for granted when we were still in our home countries. We failed to appreciate many blessings when we had them.

Let's talk about retirement. The day finally comes when we no longer have to worry about finances or face mean bosses or difficult customers. However, while some issues are gone, new issues are

coming up. We realise that we are no longer in the optimal health to enjoy what we have always wanted to do. We were so engrossed in reaching our financial goals, we neglected our health in the process.

I hope to share with you, through this book, the notion that the magical realm of happiness is right in front of you, regardless of your age or financial status. There is no physical place or stage in life where you can go to and be forever happy. However, you can create this place yourself, through a shift in thinking. The mindset change is so powerful, it will allow you to see the magical realm of happiness now, wherever you are and in whatever you do.

This book has three volumes. The first volume is all about uncovering the negative emotions surrounding us, so we gain more awareness of the waves of negative influence around us and learn how to react to them. The second volume is about generating the positive energy—such as kindness, patience and happiness—with which we must diffuse our negative energy. Once we are more aware of the negative energy in our surroundings and learn how to diffuse it with positive energy, we can find our motivation and purpose in life. This will be covered in the third volume of the book.

The core content of this trilogy is a compilation of my writings from the past six years (2013 to 2019). I have categorised the articles according to their genre for easy reference. I hope that the book will come in handy for you whenever you are besieged by negative emotions, facing challenges or lacking motivation in life. It can be the handbook that you carry with you throughout life, as it becomes your

dose of positive energy and source of inspiration, especially in difficult times. Because we are on a "magical" theme, I have named every chapter after a magical character or element to make it more special and interesting.

I hereby present to you my first motivational book, *Finding the Magical Realm of Happiness*. I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

VOLUME 1

THE MIST OF NEGATIVITY

The mist of negativity clouds your vision of the magical realm of happiness. Once the mist is cleared, you will realise that the magical realm is right in front of you. Learning how to deal with negative emotions is an act of clearing the mist of negativity. Once your vision is clear, you will see your blessings and all the reasons for happiness. Volume 1 of this book is a series of chapters to help you deal with the negative emotions and events in your daily life.

CHAPTER 1

TAMING THE ANGRY MONSTERSAURUS (ANGER MANAGEMENT)

The Angry Monstersaurus, when released from its cage, will unleash fury so devastating that the magical land will be in ruins in seconds. You own this creature and you will suffer the worst damage. With every reason to be angry and frustrated, you edge one step closer to opening the door of its cage.

[Author's Note]

Anger lives inside all of us. It is not a question of whether or not we have anger but, rather, of when we will be triggered into an angry outburst. In a stressful city like Singapore, we may be easily triggered due to the pressure we are under. In this chapter, I share with you the incidents during which I felt triggered, how I reacted to them and my thoughts on anger management. I hope they are useful to you when it comes to managing your own anger.

Anger Is the Gun Firing in the Opposite Direction

Years ago, when I first started work, I had fire in my belly and worked in a stressful environment. I was easily irritated by many things and people, especially those who did not take ownership of their work or who thought that the world owed them a living.

I specialised in writing long, angry emails to "wake them up". One senior even commented that he was impressed with how my email could "slit" people apart, which encouraged my actions. Anger was a powerful tool in my hand. I felt like I had a gun which I could fire at will, aimed at anyone who pissed me off. I later realised the gun was firing in the opposite direction.

While I felt mildly satisfied after sending each mail, the exchange that came afterwards meant that I had to keep up the momentum. Thus, more anger was generated. Even when there was no exchange, I brought the angry thoughts home with me because they did not go away after office hours. I was tormented by the angry thoughts as my mind kept replaying the unhappy scenes that had taken place earlier

and that gave me justification to sustain the anger. It also affected my relationship with my loved ones, as I became less tolerant of their shortcomings.

Years later, I have learnt to let go of the things I cannot control—for example, human behaviour or the actions of others. Instead, I focus on the things I can control, such as my reactions, my thoughts and my emotions. There will be people out there who will put you down, whether intentionally or not, but you make the decision as to how you will react to them. It may be a reflex action to get irritated or angry but it is possible to train ourselves to not react that way. The reward? Inner peace, good health, happiness and the ability to fully enjoy quality time with our loved ones.

Words of Wisdom From a 75-Year-Old Taxi Driver

One day, I met a very wise old man during a trip. He was a 75-year-old taxi uncle who was due to retire a month later after 40 years in service. He shared about how his passengers gave him the wrong instructions but still scolded him for the mistakes he made when he followed them.

Guess how he reacted when he was scolded? He smiled and apologised for it. He explained that getting into an argument with the passenger would do him no good. The passenger might file a complaint even though they were in the wrong and the taxi company would still summon him for questioning and to write a report. In the midst of these follow-ups, he would waste precious time during which he could have earned more income.

Uncle mentioned that going into a head-on collision with an angry person is like receiving a ball of fire. It only serves to bring harm to oneself, with no benefits at all. He emphasised the need to cultivate patience and that the best time to practise this is when people vent their anger on you.

I asked him how we could take things lying down when we are accused of something we did not do. Surely, we must clarify, especially if that person is someone close to us. Uncle said that any clarification can take place after that person has cooled down. Trying to clarify when the other party is angry is adding fuel to the fire; nothing gets in and, in fact, things will only worsen. He said if one can keep quiet and not engage that person, he or she will cool down faster. He also mentioned that a person who is hot-tempered will always suffer under their own anger, so there is no need to try to get even with them.

So many valuable life lessons from a man who has lived three-quarters of a century on Earth.

The Inflated Balloons We Carry With Us

When we blow air into a balloon, it inflates. When we continue to blow, the balloon gets bigger and bigger. Eventually, it reaches a point at which we need only a single puff for the balloon to burst in our face.

Why do people get angry easily, with a single incident causing them to lose their head? The reason is that most people are carrying a very inflated balloon. The air inside represents the negative thoughts and

emotions that are bottled up inside us. It takes only a slight provocation or misunderstanding to ignite a full-blown outburst.

It is not surprising that we are inflating our own balloons daily, given the negativity all around us. On a world front, terrorism is happening and lives are being lost; the humanitarian crisis is causing great suffering and countries are experiencing friction and threatening war. On a local front, people stir up anger and unhappiness by reminding you about how tough it is to live in Singapore. Coupled with stress at work and about the issues we face in life, it is no wonder that our balloons are on the verge of bursting. When the balloon bursts, we are the ones who get hurt the most.

However, it does not always have to be this way. We can make a conscious effort to release air from the balloon and learn how to manage anger when we are triggered. It is not straightforward or easy but it is possible. It will not happen overnight but, with practise, it gets easier and will eventually become a habit.

Is It Worth Getting Angry?

I had arranged to meet a buyer from Carousell at 5.30 pm. When it was almost 5.30 pm, he asked if we could meet at 6 pm instead, as he would be late and 6 pm would be safe timing. I acceded to his request but reminded him that it could not be later than 6 pm, as I had to rush off for another appointment. When it was 6 pm, he told me that he would be there at 6.10 pm. He eventually showed up around 6.20 pm. I had waited almost an hour for him, as I had arrived before 5.30 pm. He saw the item and said it was not what he wanted, then left

I thought I could react in two ways. I could give him a piece of my mind, scold him for being late repeatedly and start a quarrel with him. If I did this, I would bring the anger home and share the negative energy with my loved ones, making them feel angry as well. Or, I could simply tell him that it was alright, wish him well and move on.

I chose the second option and it brought me peace. If I had chosen to get even with him, I probably would have had a bad evening, with all the negative emotions filling me up. The worst part was, it would not change anything, bring back the lost 50 minutes of my life or get my item sold. It would only serve to create anger and frustration, which I absolutely did not need or deserve.

We live in a world where there is so much stress because things are developing at lightning speed. The pace of life is fast and time is always limited. As a result, we easily lose patience. When we perceive that someone is wasting our precious time, we get angry. We lose our ability to tolerate many things, even with our loved ones. It is a vicious cycle and we are the ones who suffer the most. Over time, anger becomes a reflex action and we always find someone to blame when things do not go well. When we let anger take control, we are actually unwittingly giving up ownership of our happiness.

Think about it. The next time you have to decide whether to get really angry, ask yourself if it is really worth it, or if it would be a double blow to you. Will you really feel better after you get angry? We have absolute control over our emotions—a process that gets easier when

we continually cultivate positive thoughts and a positive mindset. You have a choice.

Negative Thoughts Creep in to Burn Down Your Wooden House

Anyone who has lived in or seen the traditional type of Kampong houses, which are made of wood and tree leaves, will know that they catch fire easily. That is why the modern-day HDB brick houses are being built, to prevent a single spark from igniting the whole house.

The mind behaves like a wooden house and a negative thought creeps in like a small spark. The fire starts slowly but, before we know it, the whole house is on fire.

We may be watching TV or doing household chores, but the thoughts make our mind wander off to ruminate about an event which makes us angry. Our mind replays the scenes and justifies the anger. Then we start wanting to blame someone for our misery.

The negative thought of worry can also creep in while we are carrying out our routine work. As the mind manifests the thought, we start to feel more insecure. The mind, our wooden house, is on fire now. We cannot stop worrying and these worries soon become fears.

When the house we live in catches fire, the person who gets hurt is not the person who started the fire. It is us! The fire will also harm the people who are near the burning house, like our family members, because we are passing the negative energy on to them. Therefore, we must put out the fire before it does further damage.

How do we do that? First, we consciously recognise the thoughts in our minds. While these thoughts may be happening in the background while we do our stuff, we can learn to be mindful of them, especially when they are bothering us.

Then, we need to ask ourselves two critical questions. 1. Where are these thoughts (anger, worries, fears) leading us? Definitely nowhere physically because we're still where we are. 2. What are we achieving with these thoughts? Nothing more than negative energy. If there is an issue to be solved, our thoughts should revolve around solutions, not anger, worries or illogical fears.

We will experience unhappiness from time to time. We will be angered by the actions of others, including those closest to us. So, I hope that you will remember this analogy when your mind swarms with negative thoughts like anger or excess worry. When your wooden house is on fire, leave it and put out the fire. Otherwise, you and your loved ones will get hurt.

Hate Generates More Anger

When you do not like someone and happen to see that person doing very well, living a seemingly happier life than you are, do you feel uncomfortable? You may be wondering what this person has done to deserve these blessings after having inflicted hurt on you.

That is the power of hate, which brings about more anger. You see that while the person is living his or her life elsewhere, he or she is no longer inflicting any pain on you (at that present moment). Instead, it

is the hate and anger inside you that are causing you to suffer more. The only way to feel better is to put down all the hate and anger and shift the focus to happier, more worthy areas of your life.

Whatever hurt or damage was done unto you has passed. If you cannot forgive that person, it is fine. However, you should not torture yourself with more sufferings by harbouring hate and anger, by invoking past painful memories. The reasons for happiness and unhappiness lay in front of you every day, so make a wise choice, my dear friends.

Holding Onto Pee

Ever had to hold your pee for a long time because you could not find a washroom or were stuck during a long journey? It is definitely not a comfortable feeling. Bottling negative emotions like anger has the same effect on your mind as does holding your pee.

Say you are angry with someone and your mind keeps replaying how the person has hurt you, like a broken record. This creates an endless loop that builds and sustains your anger. In the end, the person who suffers the most is you, not the person who made you angry. The same goes for the other negative emotions you have bottled up inside you.

You can bring this state of mind everywhere—to the movies, to a nice restaurant—but you will never truly enjoy what you are doing. It is like watching an exciting movie while you have a full bladder. You must find a way to release it.

If you are harbouring negative emotions now, try telling yourself this:

"I acknowledge that I am feeling negative because of a certain incident or person, but I also have the wisdom to know that having these thoughts is not going to help me in any way. Therefore, I choose to let these thoughts go and to shift my focus onto something positive and meaningful. I choose to love myself because I deserve to be happy".

[Guest Post] Dealing With Provocation

I share this piece of writing from a friend because I think it is good to learn how to react to provocation and how to control our anger, especially in front of our kids. This sharing also reminds us about how unkind words and actions can hurt people. So, let us all be responsible for our words and actions, online or offline.

"In my years of motherhood, I've met many different people who added value to my life and to the lives of my boys. But, also, people did the total opposite. I would like to share what happened on the bus this morning on our way to school.

When we were about to alight, J1 made his own way down from the upper deck of the bus. J1 has always been an independent child. J2 was trying to catch up to his elder brother. I stood in front of J2 as he did his best to balance his way down the steps of the double-decker bus. He eventually made it down but tripped a little at the end and sat on the floor. He stood up again and regained his balance. At that point, I heard someone say, "SERVES YOU RIGHT" .

I looked up and saw a lady who looked very much like Cruella de Vil from *101 Dalmatians*. I pretended not to hear her as my blood started to boil. She proceeded to glare at my sons and me, then turned to the person beside her and said these exact words: "What a lousy mother. She doesn't know how to handle two kids, letting them walk on their own. Very lousy mother" . She continued to glare at my boys and me.

At this point, I just hoped that one day she would realise how blessed it is that I have Jesus in my life. Otherwise, the morning would have ended very differently. It took all I had to not snap at her. It also took all I had for me to smile and say, 'Thank you very much for your advice.' I held my sons in my arms and alighted from the bus.

I do not need any validation that I'm a good mom. Or that my kids are well-behaved. I'm not blind and I do not expect everyone to love them. But now I want to speak on behalf of all mothers. Sharing good advice with mothers out of love will always be something we appreciate and treasure. But to you, Ms. Cruella, and to everyone else who thinks they have the right to tell mothers how they should be mothers: I'm sorry, you are not appreciated. Our kids came out of us and God entrusted them to us, so too bad for you. It is best that you keep your opinions to yourself if those opinions are not coming from a place of goodwill. Thank you for showing me what I never want my kids to be when they grow up" .

Trigger Awareness

Every one of us, no matter how good-tempered, will be triggered by something. Take my dad, for example. He is one of the gentlest people

you could ever meet. Many of my relatives describe him as a person with no temper. However, once, while we were at a carpark, my dad had just finished reversing his lorry into a lot when another driver came along and accused him of stealing her lot. My dad's eyes doubled in size and he almost wanted to pick a fight with her. His body language was already showing that he was triggered.

So, it is important to understand what our triggers are, why we are triggered and what happens after we are triggered. Different people may have different triggers. Often, we each have more than one trigger. Children's crying, wife's nagging, hubby's insensitivity or even when a stranger accidentally knocks into you—all these can be triggers. Managing triggers is part of anger management because it is the prelude to anger itself. Identifying and understanding your triggers can prevent you or your loved ones from stepping into a field of landmines.

When triggers turn into anger, we must ask ourselves: How does anger help? How long do we want to suffer under our anger? By default, we will give ourselves many reasons to justify the anger. We will replay the scenes over and over, trying to blame someone for the injustice or misery. However, in reality, nothing changes and we suffer from our angry thoughts.

We need a wake-up call. The above questions serve this purpose. Letting go of angry thoughts and choosing to think about something

happy and constructive is a way to be kind to ourselves. It is also a way to make better use of our time. It will not be straightforward but, if we are proactive in practising it, it will work. If we do not do anything about our anger and let it take control, it will manifest into hate or other undesirable consequences, which we may later live to regret.

In our fast-paced and stressful society, triggers and anger are common. If we want to live happy and fulfilling lives, we must learn how to keep these negative emotions in check.

Dealing With Anger as a Reflex Action

I was at a bakery to buy some snacks when I left my drink on a table near the cashier counter. While receiving payment, the cashier accidentally knocked over my cup. My drink spilled all over my shirt and pants. At that instant, I was quite pissed off. It was as though being angry was a reflex action when something unpleasant happened to me. I then proceeded to find a few reasons to justify my anger:

1. The cashier was careless and should have seen the cup.
 2. The drink was already too expensive. The fact that it had spilled meant I had even less of it.
 3. I would have to walk back quite a distance to get another drink if the whole cup had spilled.
 4. I had to wash up, as the drink was all over my hands, shirt and pants.
- However, the more critical questions I had to ask myself were: How does being angry help solve the problem? By being angry, what am I compromising? I am actually compromising my health, both physical and emotional.

In life, we often find many reasons to get angry. We could be angry with our bosses, our colleagues, our spouses, our children, our parents, strangers on the street, the government, the high cost of living, what people say on cyberspace and so on.

Anger, when not managed properly, will lead to hate and hate leads to many uglier things. Physically, anger can lead to increased blood pressure, headache, insomnia and heart-related problems. Emotionally, anger is a negative emotion. If allowed to grow, it will soon become a habit and one may easily get angry at even the smallest thing. A vicious cycle is formed as one gets angry easily, reacts unpleasantly and incites more anger and hate.

All this while little is done to solve the problem and a lot of effort and energy are expended on being angry. I do not expect everyone to remain calm at all times but, when that bout of anger strikes, I think we can ask ourselves one simple question: How does being angry help solve the problem or change the situation for the better? Or, is anger causing more harm than good? This self-questioning can cause the logical part of the brain to choose to do the sensible thing. Focus on the solution, not the problem. I leave you with this quote: "You will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger" .

A Box of Matchsticks

Every one of us carries a box of matchsticks within us. Some people have hidden it so well, it is almost non-existent. Others are simply lighting matchstick after matchstick every day. This box of matchsticks represents your anger. The peculiar thing is, the more you use the

matchsticks, the more of them you have and the more quickly they are replenished.

* The 4 Stages of Anger *

Stage 1: Matchstick is taken out of the box and struck against a rough surface (Trigger)

This is the first stage of how anger forms. There must be a trigger that leads to an unhappy thought or reaction, just like how a matchstick is struck against a rough surface. Sparks may form but there is no fire yet. We often ignore this crucial stage because anger has not yet taken a definite shape. However, this is the best time to stop anger in its tracks. The knowledge that you are already triggered, as a form of awareness, can help you mitigate the damage that anger causes later.

Stage 2: Matchstick is lighted (Ignition)

When you are triggered, angry thoughts form. At this stage, you have already given your mind permission to be angry. The fire has started. Anger is slowly taking shape and building up. It is just like adding wood to a growing flame.

Stage 3: The lighted matchstick is thrown into its box to burn with other matchsticks (Explosion)

This is the most dangerous stage because angry thoughts flood the mind like a tsunami hitting the coast. There is almost no stopping anger as it takes control of you and, subsequently, your actions.

Anger can lead to ugly confrontations. It may even lead to serious and violent outcomes. Some people may commit crimes because they cannot manage their own anger and they act in a moment of rage. Angry outbursts can strain relationships with our loved ones, as we end up saying things that we do not really mean.

Stage 4: The fire stops burning and everything is charred (Damage)
This is the stage at which the damage is already done. The anger may have subsided but after it may come regret and permanent damage that you cannot reverse.

As with all major illnesses, such as cancer, it is important to catch anger early in Stage 1, with more awareness. If that is not possible, we need to deal with anger in Stage 2 and find ways to diffuse it before it evolves into Stages 3 and 4.

Choosing to not react with Anger is NOT choosing to sweep any issue under the carpet. Instead, it is to focus on the solution that solves the issue, with a cool and positive mind and without the need for anger. That way, we bypass all the finger-pointing and the blame game and can reach a solution much faster.

Less Anger, More Tolerance and More Empathy

I share two unpleasant incidents that I encountered and my reactions to them. The first incident happened when I asked a shopkeeper about where to locate a particular product. She answered in a very impatient and rude manner.

The second incident happened when I was in the lift with some neighbours who lived on the same block. When the lift door opened halfway through, I moved in a little to make space for more neighbours to enter. I did not realise that I was invading the space of an elderly lady. She got irritated and started ranting at me.

My initial reactions to both incidents were negative and defensive in nature. An instinctive part of me wanted to get even with them because I thought that I was totally undeserving of such treatment, especially when I had done nothing wrong. However, on both occasions, I chose to calm myself down and move on.

I feel that sometimes the best reaction to any form of negativity is to choose not to react. This is because, when we get into an argument with angry folks, we are sucked into the vicious cycle of negativity. Soon, we will be hurling abuses at one another, which will make our day even more miserable. Thereafter, we tend to share the unhappy experience with our friends and loved ones. When we do so, we revisit memories of the confrontation, reminding ourselves about the unhappiness and making us feel angry again. This creates a vicious cycle of anger and unhappiness. When reacting becomes a habit, we remain stuck in one vicious cycle after another whenever someone does something unpleasant to us.

I feel that a better approach is to not react to these people who are unkind to us and to avoid getting into a confrontation with them. When we move away and calm ourselves, we may better understand why some people react in a certain way. The rude shopkeeper could

have been having a bad day. Also, the weather was really hot that day, which might have contributed to her bad mood. The elderly lady who reacted negatively could have been overly concerned about protecting her physical health and preventing an accident from happening (e.g. stopping me from accidentally stepping on her toes).

Whatever the case, not reacting to negativity stops that negativity in its place. Therefore, it does not evolve into something more unpleasant. Also, not reacting is not a sign of weakness or cowardice. It is a sign of sensibility and maturity. We cannot control how others think or react, but we can certainly control how we think or react to their actions. Understanding this fact makes a world of difference.

Lastly, these two incidents did not affect me much because I chose to not let them affect me negatively. They did not derail my motivation to spread kindness and influence others to do good. In fact, I am more determined to do so after these incidents because it is evident that kindness is clearly lacking in some ways. If we can show more kindness to others, perhaps we will be more patient and tolerant towards others, even when we feel intruded upon in some way. If we choose to be kind instead of getting even with others, we will likely feel happier and achieve inner peace. Do not focus on the negativity. Move on, be kind and help others. You will definitely feel better than dwelling on the unhappy stuff.

[Guest Post] Anger Management

The following is an insightful sharing from a friend regarding anger management.

"I am happy to share my experience with anger management. It is very difficult to make me angry. I once read that when you are angry with someone, you allow them to live rent-free in your mind. That stuck with me. As I grow older, I feel that my anger is a sacred energy and that most things or people are not important enough to evoke that sacred energy.

I have also learnt that understanding and empathising with others are much better for our heart than anger. Everyone has a story that no one knows in-depth, as we didn't walk in their shoes. Cut them some slack—and, yes, when they are too annoying and it is beyond our means to talk sense into them, you should give less of yourself so that you are not dragged down to the pits.

Everything has its timing and you are right—we can't control most things and people. So, we do not need to think that we have to fix and mend every fault we see. Some are not our battles to fight. Use your bullets where you can have results and make the world a better place" .

Choosing Not to Get Angry About a No-show

I waited almost an hour for a buyer who did not show up for our appointment. I tried calling her a few times but her phone was busy. She had mentioned that her phone could not receive calls, so we agreed to meet at a specific location at a specific time, just like the good old days when there were no mobile phones.

I arrived 10 minutes early, as I thought she might be early, too. I waited and waited. Every time I felt like leaving, I told myself to wait another five minutes, as she might be held up by some urgent matters. As I neared the hour mark, I was convinced that she was not coming. I could sense that my disappointment was slowly turning into anger as I started having thoughts of wanting to give her a piece of my mind by sending her an angry message for her no-show.

Then I asked myself this: How would getting angry and scolding her benefit me? It would not compensate for the time lost, nor would it get the deal done. It would only serve to generate more negative emotions, which would affect me emotionally, mentally and physically. So, I decided to not get angry and, instead, to focus on how to solve my problem. The solution revolved around how to sell my product, not on how to get even with the buyer. I knew it was my choice to not go down the path of anger and destruction because doing so would be counter-productive and simply create more suffering for everyone.

Dealing With Angry People

I was carrying a sling bag containing a huge parcel while on my way to a bus stop via a narrow pathway. In front of me was a woman, maybe in her late 40s, walking at a snail's pace and blocking the whole walkway. I asked her politely, "I am sorry, can you excuse me and let me pass first?" She did not reply, so I gently tapped her arm, smiled at her and asked her to let me pass. She turned around and gave me a displeased look.

After walking past her, I continued my journey. Suddenly, I heard someone shouting angrily behind me. It went something like this: "Use your hands to carry your box. Why are you using a sling bag? You are a man!" I knew it was the lady whom I had overtaken, but I ignored her. She kept ranting even as I moved farther away from her.

At that moment, when I chose not to react, not even turning my head to look at her or give her the killer stare, I remembered the words of a wise 75-year-old taxi driver: "If someone scolds you (even when you are not at fault) and you keep quiet, the person is scolding himself" .

Also, I think there is absolutely no need to react at all. Some people have bad days and decide to vent at unlucky souls who cross their paths. I experienced that so many times when I worked as an NTUC cashier. Some people are easily triggered by the smallest thing. It is their problem, not yours, so do not absorb their negative energies and ruin your day. If you do so and you replay all the angry scenes in your mind, you will only suffer more.

No matter how carefully, nicely or politely you treat others, if someone wants to make life difficult for you, he or she will do it. It's just like how you can be a very careful driver on the road but still be unable to prevent a reckless driver from bumping into you from behind. The key is to not focus on how you can stop anything undesirable from happening to you. Rather, you should focus on how you react when

something undesirable happens. We can still choose to take a deep breath, relax, keep calm, be positive and think of a solution.

Dealing With Insults

I have been called "死人脸". It literally means "a dead man's face". The person who called me that was the bus driver of a premium bus service, for which I paid double the usual fare for a more direct ride. He called me that because he was angry with me for not having moved to the front earlier to alert him that I was alighting.

He was speeding from one bus stop to next when I pressed the stop button and he had to slow down to let me alight. He got angry and started scolding me for not moving to the front. When I looked shocked by his verbal abuse and moved to the front door, he scolded me further and called me "死人脸". Can you imagine how I felt being a customer who paid for premium bus service and, in return, got scolded by the person who served me?

Part of me wanted to get even with him and start a quarrel or call him something nasty, but I soon calmed myself and realised that it was not worth it. So, I walked away. It was obvious, from his rude behaviour, that this bus driver had some anger issues and was likely to be very irritable. I have been on his bus a few times and I have observed that he never smiles at or greets anyone. I vaguely remembered that he was rude to other passengers as well.

A person living life this way is miserable. A person engulfed in hate and anger is suffering. Instead of getting angry over his actions and

spoiling the rest of my evening, I chose to forgive him because I pitied him. I did not need to get back at him because he was already being punished by his anger and negativity. I am thankful to have met him because he is a good reminder that there are many nice people around me who are unlike him.

I hope this story will encourage friends who have experienced similar incidents. You really do not need to get angry or get even with a person, be it a stranger or someone you know, who tries to hurt you by insulting you. They are hurt by their own hate and anger and they want to pass on the ball of flames to you so that you will get hurt, too. You can make the wise decision to not receive it. In return, you will get the inner peace that you deserve.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE SOME INCIDENTS DURING WHICH YOU REGRET HAVING REACTED WITH ANGER?

WHEN YOU ARE TRIGGERED, HOW DOES GETTING ANGRY HELP WITH THE SITUATION? OR DOES IT MAKE MATTERS WORSE?

IF A SIMILAR SITUATION OCCURRED IN THE FUTURE, HOW DIFFERENTLY WOULD YOU REACT?

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING HARMFUL EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH ANGER?

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE	(YES/NO)
INCREASED ANXIETY	(YES/NO)
DIGESTION PROBLEMS	(YES/NO)
HEADACHE	(YES/NO)
INSOMNIA	(YES/NO)
HEART ATTACK	(YES/NO)
STROKE	(YES/NO)

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES YOU ARE LIKELY TO USE?

(TICK IF YOU AGREE)

TAKE A TIMEOUT	<input type="radio"/>
TAKE A SHOWER	<input type="radio"/>
LISTEN TO RELAXING MUSIC	<input type="radio"/>
GET SOME EXERCISE AND SWEAT IT OUT	<input type="radio"/>
REMIND YOURSELF THAT ANGER IS NOT HELPING	<input type="radio"/>
FOCUS ON THE SOLUTION, NOT ON ANGER	<input type="radio"/>
TAKE DEEP BREATHS AND CALM YOURSELF DOWN	<input type="radio"/>
TALK TO SOMEONE WHO LISTENS TO YOU	<input type="radio"/>
THINK OF THE HARMFUL EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH ANGER	<input type="radio"/>

DECLARATION:

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT FOR EVERY MINUTE OF ANGER I EXPERIENCE, I GAIN ONE MINUTE OF PAIN AND LOSE ONE MINUTE OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS.

CHAPTER 2

CATCHING THE GREEN-EYED ELF (ENVY)

The Green-eyed Elf is the thief of your happiness. It usually appears when you see someone having something that you do not have. The elf steals your happiness by making you envious of what others have. So, be alert and catch the elf before it steals all your happiness.

[Author's Note]

We are living in a world of endless comparison. As long as we can find common ground in certain areas, we will compare. This comparison often leads to envy, which then leads to discontentment and unhappiness. I hope to share, in this chapter, ways to break free of this cycle of comparison, envy and unhappiness by reminding ourselves about the blessings we already have.

When You Think You Do Not Have Enough

While you are thinking that your spouse is not sensitive enough, not loving enough or not taking initiative, someone else out there could be suffering from abuse in their marriage.

While you are thinking that your kids are not smart enough or that taking care of them is draining all your time and energy, some parents out there could be struggling to care for a special needs child, some parents could be coping with the loss of a child and some couples could be having problems conceiving.

While you are thinking that your parents are always nagging, overprotective and controlling, there are many out there who grew up without parents' love. Some may not have ever seen their parents.

While you are thinking that your work is overwhelming and your boss is unreasonable, someone out there could be hoping that they have a shot for an interview at your company.

While you are envying people who live on private property and drive

posh cars, someone out there may wish they simply had shelter over their head, a comfortable bed and an uninterrupted supply of electricity, water and gas— just like what you have now.

While you are wishing that you could travel the world like an adventurer, someone out there may simply wish that they had a healthy and able body, like yours, with which to do the simple things in life with their loved ones.

While you are thinking that living in Singapore is so tough, so stressful, so boring, someone out there in the poorer developing nations or someone living in war zones may be wishing that they had been born here, because their fate would have been significantly different.

Unhappiness usually revolves around a comparison with others who are better off than we are. Meanwhile, contentment comes from seeing the blessings we already have. When we can shift our mindsets away from seeing what we do not have and what we are unhappy with and towards seeing what we have and what we are happy with, we have reached another level of enlightenment. To get there takes practise. It takes courage and determination to break free of old habits. However, after going through the process of change, you will find that it is worth it.

Comparison, Envy, Unhappiness

Why is everyone else living in EC or condominiums while I am stuck in my HDB flat? Why do all my friends own cars while I am still taking

public transport? Why is my friend's hubby so sweet and always pampering her with gifts?

Humans love to compare, don't we? The revolution brought about by smartphones and social media gives us more opportunities to do so. We look through the pictures our friends share—pictures of the things they have and the places they have visited. It is perfectly fine to compare but if comparison makes us feel unhappy, we have to do something about it.

I feel that we can make something good out of comparison with others. It should spur us to improve ourselves, achieve more and spread more values to the people around us. We can learn from the people to whom we compare ourselves because they are the perfect role models for us to reach a whole new level of excellence.

If you cannot achieve what your friends have achieved (for example, if one of your close friends is a multi-millionaire), instead of being envious, be happy for this friend for what he or she has achieved. This is one way of shifting focus from feelings of inadequacy, unhappiness and dissatisfaction to a positive feeling of sharing the joy and wishing someone well. I am sure we will feel happier if we think about it this way.

Lastly, we should not always compare ourselves with people who are better off than we are. We need to see the other side of the spectrum, where so many people are worse off than we are, struggling with daily needs such as groceries, utility bills and transport fares. These folks

would be very willing to swap positions with us. Happiness is a choice. It includes choosing to have positive and constructive thoughts because they are necessary for leading happy and fulfilling lives.

Share the Glory, Hide the Pain

Many friends will share with you their cutest baby photos but not many will share with you the woes and challenges of parenting, the sleepless nights, the desperation when their babies are cranky and the worry when their babies are not meeting their milestones.

Many friends will share with you the lovely couples shots with their partners, the surprises and sweet things they do for each other, but not many will share with you the quarrels, the frustration and the unhappiness they experience with their partners.

Many friends will share with you the breathtaking pictures from their vacations or the magnificent view from their new private apartment but not many will share with you the pain and struggle involved in earning every penny to get to where they are, the issues they had at work, the mean bosses, the unsupportive colleagues, the late nights and all the sacrifices.

When you browse social media and start envying your friends for having such adorable kids, the sweetest spouses, that dream holiday trip or apartment, think again. What you see may not be the full picture because there are things that people do not share for various reasons. We all have pains and struggles which very few people know about. No one lives a perfect life in which only good things happen.

Be thankful for what you have because that is the only way to find peace and happiness.

Envy Yourself

If you want to be happy, the person you should envy most is yourself. I am very sure that someone out there is going to envy you for something you have that they do not. It could be your cheerful personality, your quick wit or your kind nature. Find it and "envy" yourself for that.

We live in a world with much comparison to everyone else, yet we conveniently forget that no one is perfect. I envy you, you envy him, he envies her and, in the end, we are all unhappy. If everyone starts looking at what they are blessed with, the enviable traits of being themselves, they will start finding contentment and inner peace there.

Be the person enviable and envy the person you are, because you are the one and only one in this world. You are unique, you are special and you are your own kind of beautiful, so love yourself because you deserve it.

The Tale of Two Saba (Mackerel) Fish

I ordered Saba (mackerel) fish for lunch and sat near the counter. Then this lady came along and ordered the same dish but her fish was much bigger than mine. Why was it so unfair? Why was her fish bigger than mine when we paid the same price?

How do we define fairness? In life, we win some and we lose some.

Nobody can be a winner forever. Her fish was bigger than mine but maybe mine was tastier than hers. Maybe she had it better than me this time, but my life is full of other blessings that she does not have.

Life can give us many reasons to be unhappy, often causing us to shift our focus to the smallest things and make us feel disadvantaged in some ways. We should take a step back and look from that angle, appreciating what we have been blessed with in many other aspects. Also, wishing people well is a great way to diffuse the negativity that comes from envy and jealousy. I choose to think this way: "This lady has a bigger fish; I am happy for her".

Keep your thoughts positive, love the people around you and life will love you back!

Don't Envy Uniqueness; Celebrate It

I was ordering my lunch when the stall owner asked if I wanted parsley on my soup. I politely told him no. That question got me thinking. Some people love to eat parsley while other people (like me) hate it. Some people love spicy food while others cannot handle it. Some people are born with the potential to compete in the Olympics while others struggle to pass their fitness tests. Some people are born with perfect eyesight till old age whereas other people have had poor vision since they were young. Some people have the passion to cook while others are more interested in analysing the stock market. Some graduate to start their own businesses while others prefer to work in an office environment.

The bottom line is that we are all made different and no two people have the exact same characteristics, talents, interests and life experiences. If we are meant to be unique and different, why do we want to compare ourselves to others and make ourselves unhappy just because we have not been blessed in certain ways or have not achieved certain things in life? When we accept our uniqueness and focus on what we are blessed with, we will truly be happy. Run your own race, compete only with yourself and let your uniqueness shine!

Envy Turns Happiness Into Unhappiness

I have some friends who love to compare salaries and bonuses. It starts off with curiosity and them wanting to know how each other is doing. It becomes envy when they realise that they are getting less than others are. The envy then becomes frustration and resentment because they feel that they are not being paid what they deserve. Sometimes, the comparison is across different companies, which makes it more biased. What starts as a happy thing, like receiving a bonus, slowly evolves to become something unhappy. My friends fail to find contentment in something with which they have been blessed.

We are all blessed in different ways. Getting less pay or a smaller bonus does not mean we are less fortunate than others. If one cannot find contentment, one will never be happy, no matter how much one is given. Some people are big earners but they are also big spenders. Some people are poor but they are thrifty and save enough for themselves. Happiness is not a measure of how much we have but, rather, of how contented we are with what we have.

The Grass Is Always Greener on the Other Side

At the train station, I saw a group of Japanese tourists looking lost, so I stopped and guided them along. They were very well-mannered and thanked me for the help. It ended up that we were travelling in the same direction. I realised that they seemed quite fascinated by our train. One of them even took several pictures of the train interior.

I guessed they probably would not have imagined that many in Singapore are unhappy with the train service due to breakdowns and congestion. Speaking of congestion, our peak-hour crowd is probably so much more acceptable than their sardine-packed peak-hour crowd.

The moral of the story: We often use the good things that others have to make ourselves feel unhappy and inadequate simply because we do not have them. We fail to realise that we ourselves have many good things which are the envy of others.

If we could pause for a moment to appreciate the many blessings we have, life would be so much happier and more meaningful, wouldn't it? We should stop trying to get to a place where the grass is greener or where we will finally be happy because we are already there. It is all about perspective.

Envy the Glamour but Forget the Pain and Sacrifice

I have a friend who, just a couple of years ago, was doing quite well in his insurance business. I remember that he drove a sports car to pick me up for lunch. He told me that he had another sports car for his dad.

He shared that his monthly expenses were over \$10,000 but it was alright because he was earning much more than that.

Recently, we chatted again and he told me that he was not doing so well anymore, as a few failed business ventures had lost him a lot of money. Because he was unable to accept his business failures, he tried to use gambling to recoup his losses. He ended up losing more, totaling a million dollars in losses. When we met, he was still in debt.

Life may take you up to the highest point but it can also send your world crashing down, just like what happened to my friend. Do not envy others when you see their glamorous side, for what you do not see could be the pain and sacrifice, or the turbulence they have had to go through thereafter. Find contentment in your life and count your blessings. While you may not be riding a hot air balloon to admire the scenery of the world, you are also safe and sheltered from the punishing thunderstorm.

Comparison With People Who Are Worse Off

If I asked you to not compare yourself to others and you said that you could not because it is human instinct, then I instead ask you to compare yourself with people who are worse off than you are, if you really want to be happy.

It is simple logic; when you compare yourself with someone who is better than you are in certain aspects, you feel inadequate and unsatisfied. When you compare yourself with someone who is worse off than you are, you will feel more blessed in many ways.

Throughout our lives, we are always comparing, whether consciously or subconsciously. As long as we have common ground, we have room to compare. We compare ourselves with our friends and our siblings. We compare our kids, our spouses, etc. However, have we stopped to ask ourselves: What is the true purpose of doing so? If it is to excel or gain happiness, by all means, go ahead and compare. However, if it creates unhappiness, jealousy or anger, stop to re-evaluate because the purpose is meaningless.

Sometimes, you may unknowingly be sucked into this cycle of comparison because another person initiated it. However, I believe that you absolutely have the power to pull yourself out and re-evaluate what you are doing.

Don't spend all your time and energy doing things that are unconstructive and then later regret the fact that you could have spent your time more wisely or have given it to the people who matter most.

It Is Sometimes Not Easy to Not Envy Others.

You are living happily in the HDB heartland. One fine day, the empty plot of land around your neighbourhood starts to be developed and BOOM: A high-rise condo is completed within a few years. You are in awe of the beautiful condo, the balcony you always wished you had and the swimming pool right in front of your doorstep.

You are happily planning your low-budget holiday to Malaysia or Thailand when you browse social media and realise that your friends

are chasing the Northern Lights in Finland, hiking in New Zealand or skiing the Alps in Switzerland.

You are overwhelmed with work and you try to motivate yourself by saying that "busy" is good because the company values and entrusts you with responsibilities. Then you see that your colleague, who is at the same pay grade or who even makes a little more than you do, has very little work. This colleague is always going out for long lunch breaks and leaving on time at the end of the day, without the need to work overtime.

You tell yourself that it does not matter if your hubby forgets your anniversary date. What's more important is that he dotes on the kids and brings home the bread. Then your best friend shares with you that her hubby pampers her with expensive gifts and flowers on every single occasion that can possibly be celebrated.

You tell yourself that it is okay that you do not have enough to buy a private property for investment. Having a decent amount of savings is good enough. You then read in the news about a record En Bloc fever sale in which each homeowner earned a profit of a few million.

The world we live in today, fuelled by the Internet and social media, presents us with so many opportunities to compare and to envy others. With smartphones, we can literally compare on-the-go. We can react in one of two ways: (1) see these things as goals or dreams and work hard to achieve them or (2) be very unhappy because we are not achieving them.

However, what we see may not always be the full picture. The young couple who managed to buy a private property in the town area may be heavily in debt and very stressed out over their finances. The multi-millionaire may have endured an extremely difficult childhood. The couple who profited from the En Bloc sale may have difficulties conceiving a child of their own. Those who can afford to travel to expensive countries may be having health issues. The "perfect" husband may be cheating on his wife. The colleague with nothing much to do may be the first to go when retrenchment comes. Also, going through motions while acting busy at work can be a very painful process.

You never know whether these people whom you are envying could, in fact, be envying you for what you have, e.g. good health, adorable kids, a faithful husband, job satisfaction and a circle of close friends.

So, there is a third way to react. It is the fastest and cheapest way: to be content with what you have and always count your blessings. Always focus on what you have rather than on what you do not have because that is the only way to avoid comparison and envy. Your happiness is at stake.

The Rich, the Famous and the Beautiful

You may look stunning but you cannot find true love because men are attracted more by your looks than by your personality and who you are inside. Someone else may be a plain Jane but she has found a soulmate who will never forsake her, in health or in sickness.

You may have a big house but it is empty and there is no warmth or joy in it. Someone else may have a family of six who is sardine-packed into a small, one-room rental flat but they find joy in bonding with their kids and enjoying the bliss of family life.

You may be rich, famous and powerful but you have no true friends. You are not sure if people approach you because of a hidden agenda or because they sincerely wish to be your friend. You may be feeling lonely or depressed and have no one to whom you can pour out your heart. Just look at the examples of Robin Williams, Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, who ended their lives despite being rich and famous.

I came across this meaningful quote by the Dalai Lama: "Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck". Sometimes, not getting what you want in life is a blessing in disguise, for life can give you so much and then take away even more.

The Good in Every Stage of Life

When you are single and the people around you are either married or in a relationship, you sometimes wish to find a partner so that you can enjoy romantic love and companionship. However, when you are married, you miss the freedom you enjoyed while you were single, the days when decisions were made solely by and for you, as well as having all the time you needed to pursue your interests and hobbies.

When you are married and do not yet have kids, you sometimes wish that you could have them more quickly so that your home would fill up with children's laughter. However, when you have kids and are overwhelmed by your responsibilities and by crying children, you miss the days when you could go on holiday to any country with your spouse without so many considerations or so much packing and contingency planning.

When your kids are small and want your attention all the time, you wish they were more independent and less clingy. However, when they grow up and start having their own friends, you miss the days when you could cradle them in your arms and when you were their best friend.

When you are young, you wish you could quickly grow up because the adult world is so fascinating. However, when you become an adult, you miss the days when you were a child, when everything seemed so simple, people befriended you with no hidden agendas and happiness seemed so easy to achieve.

In every stage of life, there is always something that is good and something that is lacking. If we can enjoy every stage and appreciate the present moment, be it good or not so ideal, there is no need for us to envy what we had or will have in other stages of life. There is also no room for regrets. That is important because it affects how happy we can be.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE 3 THINGS YOU ALWAYS ENVY OTHERS FOR?

(E.G. OWNING A CAR, EXPENSIVE HOLIDAYS, CONDO/ PRIVATE PROPERTY, WEALTH, ETC.)

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

ARE THESE THINGS CONSIDERED NEEDS OR WANTS? HOW DOES ENVYING OTHERS AFFECT YOU NEGATIVELY?

(E.G. FEELINGS OF UNHAPPINESS, DISCONTENTMENT, SADNESS)

[FOCUS ON WHAT YOU HAVE]

WHAT ARE 3 THINGS THAT OTHERS WOULD ENVY YOU FOR?

(E.G. YOUR HEALTH, YOUR CLOSE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, ETC.)

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

CHAPTER 3

THE UNICORN RIDER (AT WORK)

The workplace can be like a battleground, with the strongest villains waiting to destroy you. To succeed, you need all the ammunition and comrades you can get. Ride the mythical unicorn to help you be brave in the midst of negativity and fight to a stunning victory. You are the unicorn rider at work. May good luck be with you always.

[Author's Note]

Work forms a big part of our lives. Many challenges and much negativity can arise from it. These challenges can stem from the relationships we have with our colleagues, superiors or customers. In this chapter, I will share with you how I handle the challenges of working with difficult customers, colleagues and superiors, as well as an overwhelming workload, while staying positive and motivated.

Tomorrow Will Be a Better Day

Years ago, when I was serving National Service, I had a superior who picked on me. When we went for our preliminary assessment of our skillsets, he placed me in the bottom group. That was alright, though it meant that I would need a longer period of time to graduate.

After I had trained hard for months and was ready for the graduation assessment, he failed me. The other instructors all thought that I was good enough but, apparently, he did not think so. After I worked hard for another month to prepare for the monthly assessment, he failed me again. Life as a trainee was vastly different from life as a graduate because it was much tougher. I bit the bullet and continued to train. Finally, I graduated. However, my superior continued to pick on me and single me out for criticism whenever we did our rehearsals.

We had a major event in which we were supposed to perform for a very important guest. This superior was the main coordinator. It was an opportunity that could help him leap ahead in his career as an Army regular. Due to unforeseen circumstances, that "showcase"

performance turned out to be a total disaster. After that performance, he looked more disappointed than I had ever seen him look before. Instead of thinking, 'Serves him right for always picking on me', I sent him an SMS (there were no smartphones yet) telling him this:

"明天会更好 Tomorrow will be a better day, Cheer up".

He thanked me for the encouragement ... and guess what? Our relationship improved drastically. He no longer picked on me during rehearsals. I guess that, as a 20-year-old, I had taught him a lesson about respect.

I share this to illustrate a few points.

There will be doubters, naysayers and people who do not believe in you. They may go all out to get you down. You must first believe in yourself and then seek support from those who believe in you. Giving up is easy but you get nothing out of it.

Some people think that revenge is sweet but the people living in hate and anger are the ones suffering, not their targets of hate. If someone did something unkind to you, you do not need to stoop to their level and practise an eye for an eye. Letting go of unhappiness is setting yourself free.

Everything happens for a reason. Some difficult people are put in your

path to make you stronger and wiser, to show you that you do not want to be like them. When dealing with these people, you probably gain more than you lose. If you are in a difficult situation and feel trapped, just keep going. You will soon see light at the end of the tunnel.

Lastly, be kind whenever possible. It gives you no satisfaction to throw a stone down the well on the person you do not like. Show these people how it should be. It just may change their mindset about life and how to treat others with humility and respect.

Overwhelmed by Work in the Festive Season

Have you been in this situation at work? You are overwhelmed by work but your colleagues are in a festive mood or are going on holidays. I have been in this situation almost every year. My colleagues and friends are in festive moods while I am under pressure to deliver my work in a very tight project schedule.

Late lunch, quick lunch, overtime and work stress are all becoming common. Should I feel sorry for myself? Should I blame my boss for all the pressure and tight deadlines? Or maybe I should get angry at the colleagues who are taking their time in responding to my urgent requests. Will doing all this help me? No. On the contrary, it only serves to make me more negative, to build more resentment towards everyone and to indulge in self-pity, which is neither helpful nor meaningful.

If you regard the situation from an organisational perspective, there is no such thing as expecting less work during the festive season because we do not receive less pay during these periods. If we get less work, then it is a blessing. If not, it is normal. Many people have to work through the festive seasons and public holidays, so I am definitely more fortunate than they are.

In this festive season, I am thankful for good health, thankful that my loved ones are well, thankful that I have enough for myself and my family, thankful that I am surrounded by wonderful people. And that is all that matters, right?

Dancing With the Lions Trilogy (Episode 1):

Invitation to the Lion's Den

A storm was brewing at work and the negative people came, one after another. It was a challenging period, with uncooperative colleagues, unsupportive bosses, fake salespeople and back-stabbing, hooligan clients dressed in smart suits. All of a sudden, I found myself lacking motivation and positive energy.

So, here came the litmus test and the million-dollar question: Can Jason Cai motivate himself? In the midst of negativity, I took some time out to read articles that I had previously written. I had this thought that if I could not motivate myself, I might as well stop what I had been doing for the past few years in writing these motivational articles.

I took an hour or so, on and off, to read some of the articles. My past experiences, reflections and analogies repeatedly reminded me about what truly matters in life: our health and the well-being of our loved ones. I was reminded that engaging in negative thoughts means surrendering my happiness to people who do not deserve it. I was reminded that, ultimately, if I let anger burn in my mind, I will be the one who suffers. I was reminded about the things that I cannot control and those that I can. I was reminded that I had been in negative situations before and I had managed to walk out of them intact by letting go of the negative thoughts and shifting my focus to something positive. I was reminded that there are ways I can diffuse the negative energy, so I put on my earphones and started listening to my favourite songs. I then realised that there is a purpose in what I have been doing in writing all these articles for the past few years.

The following morning, I would be entering the lion's den and I was mentally prepared to be hunted down. However, I promised myself a few things; I would not hurt myself further, before I even entered the den, by engaging in negative thoughts and emotions. I would not let fear or anger rob me of quality time with my loved ones. Whatever the hungry predators threw at me, I would react as calmly and as positively as I could and not let my emotions drive me into an angry confrontation because the effort would not be worth it. And they would not be worth it, either. I know I always have a choice: to choose happiness and a positive outcome.

To answer my own question, yes, I am motivated by the articles I have written over the years. As such, I am writing this book to help more

people. May this book help the people who are feeling lost, sad, stressed, angry or empty. I hope this book helps them find positivity, contentment, happiness, motivation and meaning in life.

Dancing With the Lions Trilogy (Episode 2):

En Route to the Lion's Den

I remember experiencing a high level of anxiety when I went in for my biopsy surgery in 2016. The fear of what might happen if the results were not favourable gripped me as much as the fear of being cut open on the operating table. Those blessed with good health will not realise how cold and lonely it is to be on the operating table.

On the day when I met my ferocious clients, I experienced anxiety (though not as much as I'd experienced in the above example). I asked myself why. For someone who advocates that work is not everything in life, and being in a situation in which my life was not even threatened, why did I feel like I was walking into a lion's den?

I figured that there could be a few reasons. Firstly, I could foresee an imminent confrontation. It actually started before the meeting and the meeting was the perfect place to blow things out of proportion. I am someone who embraces a positive mindset and the last thing I wanted to do was pick a fight with anyone, even when they decided to make me a scapegoat.

Secondly, I felt vulnerable because the people who were supposed to protect me, i.e. my bosses, had found reasons to not attend the meeting. This pushed me to the firing line. Prior to the meeting, a

senior who knew what had happened actually told me not to go because things had developed beyond my pay grade. He said he would take medical leave if he were in a similar situation. To be honest, this naughty thought did cross my mind but I thought it was irresponsible to do so.

Thirdly, I knew that I did not trust the people I was meeting because they were known to be intimidating. They were bullies dressed in gentlemen's suits. Under the pretext of a meeting and open discussion, they would pursue their hidden agenda of finding a scapegoat for an issue that had arisen. In my opinion, that was very unprofessional.

So, why did I go when I knew the odds were against me? Professionalism? Responsibility? Or plain stupidity? I guessed it was a bit of everything. I took a calculated risk and worked out a plan to avoid being eaten alive by the lions. I rehearsed my answers over and over with my bosses, even on that morning itself. The day before, I tested the water with one of the lions to gauge the likely response and mentally prepare myself for what may come. I printed all supporting documents to prove that there had been no negligence on my part.

Deep down, I knew that I could have run away but there was no way I could hide. When people gang up to make allegations against you, keeping quiet or running away might work against you. Instead, stand firm and be prepared to answer to the accusations. There is nothing to fear with a clear conscience.

How do I deal with such anxiety? By remembering that I am not alone in it. The worst feeling in the world is not suffering; rather, it is suffering alone. I am touched by all the support and encouragement I receive from my loved ones and, more amazingly, from the friends I have met online.

I remind myself that this is work and while I have responsibilities to fulfil, doing my best is good enough. I really do not need to stress myself so much, as though my life depends on it. I think we should have this mentality when we are dealing with work or studies. We should always do our best but not become overly stressed out over things we cannot control. If my "performance" in the meeting was not satisfactory or if I were to receive a complaint, so be it. I had done what I could. I had not let myself down. The same principle applies when one fails an exam, even a major one. It does not make one a failure in life.

Everything happens for a reason and I believe this experience enriched me in more ways than one. It reminded me that one can never be fully prepared for everything in life, no matter how cautious one is. Whatever happens, deal with it. There will always be a way, an answer or a solution. Keep calm and carry on.

Dancing With the Lions Trilogy (Final Episode):

Entering the Lion's Den

This is the last part, in which I share what actually happened during the meeting itself. It concludes the trilogy of facing difficult customers.

I entered the meeting room (lion's den) with my body armour (stack of notes) and watched the lions sit on one side, sharpening their claws. I knew it would be only a matter of time before they pounced on their prey: the tiny, puny me who had come with a twig from a tree.

The advice from my bosses rang at the back of my mind: "Do not engage the lions. Do not use your twig to poke them or they will claw you even more ferociously because it will make them look bad in front of their bosses. Just answer in the most politically correct manner, as rehearsed".

The meeting started and, very soon, questions started flying like arrows. I was on the receiving end and had to explain certain decisions, though they were all the result of choices made by the people above me. The lions took the opportunity to stalk their prey. Then they made their move. I used the model answers to reply but still, it was not convincing enough. They wanted blood. I told the lions, "If you want my blood, you better work harder for it or come and get it over my dead body."

The high-intensity sparring continued. They attacked, I defended. They clawed, I dodged. I was preparing to use the hidden dagger inside my armour when the chairman decided to break it out. He said that he wanted a solution and no more finger-pointing. I thought that this was a wise and commendable decision. Neither side would benefit if we continued tearing each other apart.

After that decision was made, the situation became less intense. We started more constructive discussions to find a solution rather than assign blame. However, the chairman did look in my direction and comment that if someone were to make a mistake, he should be brave enough to admit it. I took it that he was not referring to me.

Midway through, someone shouted across the room, "It is their (my team's) screw-up. Ask them to fix the issue!" That comment really made my blood boil. Regardless of this person's appointment (he was actually quite low-ranked), it would never be right to jump to a conclusion without learning about how things had developed. Furthermore, his actions could have brought a negative mood back to the discussion and caused others to be offensive again. That was representative of the actions of a modern-day keyboard warrior. I thought about confronting him after the meeting but changed my mind because he had not inflicted much damage and his opinions did not matter anyway.

Some friends advised me to get out of this toxic work environment but I tried to look at the bigger picture. This was just one issue I had faced and one project with super unreasonable clients. There are still many good people and good clients. I would be foolish to rot away in an extremely toxic environment but I would also be naive to think that there is a perfect working environment out there with caring bosses, supportive colleagues and understanding clients. Whatever the case, I will persevere until I can no longer hold on.

Work will constantly present issues, just like life will always present

challenges. We must face them with courage and perseverance. We must learn to dance in the storm. Lastly, I know that whatever does not break me will make me stronger. It is life's way of refining me into a better product. To all those friends going through a difficult phase in life: Hang in there. We will ride the storm together!

Dealing With a Difficult Colleague (Part 1)

I had the misfortune of working with a difficult colleague who was very uncooperative, unprofessional and irresponsible. When things went wrong, he would be the first to push the blame to others when it was actually the result of his negligence.

Still, I am thankful for this experience because he made me see that I am blessed to have many other colleagues who are helpful, supportive and responsible.

If there is no darkness, the light would not shine as bright. Treasure the good people and ignore the bad ones because they do not deserve your time and energy. It is certainly not worth negatively affecting your health by getting angry over them. Just know that they exist for a reason and move on. Lastly, keep learning and improving day by day as a person.

Dealing With a Difficult Colleague (Part 2)

One fine day, the super uncooperative, unprofessional and irresponsible colleague walked up to my cubicle to give me a piece of his mind because he was angry about how I had stated the facts and

put him in a bad light. He said that my style of doing things was STUPID and asked me to not do it again.

I reacted to his bashing in front of everyone by simply not reacting at all. During the trashing, I even told him that I was stating the facts that he was unsupportive. That made him even more agitated. He continued his ranting, so I kept quiet until he finished. Then I walked off.

The moment he walked off, my concerned neighbours came over and asked what had happened. When I shared my experiences with him from throughout our whole process of working together and told them about his poor work attitude, they started sharing more stories about him.

You see, the problem did not lie within me. I have managed countless projects and have no issues with most, if not all, of the people with whom I have worked. So, I really did not need to engage him to prove anything, nor did I need to fight his inner demons.

It may seem embarrassing and ego-bruising to have someone just walk up to you and scold you, especially when you have done nothing wrong. However, engaging him—whether in an argument or through hateful and angry thoughts—would have brought about suffering which I did not deserve. These thoughts would have gone on and on, robbing me of quality time with my loved ones and for myself. The house would keep burning and I would be trapped inside.

If I can forgive, I will do that. If I cannot, I will simply ignore and move on. I find inner peace in knowing what I can control and what I cannot. Like what I always say, I am not immune to negative people and negative events. However, I am determined to lead by example to show you that it is humanly possible to stop anger in its tracks and to seek peace and serenity.

You and I, we have much to learn, but every experience creates a good lesson and is an opportunity to get better, stronger and wiser.

Appreciation From a Higher Perspective

When I look out of the office window every day, the view seems so mediocre. I see nearby buildings and trees in the forest behind those buildings. The rest of the view includes roads and carparks.

One fine day, my director asked to see me in his office on the 25th floor. While waiting for him, I looked out of the window near his room. The view at the top was spectacular: a huge stretch of greenery and a mesmerising seascape. Even the buildings look awesome at that level. We face the same direction every day but the views at Level 5 and Level 25 are so different.

Every day, we are reminded about the many issues we face in life: the high cost of living, long working hours, stressful work environment, stressful education system and even the trains that break down ever more frequently.

Yet, it takes another (higher) perspective to appreciate the true beauty

of living in Singapore. Things are definitely more expensive, here but cheaper alternatives are available, much more than in previous generations (think Taobao, Qoo10, Lazada, Carousell). People are competitive but they are also kind and helpful, as we can see by the large number of support groups on Facebook. Trains break down but we have the TATA SMRT support group to help one another plan alternate routes to their destinations. That is on top of our being free from natural disasters due to our excellent geographical location. We also enjoy clean water and we have food and medical facilities that are readily available. Members of the various races and religions co-exist harmoniously.

There are so many more things that I can list on both sides of the house (i.e. good and bad about living in Singapore). I choose to remind myself about the spectacular view from the top because it makes me live a happier life. I hope you can do so, too.

Early Morning Meetings

My boss scheduled an early meeting for a Monday morning. I could have let it affect me in one of two ways: (1) I could have blamed the boss, blamed the organisation, made myself miserable and told myself that Monday was so blue or (2) I could have been thankful that I would get to see this beautiful world sooner than I usually did. I chose the latter.

I reached the office before the meeting started. As I waited, people started streaming in. Some colleagues arrived much later than the

meeting time but my boss did not say a word. It seemed that this behaviour was acceptable.

Why should I make an effort to wake up an hour early when I could easily come in at a later time and no one would say a word? It all boils down to responsibility: doing what you know is right and not being influenced by the actions of others. It is always easier to follow the crowd but will you stay true to your own conscience? If people start dirtying the toilet seat because no one is watching them, are you going to follow them because no one knows, even though you yourself realize that it is wrong to do so?

Our actions say a lot about our character. You can be the person who always gets away with things but you will not earn respect from the people around you. When you do not display responsibility, you lose credibility and trust. So, stay true to your conscience. Be a responsible person and do what you know is right. The world will be a much better place if everyone was responsible for their own actions.

Work Together, Do Not Fight Each Other

Sometimes I cannot understand why I made certain decisions. I have been working with a group of clients who have been giving me loads of crap over the past few months. Their requirements are always changing. The deadline is always "yesterday" and weekly meetings are stressful.

The project is full of issues and Murphy's Law—"Anything that can go wrong will go wrong"—comes true almost every day. Plus, I lack

support from my own bosses and colleagues because everyone is too busy fighting their own fires. This project seems like "mission impossible" and doomed to fail.

One day, an issue occurred on-site and some items went missing. The person who supposedly signed and acknowledged the delivery of the items was held accountable though he did not physically watch over them. After a thorough search, the items were nowhere to be found and this person had no choice but to pay for them out of his own pocket. Each item cost over \$100.

This was the same guy who had tried to shoot me down during an earlier meeting without bothering to find out the truth. This time around, I told him I would help him, as I had some spares in my office which I would not be using. I could pass them along to him so that he would not have to pay so much. I could have simply ignored the situation because it was none of my business. However, when I told him that I was helping him, I could sense his gratitude because previously he had not been very friendly to me.

You see, this world in which we live can be full of hate and anger. We find many ways to differentiate and divide ourselves, in terms of nationality, race or religion. We can even distinguish ourselves in terms of companies and assume that the customer is always right. With every divide comes an unwillingness to work together to achieve a greater goal. However, we conveniently forget that we are all equal and we are all human beings. A lion does not care if you are Jack Ma or a beggar. If the lion is hungry, it will eat you.

If we live in hate and anger and use whatever status or power we have to stomp on others, this wave of negative energy will eventually come back to overwhelm us. It will translate into fear and anxiety when we are on the receiving end. If we can work together as a team and set aside all our self-imposed differences, the outcome will be vastly different from the one we would experience if we tried to push around blame and responsibilities.

Someone has to make the first move to make things better. Now I can understand why I make certain decisions.

NS Woes

Many of your male friends who are citizens of Singapore will tell you that serving National Service (NS) is a waste of two years of their youth and time. I personally felt the same way when I was enlisted. However, going through NS made me appreciate my blessings today.

Let's talk about FREEDOM. If you are not happy with your superiors, you cannot choose to quit. You are like bonded to the company but you cannot break the bond by paying a lump sum to the company. The only way to leave is to finish your term of service. You have those luxurious nights out but you must book in by a certain time or face punishment. For everything you do, you must seek permission or, again, be disciplined for not following orders.

Let's talk about LIVING CONDITIONS. Not all camps are newly renovated like the Pulau Tekong BMT "chalet". I experienced refugee-camp-like living conditions in which 18 of us squeezed together and

slept inside two small rooms. Imagine having to go to the toilet at night; you would have to navigate past all those bodies on the floor and risk stepping on someone's limbs or head. Speaking of using the toilet, imagine what happens when 18 men must finish bathing in 10 minutes. We formed groups of four to shower together while others were brushing teeth and shitting at the same time, in one small toilet.

What about the sleeping conditions? There were times when we had to sleep in the outfields with just a thin piece of groundsheet as a bed, our hard water bottles as pillows and our rifles as bolsters. There were times, while doing guard duty, when we had to sleep in bunks that were hot, stuffy and full of mosquitoes. Guard duty usually happened after a long and tiring day of training. These are nights when you sleep for two hours, wake up for two hours of duties and continue the cycle for a further eight hours. If you are unlucky, an on-the-ball duty officer will interrupt your sleep by ordering a turn-out session to simulate an intrusion.

After having been through NS, I really treasure the days when I have uninterrupted sleep, when I have a comfortable bed, pillow and bolster to sleep on. I can choose what time to sleep and how long to bathe. I can have the whole bathroom to myself. I can also choose what and when I want to eat because even tea breaks are a luxury in NS.

Despite all these woes, I firmly believe that NS is necessary and critical for our nation. The good men and women of the SAF go through tough training every day, at times endangering their own lives, to

keep our city-state safe and to let women and children, young and old, sleep soundly every night, without the fear that a rocket will hit our HDB flat. Because of that, I am thankful for the peace and security in our country.

Finding the Right Motivation for Work

Why do we need to work? To many, the purpose of going to work is to earn money. But, seriously, are we working just to earn money? Money in the form of cash is an object, while money in the bank is figures. If money is our motivation to work, it is like saying we are in love with a statue.

There is definitely so much more to work than earning money. When colleagues become good friends, we earn friendship. When we constantly learn new things, we earn knowledge. With every passing day, we earn experience. When we are contributing to a bigger cause in the organisation, we earn self-worth and recognition. When the juniors look to us for guidance and directions, we earn respect. When our income allows us to fulfil our dreams or do charity work, we earn beautiful memories and a meaningful life.

If we can think beyond working to earn money and if we find that motivation in things that are close to our hearts, we will be more motivated to go to work. Otherwise, we will be dragging our feet and going through the motions. If you can, write down all the things you are earning at work and use this list to remind yourself about what you are working hard for. It may be the greatest motivation you need when you are at your lowest point at work.

Be Careful About What You Wish For

For the last four years, I worked under a superior for whom I had little respect, mainly because he always wanted to shirk responsibilities. Despite holding a senior position, he was always the invisible man, more than happy if I bypassed him or did not involve him in my work. He was also soft when it came to accepting a heavier workload for our team. In short, he was neither a supportive nor a protective superior.

After four long years, our organisation regrouped and he went to another team. A new superior is taking over my team. He is young, enthusiastic, high-profile and very responsive. He is the one who gets things moving and who will reply to emails even late at night. When he first joined, he gave all of us an expensive lunch treat, something that had never happened under the previous superior. It was a dream start under the new superior.

All couples who are madly in love have a honeymoon period. Once it is over, friction starts and cracks appear. His less glamorous side is starting to show. While he may be very responsive, he also has high standards and demands that his subordinates finish their work quickly. He has little tolerance for errors and will let his frustration show when his subordinates cannot understand his point or answer him convincingly. He scrutinises our work like a hawk-eyed auditor and we have to extensively prepare ourselves before we meet with him. Whenever I need to clear him on my work, I feel like I am stepping onto a field full of hidden landmines because I am not sure what difficult questions he will ask next.

In life, we often see the good in others and wish that we were in their shoes. However, we never see their pain until we are in their shoes. One time, while I was still under my previous superior, I casually chatted with this new superior and expressed my interest in joining his team. I am now thankful that I did not work under him earlier.

So, the next time you wish that your boss, your spouse, your child, your parent or your country could be like someone else's, think again. Be careful about what you wish for. You may end up with more misery than you currently have. Whatever situation you are in now, always look for the good and be thankful for what you have.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE THE 3 ASPECTS OF YOUR WORK THAT YOU ENJOY? (E.G. JOB SCOPE, SENSE OF SATISFACTION IN COMPLETING TASKS, GOOD BOSSES, GOOD COLLEAGUES, ETC.)

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

WHAT ARE 3 ACHIEVEMENTS YOU HAVE MADE IN YOUR WORK?

(E.G. SALARY TO PROVIDE FOR YOUR FAMILY, FULFIL PERSONAL DREAMS OF TRAVELING, ACCOMPLISH PERSONAL MILESTONE, ETC.)

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

HOW CAN YOU BETTER MANAGE THE NEGATIVITY YOU EXPERIENCE AT WORK?

1) REMIND MYSELF THAT I AM REPLACEABLE IN MY COMPANY BUT INDISPENSABLE TO MY FAMILY.

2) UNDERSTAND THE HARMFUL EFFECTS THAT STRESS AND ANGER CAN HAVE ON THE BODY.

3) REMEMBER MY ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES (CHAPTER 1) WHENEVER I AM TRIGGERED BY DIFFICULT PEOPLE AT WORK.

4) REMIND MYSELF THAT THERE IS MUCH MORE TO LIFE THAN WORK AND THAT WORK IS JUST A PART OF LIFE, NOT ALL OF IT.

5) _____

6) _____

HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOUR OFFICE A HAPPIER ENVIRONMENT?

1) SET UP A MINI SNACK CORNER AT MY CUBICLE.

2) PASTE MOTIVATIONAL QUOTES ON MY CUBICLE WALL.

3) CONSTANTLY REMIND MYSELF ABOUT WHAT I AM ACHIEVING AT WORK AND THE THINGS I ENJOY ABOUT WORK.

4) KEEP A PLANT OR MINI FISH TANK ON MY DESK TO DE-STRESS AND DISTRACT MYSELF FROM WORK.

5) _____

CHAPTER 4

MINING THE GOBLIN'S GOLD (MONEY)

The gold mountain is guarded fiercely by the goblins. When mining the goblin's gold, you must give a piece of yourself to them. It comes in the form of your time, your energy or your health. The more gold you mine, the more of yourself you must trade with the goblins. In the end, you must weigh the cost of the trade and not blindly follow those around you who are lured by what the goblin's gold can buy. It may be able to buy you the world, but it cannot buy back what you have lost—your time, your energy and your health.

[Author's Note]

Money is one of the most powerful elements in our society. It affects many aspects of life. Many people chase money relentlessly, thinking that money can help solve every problem they have. What I hope to achieve through this chapter is to share with you that money is not everything in life and that there are many things money cannot buy. May this understanding give you another perspective on whether you need so much money when you can spend your time pursuing other, more meaningful activities.

The True Meaning of Fortune and Prosperity

The Chinese always want to "HUAT", especially during Chinese New Year. "HUAT" means to prosper, have lots of money, wealth and fortune. But do we really understand what true fortune is? Is it all about striking the windfall and having lots of money?

To me, true fortune is the ability to spend what you earn, with the people you love, doing what you enjoy most. You may have millions in the bank but they are not truly yours until you have the chance to spend them. Some people work their health away to accumulate lots of savings ... which they are then unable to enjoy due to poor health. Some people have lots of money with which to travel the world and visit the most beautiful places, but they have no one with whom to enjoy these trips. Some people hold high positions at work and receive high pay but are under tremendous stress all the time, even at night. I do not consider these above-mentioned examples as representing good fortune and prosperity.

If you have a loving family and some close friends, if your basic needs are fulfilled, if you have savings for rainy days, if you can afford a holiday (even a staycation) once in a while and, most importantly, if you are healthy and able to appreciate good food and beautiful scenery, I think you are already very blessed and a person with good fortune and prosperity. You can have more but you may lose even more. The ability to appreciate what we already have makes us realise the fortune that is already with us.

I wish that you will always be blessed with good health and happiness, as well as the wisdom and courage to choose what is really good for you. HUAT Ah!

Not Winning the Lottery May Not Be Such a Bad Thing

If you did not win the multi-million lottery, please do not feel sad or disappointed. Chances are, you do not need that much money anyway. Instead, you need good health, a supportive network of friends and family members, and the freedom to do what you wish, all of which you probably have now.

A multi-million lottery prize is a whopping sum of money, one which can last a lifetime, yet there are many things this sum of money cannot buy. For example, money cannot cause a seriously ill man to become healthy again. Money can buy you the fastest car in the world but if you get stuck in a traffic jam, you will still have to wait. Money cannot reverse ageing. No matter how many Botox shots one gets, one will still look old someday. Money cannot buy love, friendship or kinship. Even if it does, the love bought is not genuine or sincere. When you

are at the lowest point in life, you need support and encouragement. People give it to you because you have been there for them, not because you have money.

What we really need is where we should focus our time and energy. Start building relationships with loved ones through acts of love. This can be as simple as wishing them well and offering encouragement if they need it. Start taking care of your health by cultivating a good lifestyle and eating well. I have seen many friends fall sick recently, so we should take care of our health, including our mental health.

When we understand these principles, we will be content and happy. It does not matter if we win the big prize because we already have so many blessings.

Money Cannot Buy Health and Time

I went for my medical review and waited at the clinic for almost three hours from start to end. Considering the fact that I was paying a private patient rate, the wait time was definitely longer than expected.

However, I was not the only one with an empty stomach. At almost 2 pm, the doctor had not yet gone out for lunch. Given his popularity, this is likely a daily situation for him. Sure, he is earning big bucks, maybe driving posh cars or living in an expensive property, but he is trading away his health to achieve that. If you asked me whether I would want to rush every single day in a high-stress environment with irregular meal times, I would say "no thanks" to the big bucks. I value my health more. I am happy with what I have.

When I was at the clinic, I saw many foreigners coming to consult the doctor. Based on their clothing, they seemed wealthy, but illness does not discriminate. The rich are not spared just because they have money. To a dying man, a billion dollars is just notes and figures. What he needs are time and health and these are things that money cannot buy for him. Let's always remember this in our pursuit of material wealth.

For friends who are too hard at work or too stressed out by work, I hope my sharing provides some food for thought. Hard work is a virtue and chasing one's passion is always admirable. However, do not overdo things to the point that your health is compromised. Life is always a trade-off. When we gain something, we lose something. For example, we trade time for money. So, always do things in moderation and remember the really important things in life: health and time, without which we are nothing.

What Money Can't Buy

You can buy a watch but you can't buy time.

You can buy flowers to show love but you can't buy love.

You can buy medicine and supplements to boost your immunity but you can't buy health when it is deteriorating.

You can buy a big house to accommodate many people but you can't buy a family or kinship.

You can buy a cot but you can't buy children or fertility.

You can buy someone beer but you can't buy trust or true friendship.

You can buy an expensive holiday package but you can't buy companionship.

You can pay for a master's degree but you can't buy wisdom and experiences.

You can engage a helper or be the boss of many employees but you can't buy respect.

You can sign a contract with someone but you can't buy loyalty.

You can send your kids to enrichment classes but you can't buy values like filial piety, humility and kindness. You need to be a good role model yourself.

There are so many things we can buy with money, which makes money very attractive to own. However, there are more things that money can't buy. Life is meaningful when we pursue the things that money can't buy.

What Are You Investing In?

I made some pretty bad investments with my money in the stock market but I also made some really good investments with my time and energy in life. I invest my time and energy in building meaningful relationships with the people around me and also with myself. In turn, the "dividends" (returns) I get are a supportive network of friends, a caring community which gives me hope every day and inner peace achieved by cultivating positive thoughts despite the chaos happening all around me.

These, to me, are more valuable than all the money I could make from the stock market. Ideally, I would like my investment in the stock market to bear fruits as well but, hey, we do not live in a perfect world. We win some, we lose some. Most importantly, we must continue to

find meaning in what we invest in and determine whether what we are getting is worthy of what we are investing.

World's Tastiest Ramen

When the world's tastiest ramen, cooked by a top-notch chef flown in from Japan and made using a 100-year-old recipe, is served to you but you have no appetite and everything is tasteless; or if you have no teeth and can't chew, have difficulty swallowing your food or barely have the strength to lift the chopsticks, it does not matter how good the ramen is. You will not be enjoying it anyway.

Say the boss decides to give you an extra bowl of the world's best ramen, on the house, and you can invite someone to eat for free. However, your family is not around anymore. You do not have any loved ones beside you. You do not even have a close friend in mind with whom you want to eat the ramen. The feeling of loneliness will suck all the taste out of the expensive ramen.

Ramen, in this analogy, is like the luxurious items we pursue in life: private housing, posh cars, expensive holidays, diamond rings or branded items. They are always good to have but we must never forget that the most important things in life are our health and our loved ones. We must take care of our health and our loved ones before we pursue luxurious items. It should not be the other way around, pushing the limits and sacrificing our health and time with our loved ones so that we can earn more money.

Being rich is not always about having more money or being able to enjoy luxurious items; wealth can come from within. Richness in the heart is about finding contentment and inner peace. Once you achieve that, you will be satisfied with what you have and less bothered by what you don't. Otherwise, it will always be a relentless pursuit of wanting more. All the riches in the world will not be able to fill the void in your heart.

So, the next time you are enjoying a bowl of delicious ramen with a loved one or close friend, you will know you are blessed. And if life bothers you with issues and challenges, you will know that you can count on a bowl of ramen and the person beside you to ease your worries and sorrows.

Salary

When you think that you need a monthly salary of \$1,800 to cover all your expenses, a company comes along to offer you a \$2,000 salary. This happens to be the only company, out of the many companies to which you applied, that is making an offer to you. You feel relieved and thankful. You are happy to accept the offer.

Then, new management takes over and there is a salary adjustment exercise. Your newly adjusted pay is \$3,000. You are elated because you have had a 50% pay increase.

One fine day, you attend a reunion with your secondary school friends. Among yourselves, you start to share how much you are paid. You

realise that many of your friends are earning an average of \$5,000 per month. You feel unhappy that you are being paid much less than your peers.

Many think that money is the key to happiness: the more, the merrier. But is that really the case? How much is enough for us? Whatever we are earning, if we start to get envious of others for having more than we do, we will never be happy.

Happiness is not about how much we have. It is about how contented we are with what we have. If we cannot find contentment, we will forever be chasing a moving target and will never be satisfied. A pay increment will give us temporary happiness but we will soon be unhappy again because the habit of wanting more drives our unhappiness.

So, the next time you feel unhappy because you think you do not have enough money, think again. Will having more money make you happier in the long run or is it better to find contentment in what you have?

Pay as a Yardstick for Happiness

If our pay is a yardstick for happiness, i.e. higher pay equals more happiness, then from a company's perspective, the office cleaners must be the unhappiest while the directors are the happiest.

Yet, through my eyes, I see it differently. The office cleaners are always smiling, asking if I have eaten, chit-chatting and engaging in happy

conversations. On the other hand, the directors all look so serious. They are forever busy and it seems like there is only one thing on their mind and that is work.

I once asked one of my superiors why he was working so late. Wouldn't his young children miss him? He said they were used to it and that he had no choice due to the overwhelming workload.

In life, we win some and we lose some. No one is a forever winner. With higher pay come more responsibilities, which could translate into more stress and less time for family. It is a give-and-take thing. I believe no matter how much money we earn, the most important thing is to find contentment and meaning in what we are doing. Only then will we be truly happy because we are no longer chasing what we do not need. Instead, we are fully enjoying what we are blessed with, such as time, health and opportunities with our loved ones.

Do not admire others when you see them doing better than you are, for they may have pains you do not see. Do not chase things you do not need because what you do not need will not truly satisfy you.

Money and Greed

You need a three-room flat; money gives you a penthouse. You need a car to travel from one place to another; money gives you a sports car. You need a getaway holiday; money takes you around the world. You need a meal because you are hungry; money gives you an international buffet spread.

It is great to have money but always beware of the power that money has. Money can transcend your needs to wants, then to greed. With greed, people want more and if they do not get what they want, they become unhappy.

Are we unhappy because we are not earning enough to fulfil our needs or are we unhappy because we do not have enough money to fulfil our wants?

Getting Richer But Unhappier

The TOTO lottery dishes out hundreds of thousands of dollars to lucky winners every week. So, every week, potentially new millionaires are born in our country.

With the popularity of the Internet and social media, business owners have more platforms with which to reach out to their target audiences. They may even go global if their products sell well. Posting products overseas is cheaper as well, which translates into higher profit margins. Therefore, business owners have the opportunity to make more money.

What do people do with their wealth? They reward themselves, and rightfully so, as they have worked hard to earn their wealth. They probably get a car because they have spare cash to spend. They buy a private property for luxury living or go for the expensive options in terms of holiday destinations, bags, clothes or even medical consultations. By doing so, they enter the "rich men" market, where

everything comes at a premium price. When goods such as land and cars are scarce, competition drives the prices higher.

What is most challenging is not getting rich but staying rich. When expenses increase, many find it hard to keep up. For business owners, staying rich means their businesses must continue to be profitable. They cannot take their foot off the pedal. They may even need to pump in more effort and energy to expand their customer base after the growth from the current pool has stopped. If the business owners have been sacrificing family time and pushing their health to the limit, there is a high chance that they will have to continue doing that. The feeling of being trapped in this cycle brings unhappiness.

With poor money management and over-indulgence, the lottery winners may see their windfall decreasing by the day. Unhappiness arises when they must downgrade their lifestyles and are no longer able to indulge as much as they would like.

I share this not to discourage anyone from getting rich and pursuing material wealth. Rather, I hope it serves to let you see that more money may not bring more happiness in the long run. This is especially the case if we allow expectations to rise so high that we suffer the consequences. I think this is an important concept. We adults must get it right or else the next generation will grow up thinking that money is everything.

Seeking happiness is about finding contentment in what we have. It is about knowing the difference between a need and a want. It is about

finding meaning in what we do. It is about having dreams and being passionate about them. It is about building quality relationships with our loved ones, taking good care of our health and understanding the value we bring to the lives of others.

Instead of pursuing more money, thinking it will create more happiness, why not manage our expectation regarding what we really want in life? Let's start by counting our blessings and shifting our focus to what really matters. In doing so, we will realise that many things are more valuable than money.

The Relationship Between Money and Happiness

If you think that to be happy you must have lots of money because money can give you a sense of security, take you to places around the world, allow for luxurious hotel stays and VIP treatment, and elevate your social status, then hey ... you are probably right! Because that is your definition of happiness. However, until the day when you earn tons of money, you will probably not be happy. You will also probably be frustrated by your high standards of happiness, as they always seem difficult to achieve.

Happiness, to me, is simple and cheap, and at times free. When I am able to help someone and make that person happy, I am happy. Every day, I feel grateful and happy for the many blessings in my life. If this article cheers you up or gives you a tiny bit of positive energy or boosts your morale, I become happy too.

If you have been unhappy because you feel that you are not getting many things in life, it is time to evaluate whether these things are needs or wants. If you can find happiness through meaningful activities that do not cost much (or anything at all), you will break free of the chain that money has wrapped around you. You will run free, as you no longer have to keep generating more money to sustain your happiness.

The Vicious Cycle of Pursuing More Money

We live in a materialistic world where money is king and we want things fast. Every day, our fears and insecurities are heightened by the increasing cost of living. Every day, we give ourselves many reasons why more money is good. With more money, we can upgrade our living and live more luxurious lifestyles because we work so hard for the money.

[Vicious Cycle]

I need money. -> I work hard for the money. -> I deserve to be pampered because I work so hard. -> I want more money to buy expensive stuff to reward myself. -> I want MORE money and I want it FAST. -> Show me how to earn more money in the fastest way. -> Not getting what I want resulted in disappointment and unhappiness.

We also live in a world that is so fast-paced, we have practically no time and patience to wait for good things. We have too many distractions and are at times overwhelmed by the tasks at hand.

If the broth will take hours to brew, let's go for some artificial seasoning that can produce the same taste. If getting proper nutrition is a hassle, let's go for supplements and pills. If exercise is a chore, let's fix some device on our body which will help us slim down while we engage in our preferred activities.

But someday, we will realise that there is no shortcut to success. The more we try to cut corners, the more we find ourselves trapped and suffering due to our own efforts. Money was invented by man. So were the artificial seasonings, processed foods and slimming pills that are causing health concerns for man. Even great inventions like plastic and pesticides are finding their way into our food chain and are present in our food products. As a result, we have to pay much more to enjoy organic vegetables or poultry that is not injected with hormones.

If we truly wish to be happy and healthy (physically and emotionally), we must take a step back and evaluate our association of money with happiness. We must evaluate our true needs, be more aware of our distractions and, lastly, find out why we are always so busy and why we have no time for everything.

Enjoying the Freebies in an Expensive Country

Singapore is such an expensive city to live in. Everything is costly and our pay can hardly keep up with our costs. Is it even possible to enjoy anything that is free?

The library is an extensive knowledge base for the public to use. It offers free aircon and free Wi-Fi. Reading from books is better on your eyes than reading from a computer screen. If you do not have enough money to buy books or educational DVDs for your kids, you can borrow them from the library.

We have the good old hawker centres to offer you cheap and good food. If you can spend your morning volunteering at Willing Hearts, a soup kitchen, packing food for needy families, they will provide you with a free lunch. I know some temples and mosques also provide free meals for their devotees.

We can spend money on air purifiers to get purified air and anions, but there is a great abundance of fresh air and negative ions in nature. Quite a few nature reserves in Singapore allow for simple hiking, such as Mount Faber, MacRitchie Reservoir, Bukit Timah and Sungei Buloh. No money for a gym membership? Try a more natural workout in the many parks and fitness corners around Singapore. Also, with the cycling track network expanding, you can ride safely while getting a good workout.

No money for a holiday? Many places of interest allow you to take decent photos while enjoying nice attractions. The Gardens by the Bay, Sentosa Island and the Singapore Botanic Gardens are some examples. Sometimes there are free concerts at Esplanade, where the nightscape is great. The Science Centre offers free admission to Singaporeans or permanent residents during non-peak hours. Some museums also offer free entry to locals.

Want to experience a sense of satisfaction? The cost-free way is to declutter your storeroom or all around your house. Or clean your sink or bathroom, especially if it is filled with algae or moulds. You will get a sense of satisfaction when you transform your home from dirty to clean. Another way is to volunteer and help people, as it is a very rewarding experience.

There are things which are costly but there are also things which are free. We cannot use expensive items to generalise everything and then be unhappy about it. Just as life can give you reasons to be unhappy, you can give life reasons to be happy. It is always possible and you always have a choice, so choose wisely.

[Guest Post] Money, Family and Happiness

I used to earn over \$3,000 monthly but I was not happy because I was away from my kids most of the time. With my eldest child having autism and his teacher ringing me up regularly to complain about his behaviour , I felt so stressed out at work. With little support from family members, I nearly broke down and went into depression.

I was very determined to spend quality time with my son, so I planned to quit my job. However, at the same time, I found out that I was pregnant with my second child. At a crossroads, I stayed on for an additional two months before eventually quitting.

Seeing that I had put my son in the back seat for so long, it was time that I spent quality time with him instead of working such long hours. My gynecologist determined that my second child would be a difficult birth. I could not walk and I had to be on bed rest for at least a month.

With the pressure at work and with my current situation, I plucked up the courage to leave my job.

My family and some friends could not understand why I had decided to quit when there were so many uncertainties ahead, which included a loss of income coupled with more upcoming expenses due to my new-born. However, as a mother to my children and considering my overall well-being, I knew that I had to step away by quitting. Fast forward to now. My eldest is 12 years old and my youngest child is turning four this November. I returned to the workforce a year ago but was earning less than \$2,000 monthly. We are happier as a family, as I get to spend more time with my children.

We made some lifestyle changes and learnt to work with what we have. We also cut down on unnecessary spending. We have had no aircon for almost four years and no big meals at fancy restaurants. We have downgraded our mobile plan, terminated our Internet connection and limited our use of mobile data, etc.

The gist of my sharing is that money will get us nowhere if we are not wise to the fact that money does not bring us happiness. With the current society's perception that more is good and bigger is better, many of us are blindsided by worldly and material wants. However, these are items that can never replace the human touch. In the relentless pursuit of more money and material possessions, we fail to care for the people around us.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE 5 THINGS THAT MONEY CANNOT BUY FOR YOU?
(E.G. GOOD HEALTH, YOUR PARENTS, YOUR CHILDREN, YOUR PETS,
YOUR BEST FRIENDS, YOUR FREEDOM, YOUR MEMORIES, ETC.)

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO ACHIEVE WITH MORE MONEY?
(E.G. DREAM HOUSE, DREAM CAR, DREAM HOLIDAY, A SENSE OF
SECURITY, A SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT, BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE)

HOW MANY OF THE ABOVE ARE WANTS AND NOT NEEDS?
(E.G. CAR, CONDO, ETC.)

WHAT ARE YOU LOSING OUT ON TO EARN WITH MORE MONEY?

(E.G. SACRIFICE YOUR TIME WITH YOUR LOVED ONES, YOUR PHYSICAL / EMOTIONAL HEALTH, TIME BONDING WITH CHILDREN AND WATCHING THEM GROW)

IS IT WORTH LOSING THE ABOVE IN THE PURSUIT OF MORE MONEY?

(CIRCLE WHERE APPROPRIATE)

YES/NO

HOW CAN I ACHIEVE WHAT I HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITHOUT HAVING TO EARN MORE MONEY?

- 1) BE PRUDENT IN SPENDING AND SAVE MORE.
- 2) MANAGE MY EXPECTATIONS AND FOCUS ON MY NEEDS.
- 3) BACKPACK FOR HOLIDAYS, KEEP A LOOKOUT FOR CHEAPER DEALS OR ALTERNATIVES.

4) _____

5) _____

CHAPTER 5

FINDING THE HEALING FAIRY (DEATH, LOSS & SADNESS)

The healing fairy comes to those who are saddened by losses or other negative events. The fairy brings hope, comfort and strength to those in need. Every one of us can be a healing fairy to someone else. We ourselves may need a healing fairy someday. While we take turns healing and being healed, we learn more about life through death, loss and sadness.

[Author's Note]

Death is much feared because it brings sadness and pain. We are not programmed to enjoy pain, so every loss affects us emotionally. Dealing with death, loss and sadness is crucial to removing negativity from our lives because some people can live in pain for many years. I hope that the sharing in this chapter can help alleviate your pain and help you cope better with the sadness that you are going through.

Death and Life

I want to share my thoughts on this taboo topic because I think that if we do not understand death and why we fear it, we will not have fully appreciate and cherish life.

Why are we afraid to die or to see our loved ones die? The passing of a loved one is often a very sad experience, as it marks the end of our physical relationship with that person. There will be no more opportunities for us to engage in any physical activities with the loved one who has departed. We will not see them or talk to them ever again. The same goes for the person who is about to pass on. This person has few or almost no opportunities to further interact with his or her loved ones or to do the things that he or she aspires to do.

All this fear and sadness revolves around another feeling known as regret. We may regret not spending enough time with our loved ones (our parents, family, friends) when we still had the opportunity to do so. We may regret not having the time to do the things we always wanted to do because we instead chose to blindly follow others' definition of a successful life. The more regrets we have, the sadder

and more afraid of death we will be because death means you have no more chances to undo all your regrets.

Question 1:

What are the regrets you foresee that you will have when you know you are going to die?

You have life now. With life come time and opportunities for you to eliminate as many regrets as you possibly can. Make full use of your time and the opportunities you have now.

It is interesting to see many people associate "How long has one lived?" with "How well has one lived?" Person A, who passes on at the age of 30, has not lived as well as Person B, who passes on at the age of 90. I can only agree that Person B has had more time and opportunities to live the life he or she wanted but this does not necessarily mean that he or she has lived a more fulfilling life than Person A. What if Person A has been living every day to the fullest and doing something which he or she enjoys and finds meaning in, while Person B is always sad and has no direction or drive in life? A short and well-lived life is definitely better than a long life of worries and emotional suffering.

Question 2:

Would you rather have a long-lived life or would you rather have a well-lived life?

While you may not be able to determine the length of life that you will have, you can still determine the quality of life that you want to live.

The purpose of this sharing is not to tell you that I am not afraid to die. That is totally not true because I fear death like everyone else does. However, I am not going to start worrying and suffer sleepless nights over it. Instead, I want to turn this fear into an energy that will propel me further, to appreciate the life that I have and to count all my blessings, to bear fewer grudges, to get angry less and to let go of the many things I cannot control. I want my fear of death to remind me that I am not going to live forever and that I am not even sure how much time I have left. With these reminders, I will treasure every day that I have, for every day is my blessing and an opportunity to change my life or the lives of others for the better.

The P.A.R.K. journey of giving and encouraging kindness has been very rewarding thus far, but outside this role, I am reaping many benefits in my everyday life by being positive. For every message I send out that is embedded with love and positive vibes, I give something back to myself—sometimes just a gentle reminder about how life should be.

[Guest Post] A Beautiful Eulogy for a Child Gone Too Soon

This is a beautiful article that my friend wrote about coping with the loss of her child. May this sharing bring some comfort to parents who are struggling to cope with their own loss. May it also encourage all tired parents to keep going. Lastly, may it remind all parents that

having healthy kids is a great blessing. The rest—work, grades and enrichment classes—is really secondary.

"In early October of 2014, my husband and I welcomed our first bundle of joy into the world, Baby A. Like all first-time parents, we embarked on our new journey with much anticipation, hope and expectations. The transition to parenthood required countless adjustments to our daily lives, but the joy that Baby A shone upon us superseded everything.

Baby A meant the world to us. Watching him grow each day was a blessing. As he became more aware of his surroundings, he began rewarding us with smiles and laughter. We were constantly amazed by him and tickled by his antics.

Baby A was born a healthy boy, with no underlying medical conditions. During the first six months of his life, his developmental milestones were like those of any other child. However, that changed drastically when he developed a fever at seven months of age. This fever soon morphed into something fatal for Baby A: a disease we have never heard of, Kawasaki.

Soon after, hospital stays became more of a weekly affair. One fateful morning in June, Baby A had a massive heart attack. This episode of cardiac arrest changed our lives forever. Baby A was hospital-bound, spending close to six months in the ICU. He was on life support.

The initial months were terrifying. As we watched him drift between consciousness and unconsciousness, we were extremely fearful about the uncertainty. At a certain stage, he had as many as three or four life support machines hooked up to his little body. Would he be able to pull through this ordeal? Would he have the strength to fight on? Our lives plunged into darkness as we prayed for a miracle.

As we kept vigil beside him and held tightly onto him, Baby A soon had a turn of events. It seemed that, finally, we were able to see some light at the end of the tunnel. While he was still in critical condition, we were thankful for the small improvements he had made. He regained consciousness and a certain degree of playfulness. He began to smile once more. All these achievements while being on life support were no easy feat for an adult, let alone a baby. Baby A was our brave fighter.

It was a six-month battle against Kawasaki, a disease that destroyed his heart completely. We soon found the odds against us once more. In the last quarter of 2015, we cradled Baby A as he took his last breath. We watched his little body turned pale, cold and limp. We heard the deafening beep of the machines that signaled the end of life. We were nothing but helpless. As we prepared for his final journey, it struck us bitterly that this was the first time in six months that he had been inside his own home. This rollercoaster ride took the wind out of us mentally, emotionally and physically. We couldn't come to terms with what we had lost. If we could have exchanged our lives for his health, we would have.

If tears could build a stairway, and memories a lane, I'd walk right up to Heaven, and bring you home again. – Anonymous

It has been almost a year since Baby A's passing and not a day has gone by when we haven't thought about him. It has never been easy to have received a child only to have God take him away prematurely. Over time, we've moved from denial to self-blame to anger to, finally, helpless acceptance. His chapter has closed and not in the desired way.

Many times, we have asked ourselves, "Did we do enough? What if we had done this? And what if we'd tried harder? Could he have been saved?" Countless unanswered questions filtered through our minds. And in the midst of grief, we struggled with faith. Why did this happen? Why was God doling out such harsh punishment? Where did we go wrong? What did we do wrong?

The song is ended but the melody lingers on... - Irving Berlin.

A vase broken and re-mended can never be without visible cracks. Memories of Baby A are anchored deep within our hearts. The wounds are vivid and still pretty raw. Through his struggles and pain, we remembered his bravery and took comfort in the fact that he is no longer suffering. Above all, we remembered his smiles. Despite having foreign objects coming out of his body and numerous daily injections, etc., Baby A never gave up. He showered us with angelic smiles till the very end. That was how much he loved us. It took us months to come to that realisation.

And this love he had for us strengthened us to move forward. He had tried his best in this battle against a dreadful disease, so, in honour of him, we too had to try our best to pick up the broken pieces in life. It dawned on us that Baby A's brief moments with us were not coincidental. However painful, he had been there for a reason, perhaps to teach us some values and to give us a different perspective on life. Each memory is extremely precious and treasured.

Baby A, till we meet again. You will forever be in our hearts. We wish things had been different, but God didn't grant us that privilege. The pain and longing to have you with us will always be there. However, we are still blessed that you have come into our lives and we wouldn't have it any differently. And, angel, you are in heaven; do watch over us".

What Is Scarier Than Death?

Every now and then, I read about deaths, not just among the elderly but also among young children and babies. Death seems like such a scary thing, doesn't it? Death brings pain, sadness and suffering. But what is scarier than death is the knowledge that you have not truly lived when death is near.

Why do I always advocate for being positive and staying happy? It is because we should treasure life, every day and every moment. Life is short and it could be gone before you know it. You have time now. It is a privilege and time is something that is denied to many. To spend our time accumulating negative emotions, getting angry with people,

revisiting hurts from past incidents, and holding onto resentment, fears and worries is to waste precious moments of our lives.

When the time comes and we look back and realise that we have wasted our lives by holding onto so much anger, resentment, fear and unhappiness when we could have done something more constructive and meaningful, we will not be proud. By then, no time will be left to change anything. There will be only regrets.

If you have not been living the life you always wanted, you still have time to change it for the better. You just need to abide by the guiding principles of being positive and happy. Make every day a happy and good one. Aspire to be positive no matter what circumstances you are in. If you need to stay away from negative influences or people, have the courage to do so. This is your life and no one has the right to dictate what you should or should not do.

Coping With Sadness

Sadness is one of the most painful emotions that human beings can experience. Sadness usually comes from loss, especially the loss of people who are very close to us and who have touched our lives on many occasions. Because we are all social beings, we will inevitably experience loss and the pain that comes with it.

The pain of loss can come in waves, not just during the period when the loss occurs. While it is natural to grieve and experience sadness, we must not let these emotions overwhelm us and pull us into a downward spiral.

How can we deal with sadness when it comes? I believe we all have the ability to turn negative emotions into positive ones if we teach ourselves how to do it.

When sadness comes, instead of focusing on the loss, think about the wonderful memories your loved ones have created for you. Think about the life lessons your loved ones taught you and what they stood for. Celebrate their lives instead of mourning their passing. Be happy for them, for they have led good and meaningful lives. Their life stories may have ended but their books are so well-written that they will enrich many who read them.

Lastly, remember that no matter where your loved ones went, they will always want you to be happy, to take care of yourself and to continue living a meaningful life.

Excessive Worrying About Losing Something Precious

Let's say you just bought a pet goldfish. He is so adorable and he responds to you when you are near. You love the goldfish so much and feel happy that you have been blessed to have this goldfish as a pet.

Then, a thought enters your mind: "What if I lose my goldfish one day?" So, every day you spend a portion of your time worrying. You let fears and insecurity fill you. You dread the day when you will lose your goldfish.

The same principle applies to life. We sometimes fill ourselves with unnecessary worries that rob us of precious time to seize the moment. Actually, there is no need to ask such "what-if" questions because we will lose what we have someday. Everything has an expiry date, including ourselves.

Worrying may get you slightly mentally prepared but you cannot possibly cover all the angles. Worrying will not prevent things from happening, anyway. If we live in the moment and live every day as best we can, there is no need to fear the day when we lose what is precious to us. That is because we have made full use of every opportunity to cherish what we have.

When a negative thought fills your mind and makes you worry about losing what you have, do not waste time engaging that thought. Instead, shift your focus to making full use of whatever time or opportunity you have to create beautiful memories and to treasure what you have been blessed with.

Miscarriage

Miscarriage is the most dreadful outcome of a pregnancy. The same goes for abortion due to fetal anomalies. When a woman successfully conceives, it is a magical feeling because life has started. The baby grows not just in the womb but also in Mummy's heart. To have him or her taken away prematurely is one of the most heartbreaking losses that a mother can suffer.

And they ask, "Why are you so upset when the baby had not been born yet?" They do not understand that losing an unborn child is no less painful than losing a child who has been born. Love has already formed alongside hopes and dreams for the child. The bond between mother and child is real and it hurts a lot when this bond is broken.

They say, "You are young. You can have another child." They say, "It is alright because you already have a child." They do not realise that every child is special and precious, and you wanted to hold this child in your arms so much, to watch him or her grow day by day and to achieve all the milestones together.

Nature chose woman to undertake the child-bearing responsibility, but it also put her at a higher risk of getting hurt. She is often the one to suffer when things do not go according to plan. She suffers the pain of fertility treatments and of delivery, as well as of birth complications. The pain is not just physical but also psychological and emotional. However, nature did not choose blindly. Woman was chosen because she is strong enough to conquer it all. Through her love and sacrifices, all things are made possible and dreams can come true.

For those who are informed, you are the privileged ones because they will not share their loss as openly as they share their pregnancy. You are in the inner circle that they trust. Be there for them, comfort them and encourage them.

To all the mummies and daddies suffering a loss: You are not alone. Please do not feel guilty anymore. You have done your best for your

baby. Believe that this separation is only temporary. Someday, you will reunite with your angels when your journey here is over. Till then, please live well and spread the love because your angels will watch over you. No matter where they are now, all they want is for you to be happy.

What You Did Not Lose

When you miss that promotion opportunity, when you fail to clinch a lucrative business deal, when you forgot to apply that 50% discount coupon upon checkout, when you are upset about missed chances, it is important to remind yourself that you did not lose something that you already had. Rather, you did not gain something that you could have had.

When your phone crashes and all your saved contact numbers are gone, remind yourself that you may have lost the contacts but you did not lose the friendships. When your SD card is corrupted and you are devastated that all your photos are lost, remind yourself that photos are just snapshots of your memories and that you did not lose all of your memories. The best place to store them is in your heart.

True loss comes from losing someone close to you. It comes from losing something precious to you—for example, your health. True loss happens when you are no longer able to live your dreams or the dreams you envisage with your loved ones. This can happen due to a terrorist attack or a natural disaster, in which many lives are lost overnight and loved ones struggle to cope with the great loss.

While we bemoan the overwhelming restrictions in this country, let's also be thankful that these are ways of keeping us safe and protected. Let us be comforted by the knowledge that our loved ones are well and that we are in good health to pursue our dreams together. While we may have some losses to deal with, we also have what truly matters.

Surviving a Catastrophe

I watched an interview with a Tainan earthquake survivor, Wei-ling. It was heartbreaking to see her narrate her story. The tragedy ripped her life apart but yet she continues to live life as cheerfully and positively as she can.

Wei-ling became a happy mum at age 43. Her loving husband asked her to stop working when she was five months pregnant so that she could get more rest for the later stages of pregnancy. She described the arrival of her son as the best gift of their lives. For two years, they enjoyed a blissful family life.

This sweet dream suddenly became a nightmare when, one night, as their family of three was sleeping, Wei-ling felt like the whole ceiling had collapsed on her. Her natural instinct was to clear as much weight as possible off her two-year-old son because he could not withstand that pressure at such a tender age. She heard her son crying and did her best to comfort him. "Don't be scared, Mummy is here", she told her son. She called out to her husband but there was no response. She feared the worst.

After a few hours, her son's cries became softer and soon Wei-ling felt no pulse. At that moment, she realised she had lost the two most precious people in her life. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she recalled that moment. Despite this, she was determined to survive so that she could tend to their funeral arrangements. With a strong fighting spirit, Wei-ling hung on for over two days before she was rescued. The tragedy also caused her to lose the normal functioning of her legs. She has required extensive physiotherapy so that her right hand can regain some basic abilities.

Despite having gone through so much, she remains positive and determined to live life to the fullest. She remembered her late husband's words to always live in the present moment and to not let future problems or past issues rob her of happiness. Throughout the interview, she mentioned a few times that she was grateful to have so much and that living itself is a blessing. She said that her late husband and son would leave with no worries only if she could carry on happily with life.

It is very admirable for someone who has lost so much overnight to have such a positive outlook on life. As Wei-ling said, we should all learn to look at what we have rather than at what we lost or what we do not have.

While we (Singapore) may not have any natural resources, I count my blessing that we are also sheltered from natural disasters that could destroy many lives overnight. Just look around the world to see how

many lives had been lost and how many families have been affected by typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

We can all sleep with the assurance that the ceiling will not collapse because of an earthquake or safety lapse in construction. That, to me, is something to be grateful for. Of course, life is not perfect and we still have many issues to deal with. But if you can add together all the bits and pieces of happiness, you will realise that we are so much better off than many others.

[Guest Post] The Letter to a Vilomah

"Vilomah" is a Sanskrit word which means against "a natural order". It is used to describe a parent who loses a child. The following letter was written to a Vilomah by a group of parents who have experienced child loss. They created a support group called "Letters to Vilomahs (Singapore)" and write encouraging letters to help grieving parents cope with their losses.

"Dear Mummy,

The hardest journey made was the ride home. Your little companion was no longer there. Homecoming to an empty cot, the nursery looked quieter than it had ever been before. Yet, you did it twice, for your three little fireflies.

It is the kind of bravery that only mothers who have endured the loss of their children would understand. We are sorry that you had to go

through such heart-wrenching pain. It must have hurt, to receive them wholeheartedly and then to lose them prematurely.

You must have loved them so deeply, and still be missing them so dearly.

For them, you grieved and cried constantly, as if the tears could never go away. At some point, it became too tiring. Nonetheless, you continued on your journey. The ride back home was not the end of the ordeal. You had your whole life to live. Facing others without your fireflies. Some may not acknowledge that you have had children, so you silently engraved their existence into your heart.

Perhaps someday there will be a reunion, with all three children waiting under a blossoming tree. The day will be sunny and bright, yet their faces would illuminate the entire sky. Will they recognise you as their mother? Definitely, as your name was already inscribed in their tiny hearts from the start.

You would want to live decently and magnificently in this life so that you could honour your three little fireflies.

However we feel, the honour is theirs, for YOU were chosen to be Their Mother.

Welcome to this unspoken group of Vilomahs. Hopefully, together, we will un-silence our grief and let the world know that we are the best kind of Mothers".

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

IN DEALING WITH DEATH AND LOSS, HOW CAN YOU REACT POSITIVELY?

1) I CHOOSE TO CELEBRATE HIS / HER / ITS LIFE INSTEAD OF MOURNING MY LOSS.

2) I CHOOSE TO REMEMBER THE LIFE LESSON MY LOVED ONE / PET HAS TAUGHT ME.

3) I CHOOSE TO REMEMBER THE FOND MEMORIES WE CREATED TOGETHER.

4) NO MATTER WHERE MY LOVED ONES WENT, I KNOW THEY WANT ME TO BE HAPPY AND CONTINUE TO LIVE LIFE HAPPILY.

5) _____

HOW HAS THE FEAR OF LOSS RESULTED IN POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOU?

1) I CHERISH TIME WITH MY LOVED ONES (MY PARENTS, MY FRIENDS, MY CHILDREN, MY PETS).

2) I ASPIRE TO LIVE EACH DAY TO THE FULLEST AND TO FIND MEANING IN THE THINGS I DO.

3) I AM THANKFUL FOR ALL MY BLESSINGS NOW, AS THEY MAY NOT LAST FOREVER.

4) _____

VOLUME 2

THE LIGHT OF POSITIVITY

The light of positivity illuminates the entire realm, as it shines through darkness and the mist of negativity that is clouding our vision of the magical realm of happiness. The light brings hope, courage and strength to the suffering. It is an essential element for supporting life in the magical realm. Let us learn more about how to generate positive emotions and energy, which will help us live a meaningful and fulfilling life, through the chapters in Volume 2 of this book.

CHAPTER 6

THE MAGICAL WAND (OF JOY & CONTENTMENT)

The magical wand bestows joy on its owner. Every one of us owns one. However, some of us have forgotten where we left it. May the light of positivity brighten our vision and help us find our precious magical wand.

[Author's Note]

It seems like a natural and straightforward decision to choose happiness in our everyday lives. However, we are besieged by so many reasons to be unhappy that we conveniently forget what it takes to be happy. In this chapter, I hope to share with you that being happy is still a choice. I also share some secrets of happiness, which I hope will benefit you and your loved ones.

Living in Abundance

When we want to eat Dim Sum, there is Siew Mai, Har Gao, Chee Cheong Fun, Char Siew Bao, carrot cake, etc.

When we want to eat a buffet meal, there is Japanese buffet, Korean BBQ buffet, international buffet and even durian buffet. We can eat until we are full—at times, overly full.

Yet, there are people living in Southeast Asia who have never tasted chicken. Chicken, to us, is considered a relatively cheaper meat as compared to seafood.

When we want to buy clothes, bags or shoes, we have so many choices. Shopping malls are everywhere and shops are having sales almost all the time. These days, you can buy at even lower prices online and the items are delivered right to your doorstep. We have so much pre-loved clothing to donate that there are not enough welfare organisations to accept them.

Yet, there are people in other parts of the world wearing their one and only torn item of clothing and walking around barefoot.

When we wish to have some form of entertainment, the choices are there as well. We have our smartphones and personal computers in the comfort of our homes. Movie theatres are available in almost every estate, while tourist attractions are changing and emerging every year. There are also free dance or cooking classes organised by Resident Centres (RC) and Community Centres (CC). The booking of holiday trips is just a few clicks away or can be done via the many travel agencies in Singapore.

Yet, there are many people who never had the chance to leave their villages or their countries, either because of poverty or for political reasons.

We have so much that we are spoilt for choices. It is important that we learn to count our blessings and find contentment in what we are blessed with. Otherwise, we will never be truly satisfied or happy.

Life as a Bangladeshi Worker

Every time I looked at the Bangladeshi workers hard at work, I wondered how life would have been different for me had I not been born in Singapore but in a poorer country like Bangladesh.

When I was crossing the traffic junction on a hot morning, I could feel that the heat was unbearable, as though I were going to melt. However, these workers are under the sun for most of the day, doing

construction or repair work. There is no aircon office environment for them, no comfortable ergonomic chair in which they can rest their feet, no pantry where they can easily grab snacks, no visiting of their favourite hawker centres or eateries during lunch to grab their favourite food or have a different variety of food (Chinese, Western, Japanese) throughout the week. Even on a Saturday morning, the workers were outside my flat, painting the walls under the hot sun.

We are all human beings. I am in no way superior to a Bangladeshi worker who is the same age as I am. Because we were born in different geographical locations, I have many more blessings than he does. I enjoy a higher quality of life, have received a proper education, have better nutrition and have more opportunities to progress in my work, inside a less hazardous working environment. Because I am aware of these blessings, I am thankful and I am happy.

What Is in Your Basket of Life?

I have a habit of getting too many groceries when I go to the supermarket because everything seems necessary to me. However, what seems like a need may not necessarily be a need if I were to evaluate it carefully. For example, I wanted to buy some fruits, so I bought bananas, apples, dragonfruit and kiwi, all of which added weight to the basket. However, I could not possibly eat so many fruits in a day or two. I would probably do fine with any two of the four.

In the above example, an unnecessary 'need' becomes a 'want'. It is not as though I go to the supermarket only once a month. In fact, I pass the supermarket every day and I always have opportunities to

buy on another day. I ended up carrying this arm-breaking load back home because I wanted to get it all in one shot.

The same analogy applies to us in life. For example, some young couples rush into buying expensive private property with minimal savings and end up with huge commitments. It is not that they will never be able to buy private property at all, but that they might be better served to do so when there is less load in their basket.

What commitments are you carrying in your basket of life? Are you carrying more weight than what you can handle?

I will now do a final check of my basket before payment. If there are items that I will not need over the next few days, I will put them back on the shelf and get them on the next trip. I know that I will be the one suffering if I insist on carrying weight I do not need back home.

Time to evaluate your basket of life today. You just may find unnecessary commitments that are weighing on your happiness.

We Are All Different, Yet All the Same

You and I, we are so different. We have different outlooks on life, different priorities, different goals and different dreams.

Yet, we are also the same. We yearn to be loved, we hope to receive encouragement when we are down, we seek meaning and purpose in life and, lastly, we want to be happy.

I am just like everyone else. I have bills to settle, I face issues in life and I am not spared from experiencing anger, stress or any negative emotion, either self-inflicted or bestowed by someone else.

However, I try to live my life a little differently by constantly reminding myself about my many blessings. This makes me happy. Every blessing is a reason for happiness. For example, it can be as simple as having a good night's rest on a comfortable, clean bed and waking up feeling refreshed.

If life can give me 10 reasons to be unhappy, I can give myself 100 reasons to be happy. When you can give yourself so many reasons to be happy, I can assure you that your mind will treat your current issues as a passing rain cloud. On the other hand, if you choose to focus on only your issues, you magnify them and make yourself feel miserable. Very soon, you will let your issues define yourself and become very unhappy.

I share with you how I live my life as a reference. I am not expecting anyone to be me because we are all born differently. However, amid the differences, we all deserve to be loved and happy.

The True Owners of Our Happiness

We are the true owners of our own happiness. In every circumstance, we can give ourselves reasons to be happy or reasons to be unhappy. When we are angry with someone, when we harbour hate inside ourselves, when we feel negative, we surrender a part of our happiness ownership to them. The more we dwell on negative

thoughts, the more of the happiness ownership we transfer to them. In the end, we start blaming the people who have hurt us, the people who make us angry and the people who cause us so much misery.

This results in more hate, anger and frustration, especially when we think that all these sufferings are beyond our control. When that happens, we have basically surrendered all of our happiness ownership to them. We have no control over our happiness, as our minds are obsessed with negative thoughts.

This is not true. We have absolute control over our happiness. While people or events may create negativity in us, we do not have to keep dwelling on negative thoughts, as this will breed more negativity, which in turn robs us of happiness. We can take ownership of our happiness by finding reasons to be happy and shifting our focus away from the people or events that upset us. In this way, we do not transfer the happiness ownership to anyone else because their actions do not affect us.

So, take ownership of your happiness. Don't play the "blame" game. Choose all the reasons to be happy. The people and events that make you unhappy are not worthy of mastering your happiness. Only you are worthy, so do not give your happiness to them.

Late Lunch but Feeling Blessed

One time, I had a late lunch at around 4 plus, which was close to dinner time. I was famished but at the same time I felt very thankful for my blessings:

1. To have a warm plate of food served when I was very hungry and to experience the state of hunger only once in a long while, unlike the people who are dying of hunger every day in other parts of the world.

2. To have money to pay for my food when some people are going hungry and struggling to fulfil their basic needs. There are people who go around eating leftovers. Some elderly people earn just a few dollars a day.

3. To be able to find food in my vicinity, unlike some countries where one must drive for hours just to find a place to buy groceries.

4. To have the health to eat normally, to be able to choose and enjoy what I want to eat when there are people who must be fed through a tube or who have a strict diet to follow or who simply have no appetite at all due to illness.

We sometimes take all our blessings for granted, as though they are entitlements. Then we find other reasons to be unhappy and make ourselves feel unhappy about living in Singapore. The negativity is all around us and it is easy to get sucked into the cycle of complaining, resentment and unhappiness.

It is just like when the haze comes and we realise that having clean air is not an entitlement but a blessing. Let's be thankful for what we have. Only then will we truly be happy.

Hard Work Is the Key to Happiness

We all want happiness but it does not come easily. What comes easily is the exact opposite: negativity and the many reasons to be unhappy. Just read the news or social media or recall the common topics of chit-chat. They are usually inclined towards the issues and challenges we face every day.

There is no magic pill that we can take to make us feel happy overnight. Happiness is hard work. We must undergo a change in mindset if we really want to be happy. We need to "practise" being happy by reminding ourselves about the reasons to be happy—for example, counting our blessings, comparing ourselves with the right group, etc.—so that positive thinking and seeking happiness become habits.

Our happiness is like our child. We cannot expect others to raise our child for us, just like we cannot expect happiness to be delivered on a platter to us. It is our responsibility to find happiness for ourselves. The rest of the people around us are either our helpers or our dampers.

See Our Blessings Through the Misfortune of Others

We often see our fortunes through the misfortune of others.

The man who complained that he had no money for a nice pair of sports shoes realised how lucky he was when he saw someone with no feet.

The parent who complained about how naughty her child was or about how badly her child performed in school realised how blessed she was to have a healthy child when she saw another parent with a special needs child.

The youth who was unhappy because he could not afford a Japanese buffet dinner soon realised how blessed he was when he saw that another family's wish was to have a McDonald's meal.

Monday is the day when many dread going to work. However, it is also the day that some may not get to see. It is the day when some may be going in for surgeries and treatment. It is the day when someone is struggling to keep his or her stomach full or even to stay alive. If you are not like one of them, you are blessed. Make full use of this opportunity to live and enjoy life by being happy.

Chasing Milestones and Expectations

When you are single, people will ask why you are not attached. When you are in a relationship, people will ask when you will be getting married. When you are married, people will ask when you are going to have kids. When you have one kid, people will ask when you are going to have a second kid. Yet, no one ever asks if you are happy being where you are and no one ever guarantees that you will be happier moving onto the next phase of life.

We live in a world of expectations, fuelled by never-ending comparison, and we are constantly chasing milestones. It seems like the next milestone is the happier place to be but that is not totally true.

There are singles who are living very fulfilling lives and there are people who are married and feeling miserable.

Happiness is about finding contentment where you are. It is not about chasing expectations or achieving milestones. Get there because you want to, not because you are expected to do it or because everyone else is doing it. Otherwise, when you finally get there, you may find that things are not as great as others described them.

If the people around you ask why you are not at the next milestone, gently tell them that you are happy where you are. Remember, you do not need anyone's approval to be happy.

Five Secrets to Happiness That You Learnt in December

December is a happy month for many people, the reason being that it is the month of Christmas, the season of giving. December is also the month when people clear leave and go on holiday trips. It is a perfect time to travel, after a year of hard work, especially for parents, as it is the school holidays period. December is also the month when we receive our bonuses, that extra one month's salary.

Why do these things make us happy and how we can learn the secrets of happiness from the month of December?

1. The Season of Giving

We derive great joy from giving. When we make another person happy, we feel happy, too. And it is not just for the underprivileged; even helping a random stranger can create some form of happiness

for you. That is why I always advocate giving kindness as and when you can. The reason is simple: It makes you happy.

2. Receiving Presents

The great thing about Christmas is that we get to receive presents from our loved ones. We love to receive presents, regardless of how old we are. If Christmas is an analogy for life, then presents represent love, encouragement and support. We need some representation of love from the people around us, and presents are a good one. Beyond Christmas, presents can be the words of encouragement and acts of love that we give to one another.

3. Clearing Leave

This is the period when people clear their leave or they will be forfeited. The act of clearing leave and taking a break from work is our body's natural way of recharging itself and staying healthy, physically and emotionally. Beyond December, if you have ever felt overwhelmed by issues in life, remember to take a break and a breather.

4. Travelling

We love to travel, don't we? Travelling is all about learning by experiencing something different in another country. Learning is inside our DNA. The happiest people are those who aspire to keep learning, even through old age. On the other hand, some youth are so bored in life because they refuse to learn new things. Boredom can also occur among the busiest people, who are always rushing to get things done, but they are doing the same things over and over again. So, to be happy, keep learning and try something different each time.

5. Bonus

Finally, getting a bonus makes us happy. I hope I do not mislead anyone into thinking that money itself makes us happy. In actual fact, it is not. Otherwise, why are we not as happy during other months? We are happy to receive a bonus because we get something extra that month. The act of getting something more is what makes us happy. It is a state of comparison in the mind.

Imagine this scenario: You were elated to receive two months of performance bonus because it was something extra compared to what you received in other months. However, you soon felt disappointed when you realised that your colleague, who did not work any harder than you did, received three months of performance bonus. Money is an object for comparison but it is not the only one. If you can find other objects for comparison in which you have it better than others (for example, your health, your family, freedom), then you will be happy.

Living in Fortune and Prosperity

I often wonder how a small country like Singapore can produce so much waste in a year (7.81 million tonnes in 2016). The reason is simple: We are getting more than we need, so what we do not need becomes waste—for example, too many clothes, children's toys, food, etc.

We are also very spoilt in terms of choices. If we take a trip to a mega-supermarket like Giant or NTUC Xtra, the choices available for every single category of items will overwhelm us. Take staple food like rice,

for example. There are different types of rice (white, brown, red) and different brands, catering to different dietary needs and budgets.

The huge spread of fresh fishes on display will make you feel like you are shopping in the middle of the ocean, while the large variety of vegetables will make you feel like you are visiting a vegetable farm. Beyond the staple foods, we also have many choices for unhealthy foods like tibits and instant noodles.

Variety aside, it is evident that we can afford these items because supply is driven by demand. All these are signs of abundance and prosperity. We have so much more than we need. However, abundance and prosperity count for nothing if we are oblivious to them.

If we allow ourselves to be blinded by negative emotions, by issues we face and people who disrupt our peace, the focus will shift to them instead of the blessings we have. I encourage everyone to look beyond their issues and to see what we are blessed with. We need that positive mindset to deal with our issues and to get to the solution faster. Piling stress, anger and frustration on top of your issues is counter-productive.

When the Lunar New Year comes around, we always wish for wealth, abundance, peace, prosperity and happiness. They are all with us now.

Counting Blessings at the Office Pantry

Every time I visit my office pantry to top up my water, I always feel thankful and privileged. Why? Because I am using clean, drinkable water from the tap to wash my cup. I have cold water and hot water readily available in the pantry for drinking. If that is not enough, I have warm water at 60 degrees Celsius to save me the hassle of mixing hot and cold water to get warm water.

Elsewhere, I saw a friend campaigning to raise funds so that the underprivileged children in Cambodia could have clean drinking water. In other parts of the world, there are people who are so helpless, they cannot do anything about their own situation and must depend on good people in other countries to help them.

To be truly contented and happy, we really need to shift the focus to what we have and what we are blessed with. Otherwise, we could be worse off (in terms of happiness) than the kid in Cambodia who just refilled her bottle with clean water from the water treatment system (sponsored by Singaporeans).

What Is in a Happy Day?

If you were to ask me a few years ago, "What is a happy day?", I would have described a day on which I did not have to work and on which I could do the activities I enjoy. These days usually happen only when I am on leave or on a vacation trip.

But if you were to ask me the same question today, I would describe a day on which there is no need to go to the hospital, no need for a

medical review, no need to go under the knife, no need to anxiously wait for medical results, no need to rush to A&E in the middle of the night. It is a day on which I am healthy and feeling good.

Doesn't that sound like every day we have? However, we often do not realise how much we have until we lose it. Health, quality time with our loved ones—when we have them, it seems like an entitlement that we have for life. When we lose them, we start to have regrets. We wish we had a second chance or had spent more time appreciating what we had.

Life is about choices and no one wins all the time. When you decide to spend time in one area, you lose time in other areas. Know what is really important to you and channel your energy into the real treasures of your life. Stop wasting time on the things you do not really need. Make every day a happy one!

How to Be Happy Doing Things We Do Not Enjoy

Happiness is not just about doing the things we enjoy. It is also about finding the motivation to do the things we do not enjoy. We know how to make ourselves happy, such as by enjoying good food, retail therapy or going on holiday trips. However, we may not know how to react when we are tackling the chores that we do not enjoy. This, in turn, creates unhappiness when we try to bear it.

While it may not always be easy to find the motivation to do the things we do not enjoy doing, I believe we can still do something to make things better. For example, I do not enjoy washing the dishes. Tons of

unwashed pots and bowls in the kitchen is hardly a motivating sight. Instead of going through with the chore while feeling unhappy, I can turn on my favourite music or watch a movie on my tablet while I wash the dishes.

There are thousands of videos on YouTube and Facebook that pertain to all categories of interest. This is a great opportunity to be entertained, learn a new skill or discover the wonders of the world, while doing the things I do not enjoy. As a result, washing the dishes does not seem so daunting. In fact, I look forward to dishwashing time every day.

Working in the construction industry can be a tough and tiring job. However, I have seen a construction worker having some fun pushing a trolley of sandbags. The idea is to create fun and play when doing a seemingly uninteresting chore.

In life, we will face challenges and situations we do not want to be in. Being negative and dreading these situations will only make things worse and magnify our woes. We must learn to see the positives in each situation, change the way we do things, find meaning in what we do and remember to have fun. Life is meant to be enjoyable and happy. We can get it right through practise.

Cold Season in Singapore (Part 1)

Singapore experienced its coldest months in many years, as we experienced weather like that in the temperate region. For the first

time in a long while, I slept without the fan on and was fully covered by my blanket.

The chilly, wet season brought many reminders of how truly blessed we are. We need not worry about getting wet because we are well-equipped for it. We have roofs over our heads at home and many walkways outside are sheltered.

We have jackets, blankets and ample clothing to keep us warm. Back at home, we have a hot water shower in which to bathe. We also have piping hot food, be it home-cooked or served outside, to fill our stomachs and make the cold more bearable.

This may seem like an entitlement rather than a privilege but there are people, even in Singapore, who are struggling with the cold weather. If we think about the homeless who brave the chilling wind and sleep outside, the underprivileged who do not have enough to eat, the elderly living in rental estates with no access to hot water, we know that we are fortunate. Let us not forget our many fellow human beings who have died from cold in other parts of the world.

If we can all adopt this habit of looking at what we have rather than at what we don't, we will definitely be happier.

Cold Season in Singapore (Part 2)

As the rain will not stop, as the weather continues to be chilly and as you cannot participate in outdoor activities (even washing your hands under the cold water tap gives you goosebumps), you realise it is such

a blessing when the sun is around. It is just like how we never truly appreciate clean air until the haze comes around and we have to scramble for N95 masks and air purifiers.

There is a Chinese phrase, 不要等到失去了才学会珍惜, which translates into, "Don't wait till you lose something, then learn how to cherish". There are blessings we never realise until we start losing them. I provide two examples that are close to our hearts.

1. Our health. We know all the principles of healthy living: eat less sugar, drink more water, get ample rest, exercise and have a positive mindset. But we always give ourselves reasons to not follow these principles because doing so requires discipline. How often have we told ourselves that we are still young, we are very busy, work is important, and some stress or tiredness is okay? We start paying more attention to our health only when we realise that our bodies are not functioning optimally or when the health check results are not ideal.

2. Our loved ones. We are always so busy achieving 101 tasks but our parents are ageing and our kids are growing by the day. Some opportunities missed are opportunities gone forever. You cannot buy them back even if you have loads of money in the future.

Life is so much more than trying to impress bosses at work, trying to earn that bucket of gold and achieving financial freedom as quickly as possible. Life is about building meaningful relationships with the people around you and creating beautiful memories together. It is about pursuing happiness and living each day with purpose.

If you chase material things and neglect the blessings around you, it will be the greatest irony when you finally win the world but lose yourself or your loved ones in the process.

"What Are You Grateful For?"

Want to know a secret to happiness? Continually engage your mind with this question: "What am I grateful for?"

For example, one morning, I had to attend a company event at a faraway place. That meant having to wake up an hour earlier. These are my reasons for unhappiness, actually, but I choose to focus on what I am grateful for.

I am grateful for so many things. Firstly, I am grateful to be able to wake up and earn another day. I am grateful that there is a shuttle bus service near my residence that can take me close to the destination. I am grateful that the shuttle bus uncle was kind enough to drop me off at a place near my event venue even though he was not obliged to do so. I am grateful that I do not have to pay for some of my meals today (lunch and tea breaks catered). Above all, I am grateful for my health, for the ability to see, hear, walk and breathe. All these things should not be taken for granted. I am also grateful that I am surrounded by so many lovely people: my family, my friends and all the beautiful strangers whom I have never met yet who put so much trust and faith in me.

You see, when we continually ask ourselves this question, our mental focus shifts to something positive. We give ourselves reasons to be

happy through the things for which we are grateful. The same goes if you ask yourself what you are unhappy with. The mind shifts its focus to negativity and you feel unhappy. However, we do not have to consciously do this because negativity is all around in our environment. The state of positivity is more difficult to achieve, so we must be proactive in seeking our own happiness. Therefore, make it a habit to ask yourself this question from time to time. You will feel happier this way.

Power Outage

We often do not realise how much we are blessed until the blessings are taken away from us. For instance, my block just experienced a power outage. During that one hour plus of the outage, we were basically doing nothing in darkness because the lights, fan, TV and whatever electrical appliances we had were all down. We had torchlight but it was not bright enough for us to carry out our normal activities. We had battery-operated hand-held fans but they were not strong enough to keep us cool.

During these times, we realise that we have taken for granted the many blessings we have in our lives—simple things like electricity to operate the household appliances, clean drinking water from the tap, gas for cooking, etc. Not everyone in this world gets these things as readily as we do. Even in Singapore, there are poor families whose electricity was cut off because they could not afford it.

The more we realise how many blessings we have, the more thankful, happy and contented we will be. Stop being unhappy about what you

do not have. Instead, shift the focus to the many blessings you already have.

Are You Happy Today?

We can talk all day about chasing our dreams or finding our passion for leading a meaningful and purposeful life. However, the ultimate guiding principle is very simple: Are you happy today? Are you happy with what you have and what you are doing today? If your answer is "yes" today, tomorrow and for the rest of your life, then you have lived a very meaningful life and you will not need to worry about what is your passion, what is your purpose and so on.

A home is nothing more than a shelter filled with love. We do not need the most lavish mansion to create a home sweet home. A happy home is measured by the people inside it, not by the number of square metres it occupies.

Experience is nothing more than learning or trying something new each day. We do not need to travel the world to enrich our life experiences. Make it a point to learn or try something new every day, regardless of how simple it is. For example, try a new dish for lunch. You may be pleasantly surprised.

A job is nothing more than an income-generating mechanism. We do not really need to get overly stressed out about our work. It is not as though we will perish if we lose our jobs. If being in your current job makes you very unhappy, you may want to seriously consider whether

it is worth it. I also strongly believe that no one is indispensable to any organisation.

Money is nothing more than a tool to sustain our basic needs. If we work hard, are prudent and have good saving habits, we will have enough, even on rainy days. Do not let money fuel your desire to want more and more, which builds insecurities when you think you do not have enough. A happy life is never one in which all our wants are fulfilled. Instead, it is one filled with love, meaning and peace.

12 Reasons Why Singaporeans Are Unhappy

There are many unhappy Singaporeans among us. We witness grievances shared by colleagues at work or the negativity arising on social media. Understanding why Singaporeans are unhappy is important because they are our friends, our family and us! Also, we are so closely connected offline and online that unhappiness rubs onto the people around us when we share it with them.

Here are 12 things that I think are making us unhappy:

1. Resentment (of the Government, Bosses or a Spouse)

We harbour resentment of people or organisations that are not doing a perfect job. The government is blamed for the high cost of living and high property prices, bosses are blamed for our heavy workloads and high stress levels while spouses do not always do enough. Resentment and the blame game surrender the ownership of our happiness to the people whom we think are at fault.

2. Envy (Local or Overseas)

We envy how people living overseas have more relaxed lifestyles than we do. We envy our peers for having more than we do. As long as there is a common ground for comparisons, there is room for envy when we feel that we are worse off. Envy makes us feel inadequate and unhappy.

3. Expectation (of Others and Ourselves)

We have high expectations, not just of others but also of ourselves. It is like we have a checklist and every item must be ticked off. For example, before we can be happy, we must have enough money, we must buy a house and a car, we must let the kids take their enrichment classes, etc. Unmet expectations lead to disappointment, which causes unhappiness.

4. Money (Magnifying the Significance)

There are many things that money can buy but there are also things that money cannot buy. We are under the illusion that if we have enough money, all our problems will be solved. The truth is, when you have lots of money, other problems will crop up. Also, money can transcend needs to wants to greed. You will be forever unsatisfied, like a dog chasing its tail. When we magnify the significance of money and are not earning enough, we become unhappy.

5. Insecurity (About the Future)

The world is moving too quickly and we are feeling insecure. The cost of living is increasing and we are afraid that we will not have enough for later years. The landscape is always changing, be it at work or in

our personal lives. Just like how you cannot use yesterday's methods to parent today's kids, so are we worried about whether we can catch up quickly enough or adapt well enough. All this builds our insecurity and makes us unhappy.

6. Fear of Losing (Competition)

Competition is good when it helps us excel and improve but we have taken competition to an unhealthy level because of the fear of losing. This fear creates stress and unhappiness when we imagine the consequences if we or our kids lose out on that 'A' grade, that slot in a prestigious school or that promotion opportunity. When fear engulfs us, we become unhappy.

7. Negative Influence (All Around Us)

We are not immune to the negativity that the people around us are spreading. Furthermore, it is a reflex action to be negative first, as being positive requires proactive efforts. With the negative influence and the reflex of negative thoughts, unhappiness comes to us easily.

8. Kindness (Yet to Uncover)

There are great benefits to giving kindness. Uncovering them requires that you give without expectation. Pragmatism is preventing us from taking that first bold step, especially when time is limited. We want to see instant results or invest our time in things that will reap benefits. This makes us hesitant to give kindness because it seems like we will not get anything in return. When we are not creating positive energy to diffuse the negativity inside ourselves, we remain unhappy.

9. Ignorance (of Sufferings and Blessings)

When we fail to see our blessings and instead focus on our issues, we magnify them, feel miserable and give ourselves many reasons to be unhappy. Being aware of other people's sufferings and knowing that we are blessed in many ways can help us find contentment, which reduces unhappiness.

10. The Internet

The Internet and social media have enriched our lives and brought a wealth of information to our fingertips. However, if we do not harness the powers of the Internet in a healthy way, we will open up a Pandora's Box, which will give rise to a series of problems such as screen addiction, cyberbullying, and fatigue, which in turn creates distress and unhappiness.

11. Time

When never have enough time when we are forever busy and have 101 tasks to complete. We want to do so much more, to have more time to volunteer or enjoy more "ME" time, but we are constantly swept away by all the responsibilities and never-ending deadlines. When we struggle to find time to do the things that will make us happy, we become unhappy.

12. Purpose (Not Having One)

Many people are chasing milestones and living lives that society deems successful. If you have a house, a car, cash, kids and a stable income, you are considered successful, but are you really happy living your life this way? Is that definition of success really applicable to you?

Are you measuring life by the number of breaths you take and the number of milestones you have, or are you measuring life by the achievements that take your breath away? Not finding meaning in the things we do or living life without any sense of direction or purpose brings emptiness, which in turn creates unhappiness.

I hope that understanding the reasons why Singaporeans are unhappy will help us moderate our negative emotions and, in turn, find our deserved happiness. Life is too short for regrets or unhappiness. I wish you the courage and wisdom to pursue what is really good for you.

The Happiness List

I think we all should have a happiness list.

This list contains the things that can cheer us up when we are suddenly overwhelmed by negative emotions, such as anger, worries, sadness or stress. In a rapidly moving world, and with people being increasingly connected, negative energies can quickly flow to us, even when the intent is not to cause anyone to be negative. When our loved ones share their fears or worries, these emotions can easily rub off onto us and make us feel insecure. On other occasions, the stress level from over-expectation can make us feel overwhelmed. When we are stressed out, we can get angry very easily. Even the slightest trigger can lead to a big reaction or outburst.

Storing a list somewhere in our phones, or in a place to which we can easily refer, or simply memorise the list, is a proactive and preventive

action. When we are suddenly overwhelmed by negative emotions, the list will guide us in calming down and diffusing the negative emotions. It is beneficial to us because negative emotions are bad for our physical and mental health.

So, go on and come up with a list of things that will make you happy, or things that you really enjoy doing. As long as it is non-destructive, go ahead and write it down, because it can come in handy when you suddenly need it.

It Is Sometimes Not Easy to Be Happy While Living in Singapore

The cost of living is increasing, we read about increases in transport fees, electric bills are growing and the mother of them all: the impending 2% increase in GST come 2021.

Every morning, when your day has barely started, you are bothered by train congestion and breakdowns. You quietly wish that you owned a car but are put off by the high COE prices and value depreciation over the years. Those who own cars may also be frustrated by traffic jams, high maintenance costs and ERP (increasing numbers and increasing charges).

When you reach work, all sorts of issues are waiting for you: an overwhelming workload, unsupportive bosses, demanding clients and uncooperative colleagues. You wish you could end this all by "firing" all of them but why is the TOTO first prize so hard to strike?

The children and youth attending school may not be the happiest

bunch, either, as the education system is stressful, the competition is intense and grades are everything. Education starts at a younger age and expectations of grooming a super genius kid get higher and higher.

When you get home, the wife is naggy and the hubby refuses to do anything but laze around and watch TV. You are tired physically and drained mentally. You wish that you had fewer responsibilities and you wish that you could care less. But you can't, so you start feeling that life is hard and miserable. Happiness seems like a far-fetched dream.

You wish you could escape from this hard life to a place with no stress, no responsibilities, no challenges ... but does this place exist? And if it does, would it really benefit you?

Remember this: When a butterfly tries to break free of its cocoon and you decide to give it a helping hand by setting it free, the butterfly will never learn how to fly. It will spend the rest of its life weakened and will eventually die off.

The same principle goes for life. We are meant to struggle because these challenges and issues, when we eventually overcome them, make us stronger. Life also has to be limiting in some areas so that we have the drive to work on the things that we are lacking. If life gave you everything, your life would be aimless and without direction. Living would have no purpose or meaning.

Back to the pressing issues. The cost of everything is sky-high. I believe that everything happens for a reason and that every crisis offers an opportunity. Instead of getting stressed out about how to earn more money, why not start being more prudent and watching our spending?

We may not realise this but our country generated 781 million tonnes of waste in 2016. This means we are throwing away a lot of stuff. The amount of stuff we want to donate for free (clothing, furniture, toys) is so overwhelming that few charitable organisations have the space to store it. We spend because we have the power to spend but we are seriously damaging our environment. Global warming is very real. We had a very cold season in Singapore for the first time in many years. The weather these days can also become extremely hot. Our future generations may be the ones who bear the full brunt of environmental devastation if we persist in our actions.

For other issues that made you unhappy, my advice is to not focus on them because you will magnify them, which may eventually make you feel depressed. Instead, focus on the solution because every problem has a solution and it may not necessarily have to do with money. Also, focus on what you have, like good health and the fact that your loved ones, no matter how naggy or slack they can be, are around to celebrate life's best moments with you.

Lastly, in the most difficult times lie many opportunities for kindness. We can help one another tide through these challenges and, in turn, build a more caring and heartwarming society.

Compound Unhappiness

While we may be bothered by the heat or by flash floods on days when it rains heavily, many people living in other parts of the world have died in, or had their homes destroyed by, natural disasters. Many people live in heavily polluted cities.

While we may be sick of eating hawker food every day during lunch, or while we may give ourselves headaches trying to decide which restaurant to visit or which buffet menu to choose, many people in other parts of the world are dying of hunger and dehydration.

While we may be disgusted because the public transport system is delayed, broken down or congested, many people living in other parts of the world have no public transport system or proper roads. Travelling to work or school can take hours each day.

While we may be frustrated by long wait times at the public hospitals, many people in other parts of the world have died at hospitals simply because there were not enough doctors to render immediate medical attention.

While we may be so stressed out over primary school registration for our kids, many children in other parts of the world are growing up without education and must depend on foreign help or charity projects for a school to be built in the village.

Some friends may be familiar with the term "compound interest", which is interest earned from your original capital sum not withdrawn and further added back to the principal sum to earn more interest. The

same concept can apply to unhappiness—i.e. issues that made you unhappy are not resolved and are added to the original pool of unhappiness.

If we can learn to see things from another perspective and to ignore the noise surrounding us, we would realise that we are blessed in so many ways. That is, essentially, the key to our deserved happiness.

10 Daily Questions

Every morning when you wake up, ask yourself these 10 questions:

1. Am I healthy?
2. Are my loved ones well?
3. Do I have a few good friends whom I trust?
4. Am I able to support myself financially?
5. Is my country safe (low crime, sheltered from natural disasters)?
6. Am I drinking clean water?
7. Am I breathing non-polluted air?
8. Am I able to get to many places via public transport?
9. Are food, amenities and healthcare available at a reachable distance?
10. Do I have a roof over my head and do I sleep well at night on a clean bed?

If you answered mostly "yes", you are blessed. Do you really need much more to make yourself happy?

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHEN YOU WAKE UP EVERY MORNING, WHAT ARE THREE THINGS YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR? (E.G. A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP, A COMFORTABLE BED, A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD, A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, FOOD/ BREAKFAST, YOUR FAMILY)

WHAT IS ONE SECRET OF HAPPINESS THAT YOU LEARNT AND WOULD LIKE TO FOLLOW IN THIS CHAPTER?

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT LIVING IN SINGAPORE? (E.G. FOOD HAVEN, FREE FROM NATURAL DISASTERS, CLEAN AIR, CLEAN WATER, FREEDOM TO PURSUE MY INTERESTS, KIND PEOPLE EVERYWHERE, SAFE CITY)

WHAT IS ON YOUR HAPPINESS LIST?

CHAPTER 7

INSPIRING GEMSTONES (OF POSITIVE ENERGY)

Inspiring gemstones are one of the most precious treasures in the magical realm because they emit an abundance of positive energy for their keepers. These gemstones have the amazing ability to clone themselves when they come in contact with new keepers. Thus, they create more goodness and positive vibes for everyone in the magical realm.

[Author's Note]

Positive thinking allows us to make the best of every situation. However, it is not easy to be positive on a regular basis, especially because we live in a world surrounded by negativity. It is human nature to react negatively to challenges—so much so that it becomes a habit that is difficult to change. However, it is possible to reverse this tendency and to embrace positive thinking as a way of life if we keep working on cultivating good thoughts and teaching ourselves how to react positively. When we are able to accomplish that, we will be able to influence the people around us to be positive as well.

Dealing With Life's Challenges by Staying Positive

I have issues to deal with in life as well as many reasons to be envious, angry and unhappy. I can also find people to blame or I can feel sorry for myself. However, I choose not to do this because it will not help. It will only serve to make me feel more miserable.

I grew up in a poor family and my parents often quarreled over money. They worked long hours so I usually stayed at home by myself. I had no tuition and my parents could not guide me in my studies because they had received limited education. My mum would cook dinner as early as 6 am and by the time I was ready to eat at 6 pm, the food was cold and dry. Other times, throughout my growing up years, I simply ate out. My parents never brought me along for holidays, except once to Thailand.

Eventually, I graduated and found a decent-paying job. I could afford to travel but I started to have health concerns. A few years ago, before my 32nd birthday, I crossed paths with the big 'C'. Thankfully, it was still in the early stage, so it could be treated with surgery. A few months later, a complication occurred and I had a lymph node infection. I went through two additional surgeries to clear the infection.

A year later, my nose started bleeding for no reason and the health scare returned. Fortunately, the nasoscopy results turned out fine. Another year passed and my specialist noticed a lump on the operation site. The specialist advised me to go through another surgery to remove the lump and get it tested. I was blessed again that the results turned out well. The following year, I had food poisoning that was so serious. I thought I was going to die. Fast forward to a year later; I had an outbreak of shingles, which meant I could not go out during CNY. It was a crazy few years of checking in and out of the hospital and nervously waiting for test results.

I live in a humble three-room HDB flat while my friends and colleagues are buying ECs and private property. I take the bus to gatherings while many of them come in their own cars. When I first started work, my bosses were my inspiration. I went the extra mile just for them. However, the management changed and my current boss simply does not care much about my welfare. I met difficult customers and

colleagues at work but had to bite the bullet to continue working with them until the project was over.

I share this because I want you to know that I choose to be positive not because my life is a bed of roses. Rather, I choose to be positive because I deserve to be happy. I practised the techniques of counting my blessings and finding contentment every day until it became a habit for me. One morning, I woke up at 6 am, looked out the window and felt blessed because people were already working while I had just woken up to pee.

Another reason I managed to keep my sanity despite the years of uncertainties and health concerns is that I shifted my focus to helping others. I felt more blessed than the people I was helping, which gave me hope and encouragement to keep going. Things could have been much worse. In setting up the kindness projects, I hope to help not just the underprivileged but also the privileged. I hope that the privileged, like you and me, can see our blessings by helping others who are less fortunate than we are. The less you focus on your issues, the less likely you will magnify them and feel sorry for yourself. Lastly, remember this: You deserve to be loved and you deserve happiness.

See the Good in Every Situation

Have we allowed ourselves to get angry or unhappy too easily? Have we allowed ourselves to be influenced too easily by the angry or unhappy people around us?

The train station is crowded, the bus is packed and I can't get on. That makes me frustrated and angry. Yet what happens if there are no trains and buses at all?

My boss gives me plenty of work and I am angry because I feel overloaded. Yet what happens if there is no work for me?

Waking up early in the morning, feeling sleepy and tired, I am unhappy because I cannot get more sleep and have to go to school or work. Yet what happens if I do not wake up at all?

It may be human nature to expect the best outcome in what we get but we must not forget that the worst could have happened, too. If we can look at the positive side of every situation, we will definitely be happier. The train may be packed but it offers convenience and the transport fee is affordable. Work may be overwhelming but it also means you are capable and that your superiors have trust and confidence in your abilities. Waking up early can be painful but it also means you get to live another day, which is a privilege denied to many. Make full use of the opportunities you receive each day to create an impact, for either yourself or others.

Come tomorrow, the train will still be crowded, the workload will still be there and waking up will still be painful. However, learning to see the blessing in every situation will determine your happiness level. Things will remain the same but perspectives can change, and changing perspectives is changing your life. It is a choice and you are

the ultimate master of your thoughts and emotions. Choose to be happy always.

Moulds

Moulds grow in dark, moist areas with no sunlight. Other than being unsightly, moulds can cause health problems if they are allowed to grow in a house. Negative people or emotions are just like moulds. A few of them probably will not hurt you but if you allow them to grow, your environment (mind) will become toxic and they will harm you.

To prevent this from happening, seek the sun. Be around people who are optimistic and positive. Be around people who can help you deal with your negative emotions, people who can make a situation better and people who do not spread hate and anger. If you cannot find such people, take a bold step to be that person. Be the sun to eradicate all the moulds around you. Make a difference and have a positive impact on the lives of the people around you. Be the change you always wanted to see.

Positive Energy Sources

How many of us have no worries, no insecurities, no fears, no anger, no resentment, no frustrations or no stress in our lives? It seems almost impossible to live a life with no negative emotions. Even babies get angry when they do not get what they want. However, we must keep negative emotions at a healthy level. If we start to feel unmotivated to do anything in life, to lose sleep because of all the worries and stress, to get angry easily, then the negative emotions are overpowering us. We must find ways to either remove some sources

of negative emotions or introduce more sources of positive energy into our lives.

Here are some sources of positive energy which you can consider:

1. Rejuvenate in Nature

The very basics of life come from Mother Nature, which is a perfect place for healing. We may not have mountains but we do have decent forests and nature reserves. Go for a trek or a walk and rest assured that you will feel so much better afterwards. It is a good and healthy activity for bonding with your loved ones.

2. Music

If you prefer to stay at home to rest, try playing soothing music or music that you like. This can relax your mood and make you happy (without disturbing others). Music can have a therapeutic effect on the listener.

3. Exercise

If you are not near the reserves and do not wish to stay at home, try going out for a swim, jog or exercise activity that you enjoy. Sweating it out is a good way to detox the body and the mind.

4. Giving Kindness

This is an excellent way to generate positive energy for yourself and others. By giving and generating happiness for others, you will gain happiness and positive energy. By understanding that there are many people who are less fortunate than you are, you learn to appreciate

what you have been blessed with. You can look for kindness opportunities on our kindness group on Facebook, P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P).

5. Food

Eating is undoubtedly a favourite activity among Singaporeans, so make full use of our diverse multi-national food culture and give yourself a well-deserved treat. There are many apps and blogs that you can use to find good food in Singapore. Just Google them.

Positive thinking, and, in turn, a positively charged lifestyle, require discipline and hard work. However, with practise, it becomes easier. Eventually, it becomes a habit. If we are always negative, angry or unhappy, how can we expect our next generation to be happy, positive and inspired adults when they take over the leadership roles in the future?

Dealing With Negative People

We are bound to meet up with people who piss us off and upset us. The best way to deal with these people is to simply ignore them. There is no point in building up negative emotions (anger, hate, sadness) because of the things these people say or do. For every minute we spend getting negative about them, we waste one minute of our lives during which we could have done something constructive and good for this world. Surely, we can quarrel, fight and argue until we win but what do we really gain in the end? Will our negatively charged emotions improve our mental or spiritual health? Will we be physically

healthier after an outburst? Or will it all get worse because we spend time and effort on people who are not worth it?

It is almost a reflex reaction to get even when we are angered or pissed off. However, slowly but surely we can learn how to manage our thoughts and emotions. We continually improve as we learn to let go of (negative) things that are not useful and to instead focus on (positive) things that are constructive and beneficial, whether to ourselves or to others. If we can help remind our loved ones about the importance of staying positive, let's do it because we may also need the same reminder someday.

The world is as beautiful or as ugly as how you see it. When we take control of our thoughts, we take control of our lives.

Training the Positive Mind

When the alarm clock sounds every morning, I, like most people, do not want to wake up. I will laze awhile more. However, that is just a short phase. The moment I decide to get out of bed, the habits of positive thinking kick in. They revolve mainly around counting my blessings.

I am blessed in so many ways. I had a peaceful night's rest in my comfortable bed and I have shelter over my head. I have food available for breakfast. The fridge is filled and safe, boiled drinking water is available at my convenience.

While the weather may be hotter these days, there is air conditioning

on our public transportation and in our shopping centres and offices. The people I see on the street, who may be engrossed in their thoughts or smartphones, look nice and I feel safe around them. I do not feel like they are going to discriminate against me or rob me. Occasionally, my day is brightened when I see acts of kindness committed by strangers. The list does not stop here. There are still many blessings for which I am thankful and that make me feel happy and positive.

Positive thinking can be a way of life. If you make a conscious effort to practise it, day after day, it soon becomes a sub-conscious thing and a habit. It will come naturally to you, similar to how people practise speeches until they do not need to use the script.

People always feel charged up after a motivational talk or after reading a motivational article. However, a few days later, they go back to their normal regimen of negative thinking, comparing with others and feeling sorry for themselves. It takes commitment and effort to sustain the momentum of positivity and make it a way of life.

The Transfer of Negativity and Unhappiness

When a hairdresser thinks that she is overworked and underpaid and she is unhappy about it, she will provide poor service and crappy haircuts to her customers. The unhappiness is transferred to the customer.

When a father brings home all the stress from work and starts getting

irritated over the smallest matter, the negative energy is transferred to his spouse and kids.

Human beings are social networkers. What we do and say influences others, be they our loved ones or friends on social media. So, if we think that we are the only ones suffering from our negative emotions or actions, then we are wrong.

I urge everyone to keep their negative emotions in check. We have a social responsibility to ensure the well-being of others, as well as that of our loved ones. Do not let the people around you suffer together with you. Find ways to diffuse that negative energy so that we can all be positive and happy together.

The Dark Mist

There is a dark mist among us and it will consume your happiness if you allow it to do so. The mist is made up of a group of people who are consumed by hate and anger. They are eager to spread negative energy waves so that more people will think like they do, talk like they do and behave like they do.

Maybe you are already very happy with what you have. Then someone comes along and starts giving you many reasons why your life is inadequate, why your job is terrible, how living is actually suffering. Naturally, you start to feel unhappy and discontented.

Social media will overwhelm you with an overload of information and no filters. You are your own best filter against the negativity. Also,

learn to steer clear of people with no good intent. It may initially seem interesting to read about gossip, criticism, bashing and flaming but most of this is imbued with false information to sensationalise the topic. You may unknowingly be sucked into a vicious cycle of hate, anger and negativity, which in turn robs you of your happiness.

The Power of Mind and Thoughts

The mind is the most powerful tool inside us. The mind can work for us (generate ideas that create an impact) or against us (generate fears and worries which can lead to anxiety). Our minds process what we see or hear and they generate thoughts, either good or bad, constructive or unconstructive. When we give thoughts permission, they become actions.

There are many reasons why people allow unconstructive thoughts to form in their minds. This leads to unconstructive actions. It could be due to their upbringing, their social influence or simply because they are bored. Speaking of being bored, it is not always the case of having nothing to do. We can be very preoccupied with tasks but still be bored. This boredom comes from repeating the same routine over and over again, finding no motivation or interest in the things we do.

Thoughts become actions, which then become habits and soon develop into a lifestyle. Ever wonder why some people spend most of their time feeling unhappy and disgruntled or gossiping about others while some people spend the same amount of time inspiring people, changing lives and living life to the fullest? It all starts with that thought in the mind.

The whole kindness campaign for which I am advocating is not just about improving the quality of life for others. It is also about making ourselves better people. When we have kind thoughts, we have kind actions, which eventually becomes a way of life. When we make a difference in the lives of others, we add value to them. This boosts our self-esteem and self-worth. When everyone starts to lead the kindness way of life, they will enhance the social influence factor, which could define our culture.

We pass this experience along to our children as part of their upbringing. We create a positive ring of influence that is so strong, it influences people and inclines them towards constructive thoughts and actions. I encourage you to fill your mind with as many kind, positive and constructive thoughts as you possibly can because it will do you and everyone else a world of good.

Complaining

I have come to realise that complaining is a powerful tool for gaining empathy. It is always nice to see our loved ones offering their concerns and support to help improve our situation. However, we should be careful in using this tool. It can be a double-edged sword and suck us into a downward spiral. The more we complain, the more negative we can get. The more we feel sorry for ourselves, the more we magnify our problems and the more we feel our lives are miserable. What starts as a small issue can slowly escalate into the biggest "crisis" we have ever faced.

There is a difference between complaining and trying to solve an

issue. We all face issues in life, regardless of which stage of life we are in. Issues are part and parcel of this journey. If we approach a problem with a positive mindset, and if we discuss this problem with our loved ones to find a solution, I think we will eventually solve this problem. However, if we start to let the problem define us ("My life is so miserable because of this issue") and we focus on how the problem affects us ("Because of this issue, I cannot do this and that"), we are building a negative mist around us and the only way we are going is down.

I am not against people complaining about their issues in life. I think it is human nature to do so. In fact, all my life I have complained about many issues to my friends and family. However, the important point to note is to not get carried away, dwell on the negativity and let the issue define and destroy you. Focus on the solution, not the issue, and always stay positive.

Your First Thoughts Every Morning

When you wake up every morning, what are your first thoughts?

If you wake up thinking, 'Oh man, another working day', dreading facing your boss, worrying about your workload, demanding clients and so on, chances are your day will be uninspiring and boring because you have given yourself many reasons to be unhappy and negative. This happens when your day has barely started.

If you wake up feeling blessed that you are alive, that you do not have major health issues to deal with, that you are living in a safe country,

that all your basic needs are fulfilled, that a variety of food options are everywhere, that the public transport system can get you almost anywhere, that you have an income with which to support yourself and your loved ones, then you set the tone for a happy day ahead.

Even if things do not go your way and negative events happen (for example, you get stuck in a traffic jam or you have a heavy workload), you will still feel thankful that you have so much more that matters beyond the random negative event. However, if you start your day feeling negative, any negative event that happens will further demoralise or depress you.

Pay attention to your thoughts as you start your day because how you think determines how you live. How you live affects the people around you—your loved ones, your friends or even strangers online. If you live in a very negative fashion, this will rub off on the people around you and more anger and hate will be generated in our world. So, let's all spread more positive vibes, shall we? It may not be the easiest thing to do but we can all try.

Life Is Like a Piece of Paper

We start our lives with a blank piece of paper. Every moment, achievement or milestone we accomplish is written on this paper. Every unhappy, angry, sad or negative experience goes on the paper as well.

Our mind is like the paper and the content documented on it is our memories, both good and bad. If you keep filling the paper with good

memories, there will be no space for bad memories. However, revisiting hurts, bearing grudges and holding onto hate or any negative emotion is like "bolding" what you have written for your bad memories, which makes erasing them more difficult.

Embracing positivity, giving kindness and touching lives will fill your paper with plenty of good memories. Someday, when you look back at your "paper of life", you will be proud to see that your life has been meaningful and well-lived, not just because of the impact you have had on the lives of others but also because of the happiness and sense of satisfaction you brought into your own life.

Start filling your paper with positive and happy memories now!

Blessings in Disguise

When there is a power trip and you are scrambling for torchlight and batteries, you will realise that you are blessed to have power and electricity at the convenience of a click every day.

When the haze comes from neighbouring countries and you have to put on masks when you go out or turn on purifiers when you are home, you will realise that you are blessed to be breathing clean air every day.

When you are in a country where you cannot drink from the tap and where even boiled water might not be safe for drinking, you will realise that you are blessed to have clean water at the turn of a tap every day.

When you start having persistent health issues and it takes you a longer time to recover, you will realise that you are blessed to have good health with which to enjoy your daily activities.

Sometimes, life will throw you out of your comfort zone to make you better appreciate your blessings. Even in troubled times, you can find some positive takeaways. If we can all learn to look deeper, then we will know that everything happens for a reason. We will gain something out of it every time.

The Weeds of Life

Negative people or emotions are like weeds around your favourite plant. They share the same space, absorb the same nutrients and grow incredibly fast. They are extremely hardy and feed on the slightest food source. If you do not remove them, they will soon outgrow your favourite plant, deprive it of food and cause it to wither and die.

Negativity can come from your surroundings (the negative people around you) or from yourself (your own negative emotions). It can happen right in your space (workplace, home, community, cyberspace, your thoughts). It is constantly there with you, sucking your resources (time, energy, attention), especially if you allow it to grow. Negativity feeds on the ongoing happenings in your daily life, causing things that make you unhappy to quickly snowball from small issues to big ones. For example, negative people will always be there to spread more resentment, more complaints and more unhappiness.

The same goes for the negative thoughts or emotions that you

harbour. After thousands of years of human evolution, the world remains a chaotic place. This is a testament to how incredibly hardy negativity is. It will always be around unless we do something about it.

We can do our part by taking care of our own land and removing the weeds. If you do your part and remove the weeds from your own land as soon as they start to grow, and if I do my part and everyone else around us starts to take care of their land, then together we will change the world and transform it into a beautiful garden.

Loving My Imperfect Life

My job is not the best-paid one but through my income, I have achieved some of life's milestones. With my finances, I am able to fulfil more than just my basic needs. I can indulge in good food and go on the occasional holiday trips. My boss is not the most caring person but he trusts me and has faith in my ability. My colleagues are not my closest friends but they are helpful and dependable.

I come from a low-income family and I could have wished that my parents had given me more, like taking me to Disneyland when I was a student, just like what many of the parents of my classmates did. I could have wished that my dad had driven me to school every day in a car. However, instead of giving me all this, which was beyond their financial abilities, my parents gave me lots of love. I was never for a moment made to feel disadvantaged in any way just because we were poor. My parents always ensured that my basic needs were fulfilled. I always had enough pocket money and was able to buy new school

materials and uniforms. I even secretly saved twenty cents a day to accumulate a few dollars with which to buy my favourite Dragonballz shiny cards.

My close friends may not be as enthusiastic about organising regular outings to catch up but I know that they will always be around whenever I need them. Likewise, I know I will be there for them whenever they call upon me. On social media, I am constantly reminded of the challenges of living in Singapore but I do appreciate my home country, as we are free of natural disasters, the streets are safe, the people are kind and everything I need is within a reachable distance.

I could have lived a life deemed successful by others' standards but I chose to follow my heart in pursuing my passion. In return, I embarked on an amazing journey and met many wonderful like-minded friends who never fail to inspire me with their love of this world. Many aspects of my life are not perfect and they are meant to stay that way.

The only reason that I believe my life is a sweet dream and not a nightmare is because I choose to appreciate what I have and to not compare myself to others in terms of what I do not have. If I were to compare every imperfect aspect of my life with the lives of people who have had it better than I did, I would have found the perfect recipe for unhappiness. This is my life and I choose to live it as happily and as positively as I can. I cannot decide for others but I know, like me, that they always have a choice as to how they want to live their lives. Like

the saying goes, happy or sad, we all have the same 24 hours each day—nothing more, nothing less.

The Art of Positive Thinking

You wake up at 6 am for work and feel sleepy but some people are already working when you wake up.

You turn in later than usual at night because you are busy with your own entertainment. You are tired due to a lack of sleep but some people cannot sleep either because they have to work or because they have difficulty falling asleep (insomnia).

You say that your bed is hard and your room is small but there are homeless people who sleep on cement or stone beds, with no roofs over their heads.

Your job is deskbound and boring and you face the computer screen all day long. However, some people work in chemical plants, oil plants or construction sites and deal with occupational hazards. There are also people who risk their lives to keep our country safe.

You get so bored eating at the hawker centre every day, despite the variety of food available. However, some people must live with eating at their own staff canteen, often with limited options, because their workplace is in a secluded area.

You said that the food is not tasty or that the curry gravy is not thick

enough but some people are on diet restrictions and cannot eat anything sweet, oily or spicy.

You go back to the office after lunch feeling sleepy at your desk. You wish to take a nap but some people must stand all day long, toiling under the hot sun.

When you go home, you face the helper, whom you think is careless, forgetful and not very intelligent. However, if she had a choice, she probably would not be a helper. It is not easy to leave behind your family to work in a foreign country, often for years.

The art of positive thinking is simple. For every reason to be unhappy, you must dig deeper to see your blessing and convince yourself that you have much more than you think. When you are able to appreciate what you have, you have found contentment. Happiness will come in the same package.

Celebrate Meaningful Monday

Monday may not be your favourite day of the week and it may not be the day on which you feel the most motivated. On this day, you drag your feet to work. You may also associate this day with something negative. You feel the blues and that makes you unhappy.

However, if you could do something nice for someone, an act of kindness, a simple gesture like showing concern, giving encouragement, giving advice or helping a stranger, just one act of kindness today, your day would become meaningful. And when you

can regard your day as a meaningful one, it will no longer seem negative or dreadful.

The key to happiness is to remove as much negativity as possible from our lives. Kindness, positivity and happiness must be your three best friends. They are also inter-connected; giving kindness will bring you positivity and happiness, while happy people are more likely to be kind. Let's remember and look forward to Monday like never before. Let's make all Mondays great by celebrating Meaningful Monday and spreading more joy and love in this world.

The Gift of Life

You have a gift today and it is the gift of life. No matter what issues you are facing, you have the absolute power to make things better simply because you are blessed with this gift. So, do not give up hope. Keep trying until you succeed in turning things around because life itself is a sign of hope. When you are alive, you have the opportunity to make a change and make a difference.

Maybe not everyone appreciates this gift. They will find reasons to convince you that life is filled with pain and not worth the living. Do you wish to be in their camp? How will this thinking benefit you or your loved ones? This is the kind of influence that can make a neutral person feel unsatisfied and unhappy. It can make a person with issues feel even more demoralised and depressed. Again, you have what it takes to steer clear of negative people, negative influences and, most importantly, your own negative thoughts.

I wish you the wisdom and courage to do what is good for you and your loved ones. We human beings are not programmed to enjoy negative emotions like hate, anger, sadness and stress. On the other hand, the world never gets enough of love, kindness and positive vibes. Steer your ship in the direction you always wanted to go and enjoy this precious gift of life.

It Is Sometimes Not Easy Living in Singapore

We are a small country that has achieved tremendous results in a short period of time since independence. We are world-class in so many areas, such as our airport, our maritime port, our education system, our medical facilities and our banks. We have a strong defence force, our streets are safe at night and our passports allow us to travel to many countries without the need for a visa.

Amid these world-class accolades, are we really happy being Singaporeans or living in Singapore? Is our happiness index also world-class? Are we really prosperous and not just in the economic sense?

We have world-class schools but are our students hungry for knowledge and passionate about learning? Or are they and their parents simply chasing grades and qualifications so that they can be regarded as the best of the best or world-class?

We build rock-solid infrastructures and housing, enhanced with the comfort of aircon almost everywhere, but does this alleviate the

insecurities inside us? Or is the future getting more uncertain with the rising cost of living?

We have zero natural resources and 100% human talent to help us achieve our world-class standards but how many of us work because we love our jobs and not because we have to? Work can be very overwhelming at times. Organisations are pushing for more output with limited resources, which results in more deadlines, more stress and longer working hours.

We have world-class medical facilities and technology and our life expectancy is increasing but are we ageing with grace? Or are we always worried that we will not have enough if a major illness occurs because the bills will kill us before the illness does? Are we also worried that we may not have enough with which to retire?

We are the most liveable city in Asia but are our people keen to start their own families, have kids and boost the nation's birth rate? Or are our people pushing back plans for marriage or kids because career comes first, as it is better to earn more money while one is young and it is too much effort to nurture a child?

We come up with standards and guidelines, powered by the natural instinct of comparison, to determine who ranks among the top in every possible area of competition. However, this all comes to nothing if we cannot find inner peace and happiness. It is good that competition drives us to excel and we should all be very proud of what we have achieved thus far. However, it would be naive to think that

achieving milestones, grades, awards and plenty of material wealth will give us true happiness and a sense of fulfilment in life.

We are already there in the many areas in which we have received world-class status and recognition but we are not really there in terms of mental and psychological well-being. To be world-class in this area, we must take a step back and re-evaluate how we live our lives.

Is there a purpose in what we work hard for? Is wealth more important than health? The things we are pursuing, are they really needs or are they wants? Where will we be if we win the world but lose our loved ones? Are we busy pleasing our superiors and therefore have no time for anything which is of no value to us? Have we been kind to people? Have we warmed hearts and made someone's life better? Are our lives filled with moments that take our breath away? Or are we simply too absorbed in the wonders of the virtual world?

Some may say that Singapore is not an ideal place to live so let's move elsewhere. Let's go to Australia, New Zealand or Canada. But do bear in mind that there is something good and bad in every country, both for her citizens and for migrants. And we cannot keep running away from issues and challenges. We need to understand that issues are there for a reason. They can help make us stronger.

We may not have oil fields or rubber plantations to tap into but we have each other. The power of humanity and a positive human spirit will increase if we stay united and help one another. If we can achieve so much in such a short time, surely we can solve the issues that we

have now. Our roots are here and there is no better place to start improving in the areas that will make our lives better. We have the home ground advantage, so be the change you wish to see and build the country in which you want future generations to live.

It is not easy living in Singapore. It is not easy living elsewhere, too. However, this is life. The rainbow awaits you after the thunderstorm. And you will enjoy it better after what you been through.

Dwelling on Regrets Is a Double Blow

When you can choose only one of your favourite foods, are you going to dwell on what you missed out on? Or are you going to fully enjoy what you have on your plate?

Life is full of hits and misses. If we keep thinking about our regrets and what we have missed out on, we waste precious time that we could have used to enjoy what we have been blessed with. Dwelling on negative thoughts will not solve any issues, nor will it bring us the things we want. Instead, it deprives us of the opportunities to take action, to improve the situation and to solve problems. To top it all off, it makes us unhappy. So, why engage in such a meaningless and unconstructive activity?

The next time your "regrets" come knocking, tell yourself this: Life is not perfect. You cannot have the best of everything. Most importantly, your life is so much more than regrets. Your life is defined by what you have achieved, not by what you have not achieved. When you keep looking back on what you have missed, you lose precious time with

which to enjoy what you have now and what is possible in the future. That is a double blow for you.

The Power of Positivity

Early Monday morning, lacking sleep, rushing for an early meeting, a crowded bus, a crowded train station, blame the boss for arranging a meeting on a Monday morning, blame the train company for the congestion, blame the government for the overpopulation. Bad day, bad week and, finally, miserable life.

Early Monday morning, lacking sleep, rushing in a crowded bus and train to a meeting, thankful that I am in good health and able to go to work, thankful that my loved ones are well and thinking that they are my biggest motivation to work hard, thankful that this place where I am going is where I earn an income to fulfil my needs and chase my dreams, thankful that my boss is involving me in an important meeting, which means I still have much to contribute, thankful that the ageing train system still gets me to my destination. Even if it is an old man pulling a rickshaw, it is still moving, which is better than not moving at all.

This day, with all the frustrations and challenges I may experience, I choose to be happy and to look at the positive side of things. I choose to not let my frustration get the better of me, leading me to believe my life is miserable when, actually, there are so many blessings around me. We cannot be free from negative events or emotions, as they are happening all the time, but we can always learn how to turn our

negative emotions into positive emotions and make the best out of everything.

Living Life the Smartphone Way

Most of us own a smartphone. When you own a smartphone, two things are very precious to you: battery power and a data plan. Without them, either you cannot use the phone at all or the phone's capabilities are reduced.

If I use a smartphone as an analogy for life, the battery power is like our general health and energy level. We must continually recharge when our batteries are low. The things that deplete our battery power are the day-to-day tasks or responsibilities that we have in terms of work, studies or family commitments, as well as the negative emotions we have.

Ever felt tired after an angry outburst? Or is too much stress giving you a headache or making you fall sick? Is constant worrying making you feel drained? These are all the "unwanted apps" that run in the background and that are draining your battery life. Make a conscious effort to take stock of them and turn them off.

The data plan is what brings the smartness out of the phone, thus making it so interesting. It represents our dreams, our aspirations and our relationships with others. A smartphone without data is a person living life by going through the motions, with no sense of purpose or achievement. With data, the world is your oyster and there are endless possibilities in terms of what you can achieve.

You are the app creator. What you have created will have an impact on the people around you. If you create a useful app (campaign for good causes, spreading positive vibes), the people around you will be uplifted. On the other hand, if you spread hate and anger, people will unknowingly be sucked into your negative influence when your "bad apps" run in the background of their phones and drain their battery power.

Key takeaways from this sharing:

1. Charge your phone (life) regularly through positive thoughts, ample rest and a healthy lifestyle. Your battery life is your lifespan. Keep your battery in good shape or risk it ending prematurely.

2. Turn off the unnecessary apps that drain your phone's battery power. The negative people, the drama happening around you ... they do not deserve your time and energy and you certainly have a choice to move away from them.

3. You are always meant to be a smartphone, so do not short-change yourself (and the world) by being mediocre. Uncover your potential and create a positive impact through your actions. Be a great app creator and use your data wisely. What you send out through your phone (actions) affects others, so be considerate and responsible.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

HOW CAN YOU APPLY POSITIVE THINKING TO THE DIFFERENT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE? (E.G. WORK, MARRIAGE, PARENTING)

RECALL A RECENT UNHAPPY EVENT. HOW CAN YOU USE POSITIVE THINKING TO HELP YOU DEAL BETTER WITH THE SITUATION?

HOW CAN YOU ENGAGE IN POSITIVE CONVERSATION/ DISCUSSION WITH YOUR LOVED ONES/ FRIENDS? (E.G. SHARE THE INTERESTING ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE INSTEAD OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU UNHAPPY)

IS THERE ANY POSITIVE INFLUENCE AROUND YOU AND HOW CAN YOU LEARN FROM IT?

CHAPTER 8

DRAGON'S HEART (OF LOVE & KINDNESS)

The dragon's heart is one filled with so much love that it can warm the entire magical realm during the harsh winter months. You and I each have a dragon's heart inside us but we have buried it under layers of mistrust, hurt and insecurity. It is time that we peel off the layers and let the love and warmth emerge to heal the world and make the world a more beautiful place.

[Author's Note]

Kindness is the essence of all my community projects and it has been the most amazing and enriching journey I have embarked on ever since I started my first kindness project, Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.). In this chapter, I hope to share with you why the world needs kindness, the benefits of giving kindness and the heart-warming kindness stories from my experience. I hope you are convinced to start giving kindness because this journey is one filled with pleasant surprises and amazing discoveries.

Why Does the World Need Kindness?

The chaos happening all around the world, such as gunmen shooting at innocent crowds, terrorist attacks and humanitarian crises, is a stark reminder of why we need kindness. Human intelligence is our biggest strength, yet when used in the wrong way, it becomes our greatest weakness.

Humans invented weapons to keep themselves safe and then ended up using weapons against other humans. They get deadlier each time. Humans use IT to do wonderful things, to connect the world, yet people are scammed and are addicted to online gambling and porn. Also, extremist ideologies flow through this channel.

Without kindness to guide us, we will one day destroy one another. Kindness breeds positive energy, creates happiness and cultivates tolerance. Kindness promotes care and giving and will not ask you to hurt another person. Let kindness guide you and your children and we will build a more beautiful world together.

The Benefits of Giving Kindness (Part 1)

Why do I encourage you to be kind? On the surface, it seems like we are giving time and energy to benefit others. Time and energy are our most valuable assets because they decrease as we age. However, giving kindness is not as one-way as some may think.

A relative of mine shared how she struggled to cope with the loss of her beloved husband of almost 40 years when he passed on suddenly. Through reaching out to the poor and needy, she realised that her situation was not as bad as she had thought. By helping others and getting to know their plight, we realise that our problems are not as big as what we magnify them to be when we dwell on them.

Giving kindness is a way of bringing value to others, which is good for people with low self-esteem. If you think that you are not good at anything, giving kindness is the easiest and fastest way to boost your self-confidence. The purpose of our existence is defined by the value we bring to the people around us.

Kindness is a source of positive energy and we can never go wrong when giving it. Every day, we could be subjected to negative emotions (stress, frustration, anger, worries) which, when built up, affect our mental health. We must find ways to detox and neutralise them with positive emotions or else we will suffer. Even the happiest person can sometimes be hit hard by life's sudden events. However, with kindness come healing powers which can get us through the most difficult times.

Giving kindness and helping others can reap great rewards for the giver, which in turn empowers him or her to achieve more. The momentum built will inspire you to do greater things. We sometimes look at some great work done by volunteers and tell ourselves that we could never achieve so much. However, these volunteers also start at their first act of kindness and slowly get inspired to do more.

I hope we can all harness the many benefits that come with giving kindness. While we may not get more time back, what we get back is equally valuable: happiness, self-confidence, a sense of purpose and positive healing energy. I encourage you to be open and to look around for opportunities to be kind. They are everywhere! May the kindness journey bring you to uncharted waters and amazing discoveries.

The Benefits of Giving Kindness (Part 2)

While many perceive giving kindness as benefiting others, I see giving kindness as benefiting ourselves, too. When we help someone and make him or her happy, we feel happy, too. When we are kind to others, we are more forgiving and tolerant of others' shortcomings or mistakes. This gives us inner peace. When we make life better for others, we get a sense of satisfaction like no other. When we receive compliments for our good work, we feel proud of our efforts and become more self-confident.

When we look at the state of the poor, needy and suffering, we learn to count all the blessings in our lives. When we learn that life is not all about ourselves and chasing material possessions, we know we are

living for a bigger purpose. When we have inspired others through kindness, we know we leave beautiful memories for them and for ourselves. Kindness generates plenty of positive energy for everyone and we need it to build a better world.

There will always be challenges and problems, no matter which era we live in. However, if we help one another, we can overcome all these obstacles and move forward together. A better future starts with the good people sowing the seeds today. While our forefathers helped sow the seeds many years ago, and we are reaping the fruits of their labour today, it is our responsibility to sow the seeds of kindness now so that future generations can benefit from our efforts many years later. To start doing that, we must take the smallest step today to be kind, to give kindness whenever we can, for it will lead to bigger and better things.

Myths About Giving Kindness

When it comes to giving kindness, do you have this mentality?

1. I must have time to do volunteer work and commit to it on a regular basis.
2. I must have enough money to donate a significant amount to charities.
3. I am too insignificant to make a difference.

All of the above, to me, are just myths when it comes to giving kindness. Kindness is all about the little things we do for others, whether or not they are needy and underprivileged. It is like helping

that stranger on the street, making his or her day—as well as your own day—brighter and happier.

Take this afternoon, for instance. I saw an old, frail lady trying to push a cart up a ramp. She was struggling. I quickly went forward to help her. She smiled and thanked me. Knowing that I had helped someone made me happy, too.

Next, I went to an unfamiliar place, where an Indian lady asked me for directions. I could have told her that I did not know and then moved on but I decided to make full use of my smartphone to find the directions for her. She thanked me and I am sure she must be heartened to know that there are fellow Singaporean friends who are willing to lend a helping hand when someone is in need.

Volunteering is one form of kindness but it is not the only one. If you cannot find time to volunteer, not even on an ad hoc basis, it is okay. Just look out for kindness opportunities in your daily life. While I am a strong advocate of kindness, I will be the first to admit that I have attended fewer than five volunteer events a year. It is okay and I do not feel hypocritical or ashamed to admit that. Giving kindness can be done in many other ways, online or offline.

Regarding the part about being too small to make a difference, let's say that I am going to make a donation of \$1. I feel so embarrassed that I can donate only \$1 so I say, "Just forget it." If just one million of us have the same mindset, we have lost \$1 million dollars' worth of donations. The same goes for giving kindness. If you do not give and

if I do not give, because we feel that our efforts are too insignificant, the world loses a million acts of kindness every day.

Kindness is closely correlated with happiness and generates plenty of positive energy. It eases our insecurities and restores our faith in our own people. Giving kindness is contagious. It rubs off on the people around us and inspires them to give. With everyone giving just a little, we diffuse the hate, the anger and the sadness. We make our community and our world a better place. It is not just for you and me but for generations to come.

Spread the love, my dear friend. You are definitely capable of creating a bigger impact than you thought. Till then, be proud that you play a part in shaping a more beautiful world.

An Act of Kindness in Times of Need Means So Much

I had one of the worst experiences of my life when I fell quite sick late one night. However, I met a wonderful cab driver who made everything seem so much better.

It was already past midnight when I boarded the cab. The driver, who knew I was feeling extremely uncomfortable, kept asking me to take deep breaths and assured me that we would reach the Accident & Emergency (A&E) department soon. He repeatedly told me that everything would be fine. Mid-way through the journey, I wanted to vomit. The cab driver quickly passed me some plastic bags. I felt really bad because of the stench and I apologised to him but he was really nice and said it was okay. He told me I would feel better after vomiting

out the bad stuff. At times like this, when you feel most vulnerable, it is really comforting when someone extends their kindness to you. It makes a world of difference.

When I was at the A&E, I thought I was the most in need of medical attention because I was short of breath. However, I saw other patients wheeling in from ambulances and they were already unconscious. Health is, indeed, the most precious asset we will ever have. Without it, we lose everything. If you are going through a rough patch or having the Monday blues, take heart that your problems will be solved one by one because when you have good health, everything is possible.

The following day happened to be my company's New Year lunch celebration, where good food would be served. However, I stayed home and ate porridge. That is the perfect illustration.

Helping a Visually Impaired Uncle

I was on my way home, with two hands full of grocery bags, when I saw a visually impaired Uncle in front of me. He looked like he needed some help but I told myself I could not help him because my hands were tied. To be honest, I was also hesitant because I did not know how to help him. I was afraid of doing and saying the wrong things. However, after seeing Uncle repeatedly walking against the wall, I knew I had to help.

I approached him and offered my assistance, using all my strength to carry all the grocery bags with one hand. The initial moment was

awkward. I offered my hand, expecting Uncle to hold onto it, but he could not see it. I then thought that I should guide him by holding onto his arm instead.

It took us over 15 minutes to travel two blocks to reach his destination because it was like, "Uncle, there's a step here. Uncle, there's a pillar in front of you. Uncle, to your right, turn left. Uncle, there's a slope". Finally, we arrived and Uncle was thankful for my assistance. I felt happy to have been able to help someone.

I hope this sharing reminds you about how blessed we are to have the gift of sight. It could have taken Uncle longer than 15 minutes to reach his destination because he was trapped and had gone in the wrong direction. Normal folks like us probably need less than three minutes to complete this simple task. Also, it may seem daunting to help someone in need because we have not done so before but we can always try. Let the kindness in your heart give you the courage to make the first move. Cheers.

The Sun Does Its Job Every Single Day

The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. The sun does its job every day, even on days when people do not wish for the sun to be around because it is too hot or too glaring. However, the sun knows its purpose because, without the sun, the world will sink into darkness. The plants would die first and then everyone would perish.

The people who do good and give love, be it in the course of their jobs or in their free time, are like the sun. To the volunteers, nurses and

teachers, to name just a few, your love is like the sun's rays that brighten the lives of those suffering in darkness.

There will be days when you will feel unappreciated or when people will think you are redundant but you must carry on and believe in the greater purpose of why you serve. Take a break in the evening and continue to shine brighter the next morning.

This post is dedicated to those who live to enrich the lives of others. Thank you for all the love and kindness you give and be proud of all the good you have done in this lifetime for this world. The world would be less of a place without you.

The World Needs More "Busybodies"

I saw this lady who looked lost and who was asking around for directions. She approached two ladies who were, unfortunately, unable to help her, as they were tourists. As I walked past her, she was speaking to another lady who seemed unsure about how to guide her. So, I approached her and asked where she wanted to go. Then I gave her the directions. She was very thankful. I went to grab a drink and saw the two tourists, who were also looking lost. I approached them and offered to give them directions. They were surprised but very thankful, judging from the smiles on their faces.

I know some people may think I am very kaypoh (a busybody) but it is alright. They are entitled to their own opinions and I do not need their permission to do what I think is right. There are always opportunities to give kindness. If I see one, I will try to take it because I know how it

feels to be on the receiving end. If we have more people helping one another or looking out for one another, our society will become more caring and our community will be a more heartwarming place in which to live. Simple gestures which take minimal time and effort can touch another person and brighten his or her day. Be the one who is big-hearted enough to give love and kindness. It will change your perspective on this world and make you happier.

Zika Virus Outbreak

Expecting a baby must be one of the most beautiful and happiest experiences that a woman can have. However, knowing that a virus out there may threaten the baby's health must be one of the most worrying feelings for any mum-to-be.

This scenario happened during the global outbreak of the Zika virus, which affected pregnant mums, as the unborn fetus had a high risk of developing microcephaly, a severe brain malformation. It is exactly in such a situation that we must show kindness, help one another and make things better. We can all start by doing a check within our households for stagnant water, making sure they do not unknowingly become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

If we have pregnant friends, we should be sensitive towards their feelings. Do not spread fear or paint a very negative outlook in front of them. They have enough fears and worries to handle. Instead, comfort them by telling them that everything will be okay. You will be surprised to know how much your comforting words can reassure them. Share with them any information they may find useful and

check on them once in a while. They will definitely appreciate your kind thoughts and what you do for them.

In this case, the Zika virus affected pregnant ladies. We will not know if, in the future, another virus will affect another group of people. What we can do is rise above the issue and support one another, physically and emotionally. Together, we can brave the storm and come out stronger.

Kindness to Mother Nature

The water in my company is free; I do not need to pay a single cent for it. So is the paper. I can print thousands of pages at no cost to me. The ink is free, the power is free, and so are other resources, like paper towel, toilet paper, the lights and the aircon. I can use all I want, even to the point of wastage.

However, all these resources that I enjoy do not come from the company. They come from Mother Nature. The extent to which my company can provide these resources is directly dependant on what Mother Nature can provide to all of us. If I am working in the richest company but Mother Nature runs out of trees, there will be no paper. It is as simple as that. When the temperature starts to rise due to the fact that there are fewer trees, everyone is affected; both the rich and the poor will suffer. When the haze comes, you have nowhere to hide unless you decide not to breathe.

We may not be in the critical situation in which Earth's resources are depleted to a low level but that day will come if we use resources

much faster than they can be replenished. We may not be there to suffer the consequences but future generations will bear the brunt of them.

Let us be more responsible when we are using resources, be it in the office, in public areas or even at home. Being able to afford something does not mean you will always get what you want. The next time we decide to print something we do not really need, or when we leave the fans, lights and aircon on when no one is using them, we must think again about the impact and damage we can cause in numbers. Everyone can and must play a part in protecting the only planet we will ever have. Let your actions show your children how it should be done so that they can keep up the good work. These are our acts of kindness to Mother Nature.

Kindness and Humanity

Life may not always be smooth sailing, as you are bound to face issues and challenges. It helps significantly to have supportive people around you—people who can encourage you and carry you through the most difficult times.

This is what kindness is all about and why we need it. When there is no kindness, hope diminishes and people lose faith in humanity. But the seed of love lies inside all of us. It is absolutely possible to grow it, through acts of kindness, one at a time. Kindness is not just for the needy or underprivileged. It is for everyone: you, your family, your friends and anyone who needs it.

For the broken, do not be ashamed to ask for help when you need it. Someday, when you get out of your woes, you can pay the kindness forward. We help one another get ahead. That is how the community works and what humanity is all about.

If you ask me, "Why be kind?", my reply will be, "Why don't you try to give kindness and see where it takes you?"

Your Presence Is All They Need

When someone is in distress or when a loved one is facing issues, they often do not need a great problem solver. All they need is your presence, a listening ear, to know that someone is there for them and to tell them that everything will be okay.

Don't be afraid to show concern and care for the people around you. Your words of encouragement and concern can mean so much to the recipients and give them a big morale boost. Remember, you are not expected to solve their issues. You are just there to let them know that they are not all alone in facing their problems. And, thank you for doing that even though you are not obliged to do it. Thank you for your kindness

SG50 Acts of Kindness

On the day Singapore celebrated her 50th birthday, I prepared a birthday gift for Singapore and all our friends here. I believe that every one of us, regardless of income, race and religion, can do our part to build a better Singapore for all of us, just as how the generations before us built Singapore into what she is today.

We start small, through the simple things we can do for one another, help whenever we can, build a more cohesive society and overcome the challenges together. With that, I would like to share 50 acts of kindness that you and I can commit on a regular basis to build a more beautiful tomorrow for everyone.

1. Give thanks and appreciation to our parents for all they have done for us.
2. Return our plates or trays after consuming our food. (You are doing the next patron a great service.)
3. Give up your seat to someone who needs it more on public transport (not only applicable to just those in a reserved seat).
4. Hold the door for someone to enter first.
5. Be kind in our words, in real life or on cyberspace, even when we disagree with certain views.
6. Press the lift button for other passengers to exit first.
7. Lend a listening ear to someone who needs one.
8. Guide our junior along in work or studies.
9. Donate, within our means, to a good cause.
10. Volunteer time to help out in charity events.
11. Sponsor essential items for needy families.
12. Sort out the recyclables from the trash and bring them to recycling bins.
13. Donate pre-loved items to people, at home and abroad, who are unable to afford them.
14. Give strangers directions on the street. (Make an effort to ensure they get to their destination.)
15. Send birthday greetings to our loved ones.

16. Share good causes within our network of friends.
17. Be responsible for our actions in public, even when no one is watching (flush the toilet after use, do not urinate on the toilet seat, do not litter).
18. Give our friends or family a treat once in a while.
19. Give thanks to the cleaner who come to clear our plates and clear the litter bins.
20. Give thanks to those who serve us (refill our drinks, serve our orders).
21. Smile more to bus drivers. (It will really cheer them up after a long day on the road.)
22. Donate to students doing Flag Day. (Encourage them for their efforts.)
23. Organise an outing among friends. (Don't let life's busyness hinder us from catching up with our friends.)
24. Be generous in giving compliments and encouraging words. (Everyone needs them!)
25. Refill the papers in the printer room if they are low in supply.
26. Make space for other commuters in crowded public transport or lifts.
27. Organise a charity drive (donation of cash or used items) among friends, colleagues and family members.
28. Share knowledge, experience and good deals in real life and in cyberspace.
29. Spread positive energy whenever you can.
30. Support social enterprises or businesses with good causes.
31. Be nice to your neighbours.
32. Support causes that help animals.

33. Increase the temperature of the aircon or turn off the aircon and lights when no one is using them. (Be kind to Mother Nature.)
34. Use your talents for a good purpose (singing, dancing, arts and crafts, hair-cutting, magic shows, balloon-making).
35. Chope (reserve) food for the needy or buy food for the hungry.
36. Share your umbrella with someone caught in the rain.
37. Save a snail from being crushed by bringing it to a grass patch.
38. Help water plants in public areas during the dry season.
39. Help the visually impaired cross the road or board trains and buses.
40. Buy a drink or fruits for foreign workers who are doing the jobs we do not want to do.
41. Return a lost item to its owner or to the police station.
42. Replace the toilet roll in the office toilet when it has been used up.
43. Help an elderly tissue seller by buying from them in the hawker centres.
44. Be more patient and tolerant on the road.
45. Show our partners how much they mean to us through caring acts.
46. Spend more time with our children and nurture them to be responsible, caring adults.
47. Help our parents with household chores.
48. Give compliments to our mums or dads for the wonderful meals they cook for us.
49. Always be courteous and polite to whomever we are talking to, be they our parents, our bosses, our friends, random strangers or anyone who is of no value to us.
50. Be kind to ourselves. Love ourselves more and pamper ourselves with treats once in a while (because you deserve it!).

Everyone can give and everyone can play a part. The future of Singapore depends on each and every one of us, not just on any minority group. So, let's help make a difference with every little act of kindness that we can give to one another.

Looking Out For One Another

A group of pedestrians was walking across the road even when the lights were not in their favour, simply because there were no cars. Then, a car came and a lady quickly alerted another lady who was nearest the car but busy on her phone. They did not know each other, yet this did not stop one lady from looking out for a stranger in need.

I like that and I think we need it. Life can be tough, Life can be hard, but if we look out for one another, help one another, we can make things so much better for all of us. We do not need to keep competing with one another, fighting one another. The world is big enough for all of us to co-exist. The world has enough negative energy. If we continue fighting one another instead of helping one another, we will only create more negative energy, which is neither meaningful nor helpful.

We all want to see a better world, yet it is through these little actions taken on a consistent basis, that we bring about change, through our collective efforts.

Why Should We Be Kind to Strangers?

When I first met her, I could sense that she was nervous. This nervousness slowly escalated to fear. She was afraid because she had

done something wrong, she was afraid because she had been caught doing something wrong. She tried to deny the allegations of shoplifting and walk away but was stopped. The fear soon turned into despair as she broke down in tears. It was a sad sight to watch someone in pain. Thankfully, a policewoman was there to console her and calm her down.

Relating to this incident, I want to share my thoughts on a topic that is rarely discussed: mental illness. How do we tell if someone has a mental illness or is feeling mentally unwell—for example, suffering from depression or anxiety or dealing with a high level of stress? We cannot tell, actually, unless the person starts acting abnormally. Speaking of abnormal, how do we see someone with mental illness? Do we shun them because we are afraid of them? Do we put labels on them because we do not understand the illness or what they have been through?

In our fast-paced society, where the cost of living is increasing, competition is intense and people prefer to stay indoors instead of going out to exercise and rejuvenate in nature, the number of people who are mentally unwell will be on the rise. The social stigma we place on those with mental illness will be a stumbling block preventing them from stepping forward and seeking treatment.

When people keep the stress they are unable to manage inside them, it evolves into something more serious—for example, mental disorder or depression. It could also lead to crimes, such as the shoplifting

incident I shared earlier, because sufferers seek thrills and escapism from their issues. I am not justifying their actions because they will still need to face the music if they have done something wrong. However, we can have more empathy for these sufferers.

Why do I advocate kindness, even to strangers? It is because we do not know what each of us is going through, the battles we fight and the issues we face. Being kind simply makes it better for those who need some warmth and encouragement while they are struggling with their issues.

We have moved past the "developing nation" phase and many kids today do not know what it is like to be poor. Malnutrition is very rare. However, more kids are feeling the stress, even at an early age. I hope I am wrong on this but I foresee that the full brunt of the mental pandemic will be borne by the youth today and future generations. We can and must help them get through this. How? By giving more empathy, support, encouragement, kindness and love to the people around us and creating a more beautiful world together.

Celebrate Love Everyday

If you are especially good to your mum on Mother's Day, you bring her to a nice restaurant and buy her expensive gifts. However, for the rest of the year, if you show her little concern and are not there for her when she needs you the most, will she be happy?

Similarly, on Valentine's Day, your partner can pamper you like a

princess but if, for the rest of the year, he is not caring, loving or comforting, do you think he is a fantastic partner?

I like the idea of having a day to celebrate romantic love or parental love. However, love is definitely not given or celebrated on just a single day. It should be given or celebrated every day!

So, if your partner did not do anything special for you on Valentine's Day, do not be angry or judge him. True love is always about giving and not expecting. Valentine's Day should be remembered for generating positive energy and building relationships, not about resentment and failing expectations. Also, you do not have to compare yourself with what others are getting because you may have so much more than they do for the rest of the year.

Kindness Ripple Effect

I smile at the bus driver when I board the bus. Not all bus drivers will acknowledge me but I smile anyway.

I press the lift open button for fellow passengers to exit first. Not all will show appreciation but I press the lift open button anyway. I write articles to encourage kindness, positivity and happiness. Not everyone will be influenced but I write anyway.

Every action I take is my little effort to change things for the better. While it may not be 100% successful, I know that if I do not do anything, it is as good as 100% failure.

For every bus uncle who smiled back, for every lift passenger who said

thank you and for every friend who was motivated, even for just a short while, I know I have made a positive impact, maybe even created a ripple effect that causes him or her to pass the kindness and positive energy forward.

In the kindness journey on which I am embarking, I have seen many impossible targets made possible, especially when someone is willing to take the lead and rally people towards a good cause. You can be that special someone today when you believe that the power of change is in your hands.

Kindness Is a Choice, Not an Obligation

Whenever I see pregnant ladies or a frail elderly person in the train station, my immediate thought is for them to find a seat on the train or for someone kind to offer a seat to them. While it may seem like a natural thing to give kindness, it is not obligatory to do so. It is not someone's fault if they choose to not be kind. If we see giving kindness as an obligation rather than a goodwill gesture from the heart, we lose the beauty of giving.

I believe that kindness is a virtue which resides in all of us. It must be encouraged to grow instead of being forced upon us. When we shame others for not giving kindness, we are instilling fear in them. Fear is a strong negative emotion, so it definitely does not go hand in hand with kindness. The more we make it an obligation for people to give, the more we are pushing people away from the true meaning behind giving kindness.

If we do not see people giving kindness when kindness is needed, it is okay. We should not blame them because they did nothing wrong. Encourage them to give if you can but do not shame or criticise them. If we decide to not give kindness in a particular situation, it is okay too, for there are plenty of opportunities ahead. Kindness, like happiness, is a choice. It must be given willingly from the heart and not mandated by any rules or social norms. Only when one truly gives from the heart can one uncover the treasures that come with it.

Kampung Spirit

One evening, I saw a bunch of keys hanging by an open letterbox. The owner must have been so engrossed with the letters that he or she forgot about locking the letterbox and keeping the house keys. It would have been easy to say "none of my business" and just carry on with my stuff because it did not affect me.

However, how would I feel if I had left my house keys at the letterbox and later gone back to find that they were not there anymore? I would be very insecure, as my unit number would be there for all to see. It would be like giving the key to your treasure box to a stranger. Therefore, I locked up the letterbox and brought the keys back to the owner. The Indian Auntie who answered the door was very thankful and, of course, I felt happy to have used a few minutes of my time to help someone.

Living in high-rise housings where people lock up their doors most of the time, we may have lost much of the "Kampung Spirit", but we should never lose our "Singapore Spirit", that is, being kind and

looking out for one another. Someday, we may need someone else's help and kindness. Giving kindness whenever and wherever we can fosters greater community bonding and makes our society a more heart-warming place in which to live. All of us can play a part in creating a better world together. It is for everyone—you, me and many generations to come.

Gratitude

When I think about why I am doing what I am doing, gratitude always comes to mind. The people who helped me when I needed help most, the acts of kindness they have done for me, will remain in my heart for years to come.

When I started my National Service, being the homely boy I was, coupled with having gone through a drastic change of environment, I had quite depressive thoughts during the first week of training. My platoon instructor, who looked quite unfriendly, actually took time to counsel me when I told him that I was not settling in well. He made me realise that my problem was not as large as I imagined and that I was not alone in dealing with it. I had the support of the people around me to cope with the transition.

When I could not sleep at night because there were too many mosquitoes flying around, and it was also too hot to put the mosquito net cast over my bed, I asked my buddy if I could swap beds with him, as his bed was directly under the fan. I never expected him to agree but he did. I was truly grateful to him because insomnia was such a pain, especially when sleeping hours were so precious those days.

When I was struggling with studies in the first semester of my engineering course during my University days, my friend became my knight in shining armor, offering me free coaching in my weaker modules at the expense of his own free time. Eventually, I was able to catch up and later help other course mates who were weak in their studies.

So, why do we give kindness? We give kindness because we know what it is like to receive kindness. We give kindness because we have been touched by the kindness of others. We also hope that our loved ones (children, parents and friends) can be on the receiving end of other's kindness and that they can receive help when they need it most. This is possible if we all develop the kindness culture within our society. The people you help today will go on to help others. Who knows? That person may be your loved one or it could be you. Thank you for believing in kindness. I am sharing with you this meaningful quote:

"Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you".

~ Princess Diana

My Own Cancer Experience and Pledge For CCF

The year 2014 was a fantastic one for me in terms of community service. My Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.) project was picking up and I started our Facebook group, PARK \$2 Project (P2P). Together, we helped many charity projects and initiatives achieve

their goals and reach out to those in need. I also started another group through which we rallied everyone to help water the dry plants everywhere in Singapore. We were all so happy when the rain finally came.

Just when life couldn't get better, I crossed paths with the big 'C'. I was initially very confident about my health, as I rarely fell sick and did not want to go through with a biopsy. The doctors told me that the chance of getting the illness was only 1%, considering my age and health profile. I did it anyway to get peace of mind. The biopsy result turned out positive and I was diagnosed as being in the early stage of a rare and aggressive cancer. It was a period of denial followed by uncertainty and then fear as I struggled to cope with the diagnosis. I was not the only one suffering. My family members suffered with me. We were busy running around, seeking a second opinion, learning more about the illness and exploring the treatment options. Luckily, I was well-covered by insurance then and needed to fork over only 10% of the total treatment cost. Otherwise, the medical bills would have been another burden for me.

From my own experience, I know that cancer can hit anyone and sometimes it is unexpected. I lived a healthy lifestyle, I did not smoke or drink, I rarely fell sick and I had no family history of cancer. Yet somehow I still got it. When cancer happens to young children, it is even more heartbreaking because their lives have barely begun. Their time should be spent exploring the wonders of the world and not battling this illness. It is a draining journey. Waiting for test results is nerve-racking and sometimes complications kick in during the

treatment cycle. Even if the results are negative, the risk and fear of relapse are always there.

I think we, as fellow members of the community, can do our part to support children suffering from cancer and their families. If I can forgo just one meal at my favourite Japanese restaurant or miss just one movie and use that amount to help save a life, I think it is money well-spent. I hope we can all understand that we are not just donating money. We donate hope as well, to show these children and their families that they are not alone and that many are in this battle with them.

The Power of Kindness

At our most stressful, panicky or fearful moments, a word of concern or encouragement can work wonders. There was a lady who was six months pregnant and trapped in her car during an accident. She felt numbness in certain parts of her body and pain in her tummy. She was also afraid that her car would explode. A 12-year-old boy came along and asked if she was okay. A simple gesture like that gave her much needed courage and reassurance to face her ordeal.

Behind the facade of the happy pictures shared on social media, all of us have issues and challenges to deal with. Your word of concern and encouragement may be the greatest thing you can do for a friend or family member.

Ever wonder what humanity needs most? Is it food, water or air? I think the answer is love. No doubt, we need food, water and air to survive

but in a world without love, human beings will destroy one another. Eventually, we will become extinct. It is like having power but lacking the knowledge to use it. Love will guide us and help us cultivate good thoughts, while kindness is all about putting these useful thoughts into actions.

We all want to see the world change for the better. We hope to see big changes, like the elimination of racism, terrorism and prejudice. We hope the world can be peaceful, with no wars and no people killing one another. We sometimes forget that it all starts with the small and simple actions of giving kindness, showing more concern to the people around us and encouraging one another. When people feel loved, they are less likely to go down the wrong path.

As you read this, is there someone in your mind whom you have not contacted for a while? It is a good time to drop a message to ask how he or she is doing. It is okay to be the one who takes the initiative. Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.

An Act of Kindness to Cheer Up a Child

A little girl walked into a shop with a two-dollar note and asked the cashier if she could exchange it for some coins. The cashier told her to wait, as she was busy attending to a customer. So, the little girl waited. After the customer was served, the cashier proceeded to serve another customer.

The little girl looked at her mum in disappointment. Her mum told her

it was okay; she could take a ride another time, as the cashier was busy. I thought that it was a good opportunity to offer an act of kindness to the family, so I approached the little girl and offered two dollars' worth of coins. That made both the mum and the little girl happy, which made me happy. When we went our separate ways, I saw the joy in the little girl when she took her ride. That warmed my heart.

Let's not be quick to judge why the cashier was not being nice and helping the little girl. She did nothing wrong, as her job was on the line and priority went to serving customers. Instead, let's ask ourselves how we can make things better or cheer someone's day with little acts of love and kindness. It will most probably cheer our own days when we bring joy to others.

Use Kindness to Diffuse Your Negative Energy

I was near a cashier counter where a Caucasian man was making payment, together with his wife and baby. He was having an issue with payment, as his credit card was not working, so he had to pay cash instead. Having dug in every corner of his luggage, including a few pouches and red packets, and after emptying all his cash and coins, he was still short of the full amount.

The cashier was kind enough to ask other customers for a membership card to reduce the total amount but no one had one. I approached them to offer to top up the difference. It ended up that I topped up only five cents. The Caucasian man was very grateful and thanked me a few times, even as he was leaving the shop. I thought that if I were in the same situation, short on cash while shopping

overseas and a local came to my assistance, I would be equally grateful.

I have personally witnessed how scary humans can be when they want to get across their own agenda. Fellow Singaporeans, people of the same race, turning on each other, pushing blame and backstabbing when things do not go according to plan. It certainly feels like being in a Korean drama in which the hero and villain are trying to outsmart each other. While it is exciting to watch as a viewer, it is mentally draining to be embroiled in the drama.

I know many of us are probably in the same situation or toxic environment, dealing with the negativity all around us. For this reason, we need kindness and we should never stop giving it. When we give or receive kindness, it warms our hearts and adds positive energy to our lives. We are never meant to enjoy negative emotions like stress, anger and hate. If we continue the fighting, using negativity against negativity, we will continue to suffer.

I hope this sharing is useful for friends who are besieged by negative emotions every day. You must neutralise them with positive emotions. Giving kindness is probably the fastest, easiest and cheapest (like, in my case, five cents) solution. I can list a thousand ways to give kindness if you are willing to take a leap of faith in believing that healing will occur through kindness.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE THE ACTS OF KINDNESS YOU HAVE RECEIVED IN YOUR LIFE AND HOW DO THEY MAKE YOU FEEL?

WHAT ARE THE ACTS OF KINDNESS THAT YOU CAN GIVE ON A REGULAR BASIS?

WHEN YOU MAKE ANOTHER PERSON HAPPY THROUGH AN ACT OF KINDNESS, HOW DO YOU FEEL?

WHAT ARE THE KINDNESS STORIES WHICH INSPIRE YOU?

WHO IS YOUR KINDNESS HERO AND WHAT HAS HE OR SHE DONE TO INSPIRE YOU?

CHAPTER 9

PHOENIX'S FLAME (MARRIAGE)

The Fire Phoenix soars high and watches over married couples in the magical realm, reigniting their marriage flame whenever it diminishes, so that it can continue burning strongly, just like the Fire Phoenix's eternal flame.

[Author's Note]

Most marriages start with a happy beginning and aspirations for a blissful journey ahead. However, the reality and challenges of life often catch married couples by surprise and they struggle to sustain the passionate love they initially had for each other. Over time, the marriage flame may diminish and marriage no longer takes top priority in their lives. I hope that the sharing in this chapter can help provide some encouragement and inspiration to couples who are facing challenges in their marriages or relationships.

Her Husband Is Better Than Mine

I once read a sharing by a lady about her "perfect" husband. He basically took care of everything: bringing home the bread, hiring a maid, buying her a continental car, taking her on regular holiday trips, buying branded gifts on special dates, operating the appliances and caring for the kids.

I personally feel very happy that this lady has found such a wonderful husband and I have much respect for this husband for being such a good role model. This sharing is a breath of fresh air amid all the other sharings of unhappiness and grievances against spouses who are far from perfect.

However, I urge caution if reading such a post evokes feelings of envy or jealousy, especially for spouses who are facing issues in their marriages or parenthood journeys. I do not think that there are people who live life without facing any issues. Either they are very positive people who tend to downsize their challenges and not let their issues

bother them or they simply do not want to tell anyone about their issues.

I am privileged when people share with me about their issues and I am usually surprised to hear them, especially for couples who regularly post blissful family photos on social media. I would not have imagined that they were going through such a tough time.

When everything is going too well or when everything is provided, there may be problems, too. I have a friend who does not have much to worry about after she got married. She is not working, has no kids yet and is not expected to do any household chores. With nothing much to do or look forward to, she feels depressed because life has no direction and she lacks the drive to do anything.

I know of a lady who has four children and whose husband runs a very successful and reputable business. Her hubby is gentle towards her and they live in a big bungalow. They also have two maids to take care of all the household chores and their kids are all grown up. When she could finally look forward to the golden retirement years with her husband, she found out that he was having an affair.

It is normal to envy others when we see that they have more than we do but there are pains and struggles that we do not see. For couples who are unhappy or having marriage issues, I hope you give it another shot to make things work. Often, people do not change overnight. There must be a reason why your spouse has become the person he or she is today.

You did not marry him or her for no reason. Find those reasons and give your marriage another chance, instead of letting it die off slowly. He or she is the partner you chose for life, so trust your own judgement on this.

It Is Sometimes Not Easy to Maintain a Romantic Relationship

Most relationships start off like a high tide; the physical attraction, the adrenaline rush and the emotional connection make you fall head over heels with your partner. You feel like you have found your soulmate, someone who understands and complements you so well.

However, the high tide does not last forever. As the relationship progresses, more flaws and weakness show up. You may also start to experience some undesirable habits that you did not anticipate your partner having.

As you move into the different phases of your relationship, i.e. marriage and then having kids, more challenges start to crop up. The priorities of the couple may shift as well, with Mummy more focused on caring for the kids while Daddy's burden grows due to the extra mouths to feed.

You are no longer staying with your parents and they are no longer taking care of many things in the household. You are no longer as carefree as you want to be, doing what you want whenever you wish. Instead, more responsibilities, stress and fatigue come your way. All these changes and challenges start to take their toll on your

relationship with your spouse. It becomes stagnant or even worsens with every disagreement and quarrel.

With patience thinning, flaws magnified and love diminishing, it feels like eating an exquisite cake only to realise that you do not like the texture and filling. Whatever opposites that previously caused an attraction have now become a force of repulsion. You question why you chose to be with your partner in the first place. You are at the low tide of your romantic relationship.

The good news is that the high tide can come again. The bad news is that it does not come naturally. It is sad to see some relationships go into the low tide and stay there forever. It takes effort, understanding and lots of communication to bring back the high tide. Every conflict is a chance to get to know each other better, while every argument brings with it an opportunity to facilitate open communication rather than sweep issues under the carpet. All this will strengthen the relationship when the couple overcomes it.

There is also a need for reprioritisation. Caring for kids is important but you should not neglect your partner's feelings. Work and income are the keys to fulfilling your family's needs but you should not always be absent at home or bring back negative emotions from work.

Sometimes, it takes only a simple gesture to show that you care, such as a word of encouragement, preparing a surprise home-cooked dinner or simply giving your partner undivided attention and not being distracted by the phone or computer screen. If you are serious

about bringing back the high tide, you have won half the battle. On the other hand, the body will be weak if the heart is unwilling. So, forget the diamond rings, expensive gifts and exotic holidays. Start small with a simple gesture, one step at a time, and you will get there someday.

Why Do Married Men and Women Cheat?

I have been reading about many cases of cheating which resulted in couples going through divorces. In light of this, I wish to share my thoughts on some factors that may lead to infidelity. Understanding these contributing factors may help couples build stronger relationships that resist infidelity.

1. Complacency

Some men or women who cheat are the ones who are very confident that they will never cheat. Therefore, they let their guard down when dealing with the opposite gender. It seems like such a harmless thing to confide about your marriage issues to a friend or colleague of the opposite gender but this is an opportunity for feelings to grow. You start to realise that this person is better than your spouse in many aspects. Then, you want to see more of him or her and less of your spouse. The affair is starting to develop.

2. Boredom

Boredom does not necessarily happen when there is nothing to do. It can happen when you do the same thing over and over again or repeat a routine day in and day out. When the mind tires of the

monotony, it decides to look for excitement elsewhere. To mitigate this, couples should continually make an effort to do little things for each other to keep the marriage well and alive.

3. Respect

The wife may have unknowingly hurt her husband's ego by criticising him and putting him down in front of others—especially in front of his family members or friends. And vice versa: Wives may suffer much verbal abuse from husbands who criticise them and belittle their significance in the household. When the spouse does not get the respect he or she needs, he or she will get it from someone else. This creates an opportunity for people with ill intention to come in and give the spouse the attention and respect he or she craves.

4. Encouragement

How long has it been since you complimented your spouse and gave him or her a word of encouragement or appreciation? Does your usual conversation always revolve around the kids? Encouragement can do wonders for a man or woman, especially to a spouse with low self-esteem.

Maybe in your heart, your spouse is useless and hopeless. However, every person, especially the one you marry, has something good about him or her. Maybe you have forgotten about it or maybe he or she has forgotten about it as well. However, through encouragement, you can remind your spouse, and also yourself, about what is really special about him or her. In turn, you can help bring out the best in him or her.

5. Communication

Marriage is a lifelong journey of learning. Communication is the key if couples want to keep their marriages strong and last for the long run. Are you discussing your marriage issues with your spouse or behind your spouse? Is your communication happening only through confrontation or arguments? How long has it been since you sat down and communicated nicely and properly with your spouse?

The above pointers are not fool-proof pieces of advice that will safeguard against cheating, as there may be other reasons why a spouse cheats, regardless of how well he or she is treated at home. However, these guiding principles may help lower the risk because they help correctly set the marriage foundation. I always remember these words of wisdom: "There is no room for a third party in a strong relationship". If you keep your marriage strong, you do not have to worry about temptation because the man or woman will honour his or her vow and promises to you, no matter what the circumstances are ... and, yes, till death do the both of you part.

The challenges and stress of parenting may mean that you have less time to work on the marriage. However, successful parenthood is built upon a strong marriage. If the marriage structure is weak, the issues will come back to haunt you. No one plans for divorce when they first get married, so both parties must keep working and keep learning. Don't let the marriage die off because you have too many issues to handle. If you must seek help to revive your marriage or to make certain sacrifices, please do so. Your spouse is the one who will be

there for you for the rest of your life. You chose him or her to take on this prestigious role.

Infidelity

The greatest damage that can be inflicted on you does not come from strangers or acquaintances. It comes from the people who are closest to you, the people whom you trust. It comes from those who are supposed to protect you and go through thick and thin with you. It hurts the most when parents abuse their children, children abandon their parents and one spouse cheats on the other.

For the husband who is tempted, yes, the new girl is gorgeous and sweet, you and she seem to have endless topics to talk about, she is gentle and understanding, which mean she is unlike your wife, who loses her temper easily and is always naggy. But hey, wasn't your wife once a sweet, gorgeous girl for whom you fell head over heels, before the toil of pregnancy and motherhood took away all her glow and glamour? Didn't you and your wife have endless topics to talk about, too, before the bickering started as you trod the difficult waters of parenting?

For the wife who is tempted, yes, the new guy is sensitive and caring. He knows how to take initiative. He has great fashion sense and can give you undivided attention all the time. But you did not marry your hubby for these reasons. You married your hubby because he is down-to-earth, faithful and dependable. Beware the man who has no flaws and who plans his advances despite knowing you are married.

Chances are you will not be the only one he is interested in.

For the broken spouse, life goes on ... and life must go on. When Papa Rooster decides to move to another field because he thinks the corn is sweeter there, you cannot give up on yourself and stay in the coop all day long. The baby chicks need you more than anything now. You must find the strength and courage to be brave for them.

It may seem pitch-black in the tunnel now, and you are lost and afraid. But keep the faith that things will get better as time heals your wound day by day. Look out for the torches that will help illuminate your path as you move forward, one step at a time, until you finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. They are your family members and friends, and they will rally around to support you. It is usually through crises like these that you see who your true friends are and who really cares about you. Your relationship with them will improve, which is life's way of giving something back to you when it has taken something from you.

Lastly, to forgive or not to forgive is the big question. Trust is a very valuable thing. Once it is broken, it is almost impossible to revert to the original state, just like a broken vase. However, the Japanese have a unique way of repairing the damage. They fill up the cracks with gold because they feel that something that is broken and that has a history becomes more beautiful. So, for those seeking forgiveness, sincerity plays a big role in repairing the damage you have caused. Whether

you can fill the cracks in broken hearts with gold very much depends on how much sincerity you show in gaining back the trust of your spouse.

[Guest Post] The True Meaning of Marriage

Far too often, we hear some of our couple friends saying that they want a divorce because they are unhappy with their marriages. It seems logical that there is no need to continue a relationship if there is persistent unhappiness for a prolonged period.

While this line of thought seems logical, it is not applicable to every type of relationship. It makes sense that you would stop befriending someone who is toxic to you. However, it does not make sense that you would end your relationship with your parents just because you are unhappy with your mother and father. Does it apply to marriage, too?

Let's be honest with ourselves. How many of us expect some happiness in marriage? Let me go one step further. Is it even wrong to expect some happiness out of your marriage? The truth is, while it is normal to expect some happiness in your marriage, happiness is not the goal of marriage. If you enter a marriage looking for happiness, you will be utterly disappointed. If both spouses enter a marriage looking for happiness at the same time, a disaster is waiting to happen.

I am convinced that almost every marital problem can be traced back to this misguided expectation of marriage, which is the expectation of

happiness as a goal. So, how can you manage your expectation of marriage?

Let's start by refreshing our memories as to the marriage vow: "I, (Bride/Groom), take you, (Groom/Bride), to be my (wife/husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part".

1) To Have

This is to receive your spouse's whole being. It is not a statement of ownership but, rather, a promise of unconditional acceptance. A pimple on her bum, unconditional acceptance. A huge bulk of meat in front of him, unconditional acceptance. Insecure about her figure, unconditional acceptance. Performance anxiety in bed, unconditional acceptance. Unconditional acceptance is a powerful act of love.

2) To Hold

This is a pledge of physical affection and tenderness for your spouse in body and soul. For the men, this includes your finances. For the ladies, never use affection as a form of blackmail. Be completely open, in bed (physical) and on the dining table (emotional). This is also a powerful act of love.

3) To Love

This is self-explanatory.

4) To Cherish

Your spouse is a prized possession, worth more than billions in cash, any precious metal or anything in this world. Husbands, guard your wives, in physical terms and in your marriage. Allow no one else in your circle of marriage. After all, your wife has forsaken all others for you. Wives, guard your husbands, in physical terms and in your marriage. Be the woman he deserves, for he has forsaken all others to be intimate with the one and only woman in his life. You show your love when you cherish your spouse beyond any prized possession you could possibly have.

The meaning of marriage is LOVE. It is not happiness, laughter, euphoria or anything else. Love involves unhappiness. I, as the author of this article, have gone through my fair share of unhappiness in marriage. It is easy to associate joy and laughter with love but it is also important to realise that love involves pain and sorrow, too. Just as a child is disciplined in the name of love, so, too, comes the pain of discipline. Yet, we never stop loving our parents despite the pain of discipline.

1) For Worse

It is easy to love when the situation is good. But can you still make the choice to love when the situation turns out for the worse? Can you still love your husband the same way if your mother-in-law acts like a demon? Can you still love your wife the same way if her ageing mother requires that she sacrifice intimate time with you?

2) For Poorer

It is easy to love when all your needs are satisfied. But can you love your spouse in the same way when you do not have enough for yourself, and still have to provide for your spouse?

3) In Sickness

It is easy to love when you and your spouse are healthy. But can you love your spouse in the same way when you are already struggling to take care of yourself, and still have to take care of your spouse's needs without any returning act of love from your spouse?

Love may bring lots of joy and laughter but it also brings pain and sorrow. Love is a form of sacrifice of the self for the betterment of your other half. It is easy to forget this important aspect of love on your wedding day.

Far too often, I counsel couples who believe that if there is unhappiness, there is no love. Love is not happiness; it is an act of sacrifice. Remember the part "to have and to hold"? When there is no happiness, it is in your marital vows that you continue with unconditional acceptance and your pledge of physical intimacy.

There are exceptions in certain family scenarios. If you find that keeping your marital vows will result in continued domestic violence or having your life in danger at the hands of your spouse, you must apply an appropriate degree of separation and protection from your spouse. Dying for your spouse is not the same as dying at the hand of your spouse.

Harrar and DeMaria have identified seven stages in a marriage. I'm going to simplify it into three stages:

1) Romance

Oh, you are totally in love. This is the married life! What could go wrong? We are still dating each other. He takes me out for beautiful dinners. She goes out with me to watch our favourite movies. Ah, what a blissful life!

2) Disillusionment

"You are such a total (insert negative name)."

"I have to do everything."

"You are so useless at (insert task)."

What an eye-opener! You finally see the negative side of your spouse. This is the period when you are disappointed at your spouse's expectations. You have arguments. Some are heated, with flying objects and window-shattering volumes.

3) Marital Love Maturity

This is the perfect realisation of what love is and what love brings. Many well-meaning friends often tell troubled couples to re-ignite their romance in order to save their marriage. That is not the way, by and of itself. Without an understanding of love, it will always lead back to disillusionment, pain and sorrow.

Let's try to understand love before we get to the maturity of marital

love. There are generally two stages of love from childhood to adulthood.

1) Dependent Love - I'm loved, therefore I love.

When we are young, we grow up in an environment in which our parents show they love us by providing for us, being a guide for us, protecting us and cleaning up after us. We love our parents back, even when they are no longer able to love us back during their elderly days, simply because they have already loved us. Our parental love tank has been filled to the brim since youth, so we have no problem returning every act of love when their time comes and they do not return these acts of love.

A dependent love is a kind of love in which our love tank must be filled with love before we can return love. This is somewhat of a transactional love that requires an investment before one can reap returns.

While this love is certainly genuine, it is not the kind of love to bring into a marriage. Sadly, not many people grow out of this kind of love. Bringing this kind of love into marriage will tax your spouse and set up a transactional relationship. Marriage is not a business model of happiness.

2) Unconditional Love - I love, despite being unloved.

This is a very difficult form of love to achieve and it is the kind of love that should be in marriage. Few people truly understand what it

means to love unconditionally, let alone actually love unconditionally in the face of terrible pain and sorrow.

It always saddens me whenever I counsel wives who choose to be independent and not rely on their husbands. This is an act of hardening the heart to stop love from flowing. Likewise, I am sad to hear from fellow men who turn cold on their wives. In the face of terrible hardships, can your love withstand the test of pain and sorrow?

The trials and fire of pain and sorrow truly test your love and declare it to be unconditional. This is the maturity of love.

If I may, I pray for all who read this article to receive love from the original source. May you never have a heart that is hardened and cold but, rather, a heart that is tough. While it may be pierced, it never stops beating.

Let love, not happiness, be the goal and meaning of your marriage. If you are already suffering in your marriage, may you find the strength to continue and to find the love to persist. Let love be the ultimate transformation of your marriage. If you are looking to tie your knot, mark these words: LOVE is the meaning of your marriage.

Finding the Magical Realm of Happily-Ever-After

"And so they lived happily-ever-after". Some couples go into marriage expecting this outcome only to feel disappointed when they are constantly fighting with their spouses. This makes them feel very unhappy. Surely, it is not unreasonable to expect happiness (or ever-

lasting happiness) in marriage but happiness does not happen simply because you are married. Like all great fairy tales, you must overcome treacherous mountains and nasty villains to get there. I hope the following pointers provide some food for thought. May you find the happiness you deserve and yearn for.

1. The Love Bank

Every marriage or relationship is like a joint bank account that is empty at first. To draw out money, you must deposit money into it. Every act of love, care and concern is like money being deposited into the bank account. On the other hand, every hurtful word or action withdraws money from the bank. When the account is always in the red, you face debt issues and risk premature termination of your love bank account.

2. Incompatibility Vs. Opposites Attract

Many couples split because they feel they are incompatible. However, they fail to realise that it is this difference in personalities that attracted them to each other in the first place. Like any great team, you need different personalities to come together and complement one another. Just imagine if both spouses were very alike. Both are chatty, so who listens? Both are indecisive, so who makes the decisions? Both are very negative, so every day is gloom and doom.

3. Everyone Is Happy on Facebook; Don't Envy

Most people will share their sweetest moments or anniversary celebrations on social media but, in reality, they have pains that they never openly share. So, when you are envying someone for their blissful marriage, someone else could be envying yours because they are dealing with infidelity and going through a separation.

4. Your Child Is Not Your Spouse

If you are not getting love from your spouse, you might as well give your love to your child, as he or she will not disappoint you and will love you unconditionally. No! Your child is not a substitute for your spouse. When you do this, your marriage will slowly die off. Work out the issues with your spouse because you need that for your child to develop healthily.

5. No One Is Completely Useless

Your spouse may not be involved most of the time, especially when it comes to parenting duties, but that does not make him a completely useless person. There is a significant chance that he is not as motivated as you would like him to be. Find ways to motivate him and get him involved instead of giving up on him and labelling him good-for-nothing. It will help you lessen your load and make your marriage more meaningful.

6. Every Man and Woman Is Different

Don't compare your spouse to your friend's spouse, your brother-in-law or someone you know on the Internet. Everyone is unique in his or her own ways. You cannot love only the strengths and not accept the flaws, as they all come together in one package. Love your spouse for who he or she is.

7. Managing Negativity

When someone makes you angry at work or if your kid is cranky the whole day, it is not your spouse's fault. If you bring these negative emotions with you and get irritated over the smallest thing that your

spouse does, you are not being fair to him or her. Being aware of this is the first step to managing the negative emotions that could affect your relationship.

8. Money

Many marriage issues can arise from money. How each spouse wishes to spend money, how much to spend and how much to save for rainy days and retirement can result in disagreements and conflicts for a couple. Both husband and wife were brought up in different family cultures, so the concept of money can be very different to each of them. However, there are resources out there (some are free) to help you with financial planning so that you and your spouse can agree on a common point.

9. Temptation Is Everywhere

Temptation is no longer confined to a physical space because there are online dating apps on which to meet people of the opposite gender. The best way to avoid temptation is to have a strong marital foundation and core values.

10. Remembering the Marriage Vow

For those couples who have been married for a while: Do you still remember answering, "Yes I do," to this question, of your own free will? "Will you, take this man / woman, to be your wedded husband / wife, to live together in the legal estate of matrimony? Will you love him / her, comfort him / her, honour and keep him / her in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, be faithful to him / her, so long as you both shall live? "

11. 5Cs (Conflict, Confrontation, Communication, Care, Concern)

If issues are swept under the rug for fear of conflict and confrontation, those issues will resurface one day. So, communicate whenever possible. Do not wait till you are about to erupt. Infuse care and concern into your marriage as you communicate regularly with each other.

12. Marriage Is Not a Bed of Roses

It is a journey full of ups and downs. No one can be a perfect spouse or be in a perfect marriage. It is in going through challenges that the couple learns more about each other, strengthens their marriage and grows together. So, do not be afraid to handle the turbulence of the storm because the rainbow is waiting for you once the storm clears.

13. Empathy, Respect, Patience, Tolerance

Show empathy for your spouse, especially when you are not in his or her shoes, facing his or her everyday challenges. Respect your spouse as a person and respect the decisions he or she makes. If there is any disagreement or any fault, be patient and gentle in dealing with your spouse's shortcomings. In the long run, you need to be tolerant of the habits that take time to change.

14. It Is Never an Equal Contribution All the Time

You cannot expect your spouse to give an equal percentage or share every load and responsibility equally with you. It is a give-and-take thing. Sometimes you give more, sometimes he or she gives more, just like men cannot be expected to give birth or breastfeed. If you give more this time round, embrace it and be proud.

15. Teammates, Not Competitors

You are not in a competition to win the better spouse or parent award. There is no glory in the victory. Work together and create synergy for the betterment of your family.

16. It Is Always About the Little Things

The traits of loving couples are that they do little things for each other and check on each other throughout the day (not in terms of their location or whom they are with). Some small acts like giving your spouse a massage or giving him or her a word of encouragement cost nothing but are powerful morale boosters.

17. You Marry Your Spouse's Family

You do not marry just your spouse. You marry his or her family as well. Relationship issues with in-laws can create unhappiness, especially when one spouse is caught in between. Putting yourself in your in-laws' shoes may help you better understand where they are coming from. Refer to S/N 12 when dealing with these issues.

18. Always Remember the Person You Marry and the Reasons Why You Married Him or Her

Some people say their spouses changed after marriage ... or are they showing a side that you never knew? Whatever it is, remember the person you fell in love with and remember why you want to commit to this union with him or her. There must be something special about him or her that attracts you. Finding those reasons can bring back the sparks and magical moments.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE THREE GOOD THINGS YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR SPOUSE?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SHOW MORE CARE AND CONCERN FOR YOUR SPOUSE?

WHAT IS THE MOST MEMORABLE THING YOUR SPOUSE HAS DONE FOR YOU? HOW CAN YOU ENCOURAGE HIM OR HER TO DO IT AGAIN?

WHAT IS ONE SPECIAL THING THAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR SPOUSE THAT WILL MAKE HIM OR HER HAPPY?

CHAPTER 10

PEGASUS BOOK (OF PARENTING)

Parents in the magical realm seek the Pegasus Book of Parenting for wisdom and guidance, to prepare their children for challenges in an ever-changing world and to help youth develop into fine, sensible and responsible adults and future leaders. The book also offers support and encouragement to parents who are having a challenging time treading the difficult waters of parenthood.

[Author's Note]

Parenting can be a challenging journey. The landscape is always changing, especially when the world is moving at a fast pace. In this chapter, I hope to share with you the virtues that I learnt from my parents and how their parenting styles shaped my personality and character. I also share my perspective on the possible challenges that children of today face and how we can help them cope. Lastly, I hope to send some encouragement and positive vibes to parents who are drained and exhausted.

Lessons Learnt From Doing Housework

When I was young, my mum gave me the task of helping out with the housework. Today, I am grateful for that. From a young age, I shared the responsibilities of cleaning the house, including sweeping, mopping the floor, cleaning the furniture, ironing and washing my own laundry (hand-wash, not machine-wash). While it meant less time for TV, computer games or even my studies, I am glad that I had the opportunity to pick up essential life skills that I still find useful today. Not only do I know how to do the housework but I am able to do it faster because I have had years of practice. Even new chores like changing taps do not scare me off.

I derive great satisfaction from clearing clutter, scrubbing algae and basically transforming something dirty into something clean. I am also proud of what I can contribute to my household. My previous transition into NS, and subsequently staying on my own in the university hostel, were experiences made less painful because I could manage all the cleaning.

Some parents may think their children should not be involved in doing the housework. They feel that either the maid or the parents themselves should do all of it. However, introducing household chores to children may do more good than harm.

It teaches them responsibility because they have a part to play in maintaining the cleanliness of the house. It teaches them to be considerate because if they make a mess, they have to clear it up. It boosts their confidence because they can do so much more than what is expected of them. It teaches them independence and equips them with essential life skills that can help them in later stages of their lives. It teaches them discipline, because housework has to be done on a regular basis, not as and when they feel like doing it.

Finally, it helps them spend time constructively. They spend less time on gadgets, TV and computer games, which studies have shown to be beneficial in terms of physical (eyesight) and mental (attention span) health. I hope this parenting tip is useful for many of our young parents today.

The Great Influence of Parents

All my life, I have enjoyed helping others, as my way of gaining happiness for myself is to give happiness to others. Way before the kindness project, I was always happy to share my summary notes and help my friends with their studies. I have wondered who inspired me to be passionate about helping others and giving kindness.

I think that a lot of the influence came from my parents. They have

never once told me that I should be kind and help others whenever possible. They simply lead by example. As I mentioned, my dad used to drive his company lorry, and whenever there was an extended family gathering, he would volunteer to take many of our relatives home, even if they did not really live close to one another. We were usually the last family to arrive home. My mum is always willing to help her friends or anyone in need. Today, she is still helping poor elderly people pay their medical bills and donating clothes to needy families.

I would like to advise all the parents reading this book that the influence you have on your child is paramount. If you teach your child to be positive, happy and kind, he or she will most likely grow up to be a positive, happy and kind adult. If you show your child that we need to fight for the best things in life for ourselves and not care much about others, there is a high chance that he or she will grow up to be negative, self-centered and unhappy.

Therefore, I encourage you to show your children what it like is to lead a positive and meaningful life filled with happy memories of bringing joy to others. In times to come, your son or daughter will appreciate what you have taught them and be proud of you as their parents.

What I Learnt From My Dad

My dad is the most unassuming person you will find. A man of few words, he is low-profile and usually fades into the background during gatherings. However, he is always present for every event, be it a birthday celebration, wedding, hospital visit or funeral. If his presence is required, he will be there.

I have learnt many things from my dad but the one thing that is especially worth mentioning is that it is always possible to go the extra mile for our loved ones. When my dad drove his company lorry years ago, he would take our relatives back home after a gathering, one by one, as long as they were willing and able to squeeze into the lorry deck. He did not mind being the last one to get home.

My dad may not be the romantic kind of husband who buys gifts and flowers for my mum but he showed that being there, being supportive and reliable, is what really matters. After a long and physically exhausting day at work (my dad worked as a mechanic), he helped my mum with the household chores or with errands, even if it meant having less rest time for himself.

My dad showed love through actions instead of words. When I was in secondary school and able to take public transport there, my dad insisted on sending me to school to make sure I arrived in one piece, even though he had to wake up an hour earlier every day. When I started work, my dad would also send me to the nearest sheltered MRT station on rainy days so that I would not get wet. My dad showed me that a small act of love, carried out on a consistent basis, can become a very big thing.

Fathers sometimes do not get as much credit as mothers do but this does not mean they do not play an important role or that they are not as great. To all the wonderful dads out there, and to those who are reading this book, thank you very much for all your hard work and sacrifice!

Tribute to My Mum

When I was a young boy, my mum was very strict. Caning was a common thing when I infringed on the house rules. My mum was not highly educated, so she never guided me in my school work. My parents were low-income earners, so I never had tuition, either. My mum tasked me with doing housework from a young age and, as early as primary school, arranged for me to take up vacation jobs during the school holidays. In my growing-up years, my mum took me to Thailand only once, for a short holiday. My mum never gave me much as compared to my friends' mums, but without my mum, I would be less of a person.

My mum taught me kindness, that we should help people whenever we can. My mum taught me manners, graciousness and generosity. She would never visit someone in their home without bringing a small gift. Though she did not have much herself, she insisted on treating friends or relatives whenever we ate together. This really showed me that kinship and people relationships are more valuable than money.

My mum taught me discipline; toys had to be placed back in their original position after I played with them. My mum taught me essential life skills, independence and responsibility through housework, vacation jobs and managing my school work. My mum taught me to work hard for what I wished to achieve in life. She led by example, as she took on two jobs and worked on the weekends to make ends meet. My mum taught me trust; she would leave a bag of \$2 notes and tell me to take whatever I needed for my school allowance.

My mum never gave me many things that I wanted but she gave me what I needed to go far in life. I am thankful for everything she has given me, and not given me, because her actions shaped the person I am today. My mum does not know what I have done for my community projects but I know that she is proud of me as her son. While she may not read what I have written, the gratitude I have for her as my mum lives in my heart forever.

I wish to express my gratitude to my mum and to all the wonderful mothers out there. There is no right or wrong or "dummy's guide" when it comes to parenting. I know you always want the best for your child, within your abilities and means, and sometimes doing the best you can is just what is best for your child. Thank you, mummies, for the love you have given to your children. Be proud of your role as a guardian angel to your children. Keep up the good work.

Give Praise Often

How do we feel when we receive praise? We feel good, don't we? When I say praise, I mean honest and genuine compliments about a person's strengths, character or contributions. When we give praise, we raise up a person in terms of self-confidence and esteem. It is a great morale booster and an acknowledgment of the person's effort and hard work. Humans have a tendency to remember the negative things. If we receive 100 good comments and one bad comment, there is a tendency that we will remember the bad comment and ignore all the good things said about us.

So, be generous in giving praises and compliments to your loved ones (your spouse, your children, your friends or even your parents). This

will help improve your relationships with them, as you will appreciate their strengths. It will give them a gentle reminder about how good they really are and inspire them to do even better. I always believe in the utmost potential inside all of us but we need encouragement and praise to bring out our best.

Praise the children or youth with whom you cross paths, even if you are not related to them. Build them up and help them become confident adults. Our society will benefit as a whole when these youths realise their full potential.

Psychological and Emotional Shelters

Halfway through my trip to get lunch, it rained suddenly and heavily. However, I was not affected, as there is a sheltered walkway from the bus stop to the place where I get lunch.

In Singapore, we are pretty much sheltered by our infrastructure. We have sheltered walkways, sheltered bridges, sheltered train stations and fully air-conditioned sheltered buses. We are blessed by our geographical location, as we are sheltered from devastating natural disasters.

Plenty of these physical shelters may protect us, but who is going to provide us with emotional and psychological shelters? Who will protect us and our children from high levels of stress, rising expectations and a rapidly changing world?

Are you willing to embrace change and move along with the rest of the world? Are you willing to cultivate positive thoughts and adopt

healthy lifestyles to de-stress and remove the negative energy from your life? Are you willing to live a lifestyle in which you take care of your basic needs while managing your wants? Are you willing to help those in need so we generate hope not just for the less fortunate but for everyone in our community?

The answer lies in the questions. You can play a big part in building this psychological shelter, not just for yourself and your loved ones but also for our community.

Change can be difficult and painful in the initial phase but if we brave through it, things will become so much easier over time. Evolution reminds us that we are all made for change and that we can all change for a better tomorrow.

Motivation Is the Key to Learning

I can spend hours surfing the web or YouTube, searching for information related to my interests, but give me a textbook about a topic that is of no interest to me and I will fall asleep in less than an hour.

The key to learning, as with many things in life, is enjoying the process. If we do not enjoy the process, we will find no meaning in continuing and thereafter will not be able to sustain the process. My own experience above illustrates that. When I enjoy the process or method, time flies. When I do not like the method or the topic, I doze off. If a child is forced to learn, to achieve good grades, the child will not be as motivated as when he or she is eager to acquire the knowledge

and finds joy in doing so. We have heard of people being very passionate about pursuing their hobbies or interests but we rarely hear about people being stressed out and doing something they like. That is the difference between enjoying and not enjoying.

If we want to achieve big things in life, we must learn to enjoy the little things that will build positive momentum for getting us there. If we want to inspire learning, we must get kids interested in learning. It must be fun for them in some way.

If we want to make the world a better place, we must share all the amazing experiences of giving kindness and making people interested in giving. We must not shame them when they do not do as we expect. If you want to be a millionaire, start by being interested in making money. Start by being interested in getting ahead dollar by dollar.

Start with the little things, one step at a time. Build positive momentum to propel you towards success and enjoy every part of the journey. It will make life so much more interesting and meaningful.

Healthy Adults First, Then Healthy Kids

Whether we are rich or poor, we have some level of insecurity inside us. We have fears because the world is moving too fast and we are finding it hard to catch up. We find something to compensate for our insecurities and money is undeniably the best choice. Many problems can be seemingly solved with money, such as the fear of retrenchment and the fear of not being able to survive when the cost of living

increases. By having lots of money, we can choose to not do something that we do not like to do but that is earning us money—for example, going to work.

How do we earn more money? We work hard in school, get a good education, get a good job, then work doubly hard at work and hopefully get a promotion. With that promotion come more responsibilities, more stress and longer working hours. We reinforce the mindset that all these sacrifices are worth it because we are earning big money to compensate for our insecurities.

It does not stop there. Because we believe so strongly that money can solve everything, we must make sure that our children adopt this belief. Otherwise, our worst fears could happen to them, i.e. they will not be able to survive in the future. If an adult feels stress, it is many times worse for a child to go through all this, because a child is not mentally developed enough to be as strong as an adult. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. We want the best for our children because they are our dearest and it is our responsibility to ensure that they survive when we are not around to take care of them. However, are we doing it right? There is a fine line between doing the right things and doing things right.

For every child who has fallen, we are reminded that a problem exists. We tell ourselves, "Okay, let's not push our children too hard," but after some time, we get back into the competitive mode again. We want our children to excel, start learning earlier, attend more

enrichment classes. How many reminders do we need before all of us start to rally together to change?

To change is not impossible but it must revolve around positive energies like love, support and encouragement, not around stress, pressure, over-expectations or anger. It is possible to bring the best out of a child and to develop a spirit for learning and improving. In the process, we encourage the child to explore the wonders around him or her, while keeping that pure, free spirit of loving the world, without prejudice and hate. It is not easy but we start one step at a time by cultivating more positive energy and happiness in the adult world. We are the best role models for our children.

Giving Encouragement to Children and Adults

Children need lots of encouragement. So do adults, because a child lives inside all of us. Deep down, we all need love, support and encouragement from the people around us. Without this, there is little motivation to keep going. That is why love always wins and hate will only generate more hate.

Don't stop at being a friend. Be an encouraging one! Give love and support to someone who is trying to make a difference, someone who is trying to improve lives and chase his or her dreams. Sometimes, your smallest action can be the spark that ignites something really amazing and wonderful. When that happens, the world benefits.

Be the one who heals wounds and gives hope, because the world needs more of that. We are not going to live forever but what we build

today can be the best present we give to our children and to generations to come. You may not see the day when the tree grows to bear fruits and provide shade but you will always be remembered for having planted that seed many years ago.

Badminton, Competition

When I saw a mum and her child playing badminton under my block, I was reminded that leisurely playing badminton is all about keeping the shuttlecock in the air for as many exchanges as you can. There are no court boundaries and no matter how bad your partner serves, you try to keep the game going. It is a lot of fun, and especially satisfying when you save that shuttlecock from hitting the ground due to a bad serve.

Let's take the game to another level: competition. Competitive badminton is all about rules, boundaries and getting the shuttlecock to hit the ground on your opponent's court. It is about winning. You do not deliberately save a bad serve. On the contrary, you hope for that to happen. Competition also brings about tension, stress and anxiety. Competition exists for a purpose: to encourage us to improve and excel. But in the midst of doing so, have we lost the true meaning of doing certain things?

Let's talk about competition in education. Is it a quest for knowledge and self-improvement or is it intended to prove that you are better than your peers? Are we trying to win at any cost? As long as we can get first place or get As, it does not matter if we learn anything. If we have this mindset, we are slowly drifting away from the true purpose

of education. The desire to win has overwhelmed the desire to learn and the quest for knowledge.

Change is always possible. In my schooling days, I used to share all my mindmaps and notes because I did not view my course mates as my direct competitors. The real competition should happen within, with myself. I should seek to improve myself every day. The world is big enough for all of us to co-exist and it is more fun doing so.

Much of today's competitiveness in children comes from their parents and they have their own reasons for doing so. I am not suggesting that competition should cease but I do hope that we occasionally remind ourselves about the true purpose of competition and what we hope to achieve. I am sure the inventor of badminton wanted the shuttlecock to stay in the air rather than be on the ground.

Tribute to the Loving Hands and Tireless Souls

The toilet rolls do not replace themselves.

The bread does not grow out of the table.

The kitchen appliances do not operate by themselves.

The dinner does not come straight from the oven.

The house does not tidy itself. The cleaning, washing and ironing do not happen automatically.

All this takes a pair of loving hands, tireless giving to the family, day after day, year after year. It could be a mother, a father, a grandparent or a nanny. Whoever they are, let's appreciate them for what they do and the love they give to their family.

If you are that person, thank you. Be proud of what you do. Respect is not earned through seniority or age. Respect is earned through the way you treat others and the things you do, especially when people find it hard to emulate what you do or simply do not wish to get their hands dirty. Often, those who put in the most effort will get the most out of life.

It Is Sometimes Not Easy to Be a Mother

Nature bestows childbearing abilities on you. Whether or not you use them, you must go through periods of pain and discomfort every month. Your emotions may also go haywire during this time.

Society expects you to look fabulous all the time, whether you have one kid or many. Many mummies' self-confidence takes a dip when they struggle with post-pregnancy weight gain and stretch marks.

Let's talk about breastfeeding. Breastmilk is so highly revered now that mummies feel guilty when they are not able to provide ample breastmilk for their babies. They are willing to try all sorts of methods (massage, recipes, TCM) to increase their milk supply but it may not work every time. This adds to their stress and anxiety. Breastfeeding is a tiring process, as it happens every few hours, even during the night.

The most under-rated job is not that of a cleaner or construction worker but that of a stay-at-home mother (SAHM). Sacrificing career aspirations and the loss of income aside, a SAHM's working hours start the moment she wakes up (often not at the most desired time)

and end when she sleeps. (And, again, her sleep may be disrupted throughout the night.)

Not all babies are sweet little things who eat, sleep, smile all day and play on their own. When babies get cranky (and they often do), a SAHM must deal with all the crying and tantrums and still meet the expectation that housework must be done and dinner cooked on time. On top of that, a SAHM is often "envied" because she does not have to go to an office to work.

Working mums do not have it any easier. After coming home from work, the duties continue, whether they are household chores or taking care of the kids. Not all hubbies are willing to share the housework because they may think it is a woman's duty.

The transition to motherhood may also mean the need to sacrifice your "me" time. Gone are the times when you could party all night during the weekend or watch Korean dramas all day long. Everything about the child takes priority now.

It takes courage, strength and plenty of hard work to be a mother but the universe works in a marvelous way. Those who put in the most effort in life will get the most out of it. Your love and sacrifices will be rewarded in ways you never imagined when you see your child grow up well and bond with you.

Mothers, whether working or stay-at-home, need all the support and encouragement they can get. I hope that through this post, you are

reminded of the challenges of being a mum and that you can be more understanding, patient, supportive and encouraging towards your mum or your spouse. With more empathy and tolerance, there will definitely be less conflict and unhappiness within the household.

It Is Sometimes Not Easy to Be a Father

Society expects you to be the king of the jungle, the indestructible figurehead of the household, the main breadwinner and the one who shows no emotions or weakness.

You are judged by how well you do in your job or career. Speaking of work, it does not become easier simply because you have kids. If it is overwhelming, it will still be overwhelming. The only thing that is different now is your energy because your kids need your attention and energy at home. Your boss wants you to stay in the office longer while your wife wants you to come home earlier. You are caught in between.

Support groups for mummies abound on Facebook, WhatsApp and forums—and rightfully so. However, a dedicated support group for daddies is almost non-existent. Even if it does exist, it is most often inactive. This is probably a man's thing; men do not really like to talk about or express their emotions. Remember what your mum told you when you were younger? A true man can bleed but he cannot shed a tear. So, where do all the frustrations, stress and unhappiness go? All bottled up inside because that is what a real man does? It is no wonder men tend to live shorter lives than women.

The moment your child is born, you know that you are no longer the number-one priority at home. Your child will share Mummy's love with you and it is not always equal sharing. Sometimes you get more but most of the time, you get less. And it is not just love that will decline, intimacy will decrease too because Mummy is so tired after taking care of the kids or the kid wakes up and spoils the plan.

When Mummy is busy, Daddy takes over and goes grocery shopping. Not all men have the talent to be a chef. Most of them don't. To them, all vegetables look green and all fruits look fresh. When they get home, mummies will "enlighten" them on the different degrees of freshness.

While a stay-at-home mum is the most under-rated job in the world, a stay-at-home dad is an absolute "no". Daddy, you must go to work, no matter how much you wish to stay at home and take care of the kids, because this is our social norm. Gender equality took a major leap when we started seeing women CEOs and women presidents but being a stay-at-home dad is still not a respectable position to aspire towards.

Fatherhood seems to turn back the time, back to the National Service days. All the gatherings, drinking sessions and sport matches are extremely rare now. Even opportunities to watch people play the game can be few and far between. What happens to your computer or mobile games? You can still play them if you have energy left after coaxing the kids to sleep.

Of course, not all daddies are the hands-on and supportive type,

willing to share the load with mummies when they get home. There are male chauvinist dads who want to be served like an emperor and who think that everything at home is Mummy's responsibility. There are also cheaters who do all kinds of nonsense behind their wives' backs. They give men, in general, a bad reputation.

Daddies, despite all these woes, expectations, burdens, stresses and sacrifices, you press on and carry out your role diligently, day in and day out, sometimes without due recognition. I hope that the satisfaction you get from seeing your family live well, from seeing your kids grow up healthy and develop into sensible youth and adults, outweighs all the hardships and tears you have kept inside yourself, just to keep everyone moving forward together. Thank you, daddies, for being who you are and for what you do.

Encouraging Note for Exhausted Mummies

I pen this note to the mummy who is struggling, who is exhausted physically and mentally, who has so much to worry about, who has doubts as to whether she is doing enough and whether she is good enough.

Parenthood can be a draining journey with countless issues to resolve. However, great rewards come after the pain, and courage grows through conquering adversity. Every day, you are learning to be a better parent and a better person for your child. Someday, all these experiences and problem-solving skills will help your child deal with his or her challenges in life.

The ones who are self-critical are usually the ones who care the most. Because you care, you are worthy of being called a good parent. You must love yourself more and maintain less guilt about not achieving perfect outcomes. You must give yourself inner pep talks and tell yourself that you are doing very well. At times, doing your best is good enough, for issues will always be there. In fact, they are there for a reason.

For the constantly worrying mum, stressing out over whether your child is growing fast enough, eating enough, taking enough breastmilk, let me assure you that if your child has no major health issue, he or she is growing perfectly fine. Over the last few years, I have worked with parents who care for children with major health issues, notably childhood cancer. The struggles and pain that these parents and their children go through are unthinkable. Most of them would not dare plan the next holiday because tomorrow, for them, is not certain. What other kids are doing, like playdates or even dining out, seems like a distant dream for such children because of their low immunity and vulnerable state of health. Hospital stays are so common that the hospital becomes like a second home. Sadly, some of them do not make it past toddlerhood, as life ends before it even begins.

My last bit of advice: Love your spouse. Your spouse is the reason you have your child, not vice-versa. During the most stressful times, tempers flare easily, patience is limited and flaws are magnified. However, bear in mind that this man whom you married or have a

child with is not your enemy. He may also be struggling to cope but will not say it out loud.

Every quarrel and fight adds up to something undesirable in the future, as the mind starts to be negative and plan "a way out". Soon, as with other virtues, love and trust become limited, too. So, I urge you to put more faith in your spouse and work through your parenting issues together. Focus on the solution, not the problem or someone's character or behavior. Remember that parenting is about teamwork. It is not a competition to determine who is better. There are (single) parents out there who are denied this opportunity.

I hope that this sharing brings some encouragement to mummies who are struggling. I wish all parents an enjoyable and fulfilling parenting journey ahead.

Full-Time Working Mum (FTWM)

It is sometimes not easy to be an FTWM. You must send your child to your parent or parent-in-law's place due to work. You ask your mother-in-law to not let your baby watch TV when he is so young, but she says, "I let my son watch TV and see how well he turned out". This is just one example of the "last-time-I-did-it-this-way" parenting style that you must adapt to when you entrust your child to their care.

So, you explore the idea of sending your child to infant care or childcare centres but you are concerned about the teacher-to-child ratio and worry that your child may not get attention whenever he or she needs it. You are also concerned about the germs and illnesses

that your child could be exposed to, especially the much-dreaded hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD). While others may term it "immunity building", you know the challenges you face when your child falls sick.

For a working mum, life will never be the same as it was before. Your colleagues have to cover for you when you go on maternity leave. This means an extra workload for them, which will most likely not please them. When you are late for work because your child refuses to cooperate or when you have to take an urgent leave because your child is sick, your superiors may regard you as not being committed. Lactating mums will need to bring all sorts of equipment to work with them, such as a breast pump, milk bags and ice packs. They will need to queue for nursing rooms where they can pump regularly so that their milk supply is not affected. When you are absent from your cubicle for certain periods, you are again judged for not being productive. Not every working mum is blessed with supportive and understanding bosses and colleagues.

When you wear different hats and serve different entities, everyone expects 100% from you. When you report for work, your boss assumes that you have had a good night's rest and are totally recharged for work. However, when you get home, totally drained from long meetings, you are expected to handle the household chores and take care of the kids. When your kid refuses to sleep or is sick, your peaceful night's rest is disrupted. When the clocks hit 6 or 7, the cycle continues and you are expected to report to the office, feeling "refreshed and recharged".

There are times when you are caught in meetings that go late but you have to go and pick up your child because the childcare centre closes at 7 and your child is hungry. However, if you leave before the meeting has concluded, the stakeholders will likely not be impressed by that. These are times when you must choose between your career aspirations and your family.

Working mums have to pay more attention to their clothing and appearance because they are socialising with people every day. If you dress down, people may regard you as lazy. You cannot just wear a T-shirt and shorts like you do at home. When motherhood takes its toll on you and when you are unable to keep up with preserving your youth, be mentally prepared for someone to call you "auntie" one day. In the blink of an eye, you are no longer a glowing and stunning young lady.

They say you have it good, you have an income and you get a full subsidy for childcare services but money cannot compensate for or replace everything. No one talks about the time you spend away from your child and the fact that you miss his or her milestones, the guilt over not cooking the most nourishing food for your child or over not being there whenever he or she needs you the most. No one mentions the struggles of juggling the commitments of work, marriage and parenting. You are a jack of all trades but you feel like a master of none.

Women's roles have evolved over the years, from traditional homemakers to successful businesswomen, CEOs and presidents.

Women are valued more and they have more opportunities. However, with great power come great responsibilities. Today, women are expected to do more and achieve more. However, a woman is only human and, like all human beings, she yearns for love, support and encouragement. Let's give the women around us the support they need so that they can continue giving the best of themselves to us.

To the full-time working or stay-at-home mums, and to single parents, you are all great in your own ways. You have unique challenges but you never give up. Keep going because the universe will reward those who work the hardest, through intangible returns that you never expect. Keep loving life and life will love you back. Thank you for the hard work. You have set an excellent example for your children and for future generations.

Stay-At-Home Mums (SAHMs)

Stay-at-home mums (SAHMs): Mums who do not have to go to the office to work. They do not have to work for terrible bosses or deal with difficult customers. They do not have to work overtime in the office because they have no working hours. SAHMs also do not suffer the blues of reporting back to the office every Monday. To some people, the ability to work from home is a wonderful thing, as there is no reporting time and you can take a break as and when you need one. These people will continue to maintain this thought process until, one day, they become stay-at-home parents.

SAHMs do not get the Monday blues over reporting for work to an office but every day can be as blue as Monday. SAHMs do not have to

work overtime because their working hours are 24x7 (24 hours a day, seven days a week). While there is no reporting time, there is also no knocking-off time. While there are no difficult bosses or customers to handle, it is equally—or more—challenging to handle a child who is throwing a tantrum or who is cranky or clingy all the time.

SAHMs also do not have the luxury of doing whatever they want or to rest whenever they want because everything revolves around the child's schedule. She is a master planner because her day is filled to the brim with tasks and responsibilities. Even trips to the washroom and meal times are squeezed into the intervals when the kids are sleeping or safe to be on their own. Forget about visiting your favourite restaurant during lunch time to enjoy a sumptuous meal in peace and to take a break from work because every minute is precious to SAHMs. Oh wait, there is more!

When your kid is a light sleeper, you become a light sleeper. When your kid is unwell, you become the nurse who works throughout the day and night. When your kid is bored at home, you become the source of entertainment. When your kid is not eating well, you become the nutritionist. When your kid is running around and checking out every corner in the house, you become the safety officer. That is on top of the daily activities of planning what to cook for the family, marketing, washing and all other household chores.

Society glorifies women who hold top positions and earn high incomes, such as CEOs and successful businesswomen. A SAHM role falls on the other end of the spectrum. However, that does not mean

that a SAHM is not capable of being a CEO or a successful businesswoman. Some mums sacrifice their career aspirations and forgo an income to stay home and look after the kids, all for the love of seeing their children grow up well.

This post is my tribute to all SAHMs who are working tirelessly for their families, and who are often misunderstood as having a good life staying at home. Your biggest rewards are the ability to bond with your child, to watch him or her grow up strong and healthy, to be the first to catch all your child's milestones instead of hearing about them from caregivers, to be the first person your child wants to run to whenever he or she feels insecure while navigating the world, to see your child grow up to be just like you, learning all the great values you have taught him or her.

I hope we can be more understanding and appreciative of the contributions of SAHMs. Whenever possible, give them some encouragement or time off, so that they can recharge their batteries. Parenting is a very draining job, both physically and mentally. Even robots and machines can break down if they do not rest.

For the SAHM community, I urge you to support one another and share tips on how to cope with challenges so that other SAHMs can be inspired or encouraged when they are struggling. Lastly, thank you very much for the hard work, love and sacrifices.

P.S. The above applies to stay-at-home dads (SAHDs), too.

The Bully From My Past

I have a somewhat shocking revelation to make. I was once a bully. Yes, you read that correctly. The man who is now spreading the message of love and kindness, writing motivational messages and spearheading ground-up community projects to help the less fortunate, was once a bully. It happened in primary school, where I had a neighbor who was very gentle and soft-spoken. His words were barely audible and his behavior somehow irritated me. I remember very clearly an incident in which I was pushing his head while scolding him. At one point, I pushed too hard. His head banged against the wall and he cried. At that moment, I regretted my actions and stopped bullying him. For years to come, that incident remained vividly in my memory. I wished I'd had the courage to say sorry to him back then.

I could not quite comprehend why I became a bully at such a young age. I guessed it could be due to the influences I was exposed to when I was a child. As my parents had limited education and worked full time, often for long hours, I was raised by my grandparents. Over at my grandparents' place, it was a nuclear family with all my uncles and aunties. Verbal abuse and name-calling were common. For the kids, corporal punishment like caning seemed to be part of the family tradition. My grandfather caned my mum when she was young and my mum caned me when I was young. I have an uncle who was more educated than the rest but he was proud and loved to call people stupid because they could not understand something that he could. I had another uncle who stepped on a baby lizard, then asked me to pick up the half-dead lizard and throw it into the bin. I told him I was scared but he mocked me and forced me to pick it up. I did exactly

what he asked but developed a phobia against lizards, one that has lasted until today, when I am in my mid-thirties.

Fear was present and weakness was not to be tolerated in the household. So, when I deemed my classmate's gentle behavior to be a sign of weakness, I wanted to do something to him, in the form of either verbal or physical abuse. Also, I grew up in an era when teachers were powerful. They could do anything to students and parents wouldn't say a thing. I saw my classmate being slapped countless times and I saw another classmate pee in his pants because he was punished and not allowed to go to the toilet. I drew dinosaurs using chalk on my desk and my form teacher hit me so hard on the back, I felt like I had an internal injury. My parents were so busy working that they rarely asked me how my day had gone or gave me words of affirmation or encouragement. Therefore, I picked up behaviors by role-modeling the behaviors of others, good and bad.

I am sharing this because I hope to advise parents that if your kids exhibit behaviors that you are not proud of, if they are unwilling to share, if they seem self-centred, if they are bossy and sarcastic or even bullying other kids, do not be quick to conclude that your child will be like that for the long run. We make mistakes and we learn from them to become better persons. Sometimes, we do not even realise they are mistakes. People change all the time, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. Given the right guidance, your children can be steered in the right direction and do well later on in life.

While we are on this topic, I have a few other not-too-proud moments

to share. I once cut my classmate's hair because she challenged me to do it and my mum was summoned to talk to the form teacher. My mum once brought me to her friend's house for a playdate. He had a super awesome toy which I liked a lot. It was a Transformer-like toy with a fighter pilot operating on top. Guess what happened after our playdate? I took home the fighter pilot and told no one. When I was in a private study group with a few friends, some of them, who came from broken families, taught me how to roll a paper, light it up and start to smoke, just like the adults did. I did exactly what they did because I was facing peer pressure but I pretended that I was smoking when, in fact, I was not. I later felt so relieved that I was no longer hanging out with them.

All these experiences are part of my growing-up years. I may not be proud of them but I accept them as part of myself. I outgrew bad habits and learnt good ones, so it is still possible to change after making mistakes. Even today, there are many areas of my life which I feel can be improved upon. I believe that if we set the direction right, if we have a positive influence, we can still undo the wrongs and continue to improve every day. If you are a perpetually negative person, you can learn to be more positive through practice. You just need to put in more effort than other people do. When I first started work, I was easily angered by many people. I wanted to get even with them each time. It took me years to learn that I was suffering from my own anger. Letting go was the best decision I ever made.

The journey of life is a never-ending learning process. One wrong move does not constitute a lifetime failure, nor does one glorious

moment create a success story. Be courageous enough to change when you are in the wrong, be humble when you are successful and the world is lifting you up, be wise enough to accept the things you cannot control or change and always be thankful for everything you have been blessed with.

Empathy

Empathy. A word that is easy to spell but difficult to get right most of the time.

Your kid does not want to eat dinner and you say, "You have food to eat and yet you are so picky. Do you know that there are thousands of children in Africa dying of hunger every day?" Or your kid does not want to study and you say, "If you do not study now, you will grow up to become a beggar". That is not empathy.

Your stay-at-home spouse tells you that he or she is tired from doing the housework and you say, "Letting you stay at home is good enough. You still want to complain?" Or the working spouse is tired after a long day at work and you say, "You come home from work, do a bit of housework and keep complaining that you are tired. I have been doing the housework for 365 days a year with no rest. How can you compare yourself with me?" That is not empathy.

Your friends tell you they are having issues with their parents or in-laws taking care of their kids and you tell them, "You are already very lucky to have people helping you take care of your kids, I don't even have a single person helping me". That is not empathy.

Someone shares their insecurities and fears about an unexpected pregnancy and has thoughts about abortion and you advise them, "There are so many people who want a child but can't conceive. Now you have one and you want to KILL your own child". That is not empathy.

Empathy is trying to understand what someone is going through and thinking from their perspective rather than from yours. Empathy does not mean supporting the decision—for example, in the case of an abortion. It is more about easing the fears and insecurities of that person before talking him or her out of the decision. Empathy is about being kind with our words, even at times when we are agitated and emotional. To have empathy is to first avoid passing any judgement on a person whom we may or may not know fully. I always remind myself using the lyrics of this nice song (Childhood): "Before you judge me, try hard to love me".

Why do we need to give empathy to our kids, our spouses and the people around us? You will understand most when you need empathy from others. We all have issues to deal with. Everyone is fighting their own battles and demons every day. Some may suffer from a broken childhood, abusive parents or betrayal from the people closest to them. These people need love, support and encouragement to heal. They do not need you to tell them what's right or wrong because, deep down, they already know the answer. If we could just give more empathy, maybe it would assure them and help them make better decisions. Giving empathy to our loved ones helps to build trust and improve the relationship.

How to Show Empathy

We can better show empathy through the use of our words.

When the kids are not eating, try saying this: "I see that you are not enjoying the vegetables. Is it because of the taste? Do you know that vegetables are really good for you? They give you a strong body so you can go out and play with your friends. How about if Mummy adds a little natural-flavoured powder to make it better for you?"

When the kids are not motivated to study, try saying this: "Mummy knows you are tired and stressed. How about you take a short break and we will continue this later? I can see you are really working very hard on your studies. That is a great job and Mummy is so proud of you".

When the spouse is tired after work, try saying this: "Dear, you must be tired after a long, hard day at work. Thank you for working so hard for our family. It is okay if you are unable to complete this chore. Why not take a short break and continue later?"

When the spouse at home is tired of doing the chores, try saying this: "Darling, it must be so draining for you to take care of the kids and at the same time do the cooking and chores. Thank you for your sacrifices for our family. Is there anything I can help you with so you can have a little more rest? Let me give you a massage to make you feel better".

To friends facing parent or in-law issues, try saying this: "Oh dear, you must have been in such a dilemma. You need your parents to help but

you cannot agree on their parenting style. Maybe a good chat with them will be useful? I am sure they always have the best intentions for your kids at heart, despite the differences in views. I hope you find a solution soon".

For the friend who shares her insecurities and fears about an unexpected pregnancy and has thoughts about abortion, try saying this: "I am so sorry to hear this. You must be so torn to have to make a decision. If you ever need a listening ear, I will be there for you. I can also help ask around for a solution or advice if you should need it. I want you to know that you have what it takes to make a wise and informed decision. All the best!"

Giving empathy to our loved ones can produce completely different outcomes as compared to when we react unempathetically or in frustration. The essence is not to create a "me vs. you" response but rather an "I am here with you, so everything is going to be alright" response. It is not easy to give empathy or be right about it all the time but we can try to practice it and get better at it over time.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TRAITS AND PARENTING STYLES OF YOUR PARENTS WHICH INSPIRE YOU?

HOW CAN YOU EQUIP YOUR CHILD WITH ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS AND BETTER PREPARE HIM OR HER TO BE MORE RESILIENT IN AN INCREASINGLY STRESSFUL SOCIETY?

HOW CAN YOU GIVE MORE LOVE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO YOUR CHILD?

WHAT ARE THE AREAS IN WHICH YOU HAVE DONE WELL AS A PARENT AND HOW CAN YOU REWARD YOURSELF FOR THAT?

VOLUME 3

THE PINNACLE OF THE REALM

The Pinnacle of the Realm offers the most spectacular view in the magical realm and is a symbol of triumph, courage and honour. To get there, one must first clear the mist of negativity, master the skills of positivity and overcome all the challenges that life throws at you when you scale the Mountain of Life. Volume 3 contains chapters on finding meaning, purpose, motivation and inspiration in life. It also provides you with the encouragement you need to overcome the challenges you face in life.

CHAPTER 11

SEEKING THE WHITE-BEARDED WIZARD (MEANING & PURPOSE)

Having lived 999 years in the magical realm, the white-bearded wizard possesses great wisdom and has seen it all in life. He will impart to you all the knowledge you need to find your purpose and live a meaningful life. When you are able to get past the mist of negativity and embrace positivity as a way of life, you are very close to meeting the white-bearded wizard of the magical realm.

[Author's Note]

There is so much more to life than going through the motions, chasing milestones and following what everyone else is doing in different stages of life. I hope that the sharing in this chapter will inspire you to find your meaning and purpose in life. When that happens, every day will be exciting and your life will change forever.

You Are Built for a Greater Purpose

I have a toothbrush that has very hard bristles—so hard that, when used daily, it can cause even healthy gums to bleed. I got it from a hotel visit. Instead of throwing it away because it did not serve its intended purpose well, I decided to use it to clean my kitchen sink. Now, it is the trustiest cleaning tool that I own. It is especially useful for scrubbing the algae off the sink filter, the gap between the tiles and other areas unreachable by the typical cleaning sponge.

We are just like the toothbrush. Not all of us are perfect at brushing teeth and gums. However, the fact that we do not do a good job of brushing teeth does not mean that we have no value or any worth at all. Using the analogy of the toothbrush with super-hard bristles which does a better job cleaning the kitchen sink than other toothbrushes with soft bristles, we could be built for another, greater purpose. Failing in one area of life does not mean failing in all areas of life. We are not in any way inferior to others who succeed.

Some school dropouts became millionaires or billionaires because they chose to focus on what they could do rather than on what they could not do. You may think that they are one in a million but you can

also choose to believe that you are another one in a million. I believe in the potential inside each and every one of us. We can all make an impact in our respective niches and contribute to building a better world.

There Is No Reset Button in Life

There is no reset button in life. There may be bad experiences and embarrassing moments that you wish you could change or there may be decisions you wish you had not taken. This is unlike any computer game, in which you can die a hundred times and still go on to defeat the last king and win. In real life, you die only once!

Yet, this is exactly the beauty of life. There is no reset button to make everything perfect because life is not meant to be perfect. There is no perfect life in which every decision you make is right, you have perfect friends with no flaws, and you meet nice, kind and trustworthy people all the time.

We go through ups and downs in life. We make bad decisions which we regret, We meet people who hurt us. We have days when everything is going against us. However, whether we like it or not, these experiences enrich our lives and make life better. Someday, we will be thankful for these experiences because they will make us stronger, make us wiser, enable us to see who our true friends are and make life much more interesting and meaningful.

I believe that everything in life, good or bad, happens for a reason. It is up to us to make the best out of every situation so we can continue

to improve and progress as human beings. Don't let setbacks hinder you and do not let failures define you. It is not over until you decide it is over. Every day is a new opportunity for redemption and to make things better. Make full use of it.

Life Is a Day in an Amusement Park

Life is comparable to spending a day in an amusement park, with plenty of interesting rides and attractions. However, before we know it, the sun is setting and the amusement park is closing.

While we are in the amusement park, we must make full use of our time to get the best out of what the amusement park has to offer. Some rides are hugely popular and have long queues, just as some goals in life will take a longer time and more effort to achieve. However, do not blindly follow the queue just because everyone else is queuing, for you may not enjoy the ride even though it is very popular.

Do not spend too much time contemplating which ride to choose while you are in the amusement park, for the weather may change and you will be unable to enjoy any ride at all. I can wait till I am 65 before I start to slow down and do something I enjoy but the question is: Will I get to live till 65?

Be bold and decisive when making your choices within a limited time. Do not think, 'What if the ride is not fun?', 'What if it is not worth my time?', etc. With too many "What-ifs", you will end up spending time doing nothing. Worries and the fears are what hold us back in life, so

accept that we can never predict and control the future and that every experience, good or bad, brings a valuable lesson.

In the midst of getting so busy with work, studies and family commitments, do not forget that life is a one-day ticket in an amusement park. Time is limited and many adventures are waiting for you. Find meaning and purpose in the things you do and you will have a memorable day to savour. Live in the present and remember: YOLO!

You Reap What You Sow in Your Land of Life

The fact that you own a piece of land does not mean you will harvest a good crop. A lot of effort goes into the process (ploughing the field, sowing the seeds, irrigating, monitoring, fertilising, pest or weed control) of getting the produce you want. This principle works in many aspects of life.

The fact that you have an able body does not mean you will always be healthy and live to a ripe old age, especially if you do not pay attention to your diet and lifestyle. The fact that you are married does not mean it will be happily-ever-after, especially if you do not invest effort into communicating and improving your relationship with your spouse. The fact that you are happy now does not mean you will always be happy, especially if you do not make an effort to cultivate positive thoughts. The fact that you have been given a life does not mean it will be a meaningful and fulfilling one, especially if you waste it away.

Many things in life do not come easily but it is usually those who put in the most effort who get the most out of it. Do not envy those who

seemingly had an easier path than you did. They probably will not achieve as much as you will. Instead, work hard for what you wish to achieve, as a greater sense of satisfaction will be waiting for you.

Your crop will be much more beautiful than the rest because of all the effort you put into your land, just as your life will be more fulfilling and meaningful because of the hard work you put into your health, your relationships with the people around you and your dreams.

The Most Precious Gift for Our Loved Ones: Our Time

What is the most precious gift we can give to our loved ones? It is not money. (I am not saying that money is not precious but it is not the most precious.) It is our time. With every passing minute, we have one minute less in this world. Some people can still make a fortune (more money) as they age but no one has successfully made more time.

If you are thinking about what you can give to your parents, spouse, children or friends, do not worry that you can't afford anything expensive, because all these material gifts are not as precious as your time. When you give your loved ones your time, you are giving a part of your life to them. Similarly, when our loved ones give us their time, they are giving us something very precious to them, so treasure it and make it worthy.

When we understand how precious time is, we do not waste it by spending it on anger, resentment, sadness, worries and unhappiness. Fill your time with positivity and happiness. This can be done when you put in a conscious effort.

Have You Bloomed Like a Flower?

Flowers, no matter how beautiful they are, will one day wither and die. The same goes for all of us. We all have our own "expiry dates". What matters is not how long we live but, rather, whether we have really bloomed like a flower while we are still alive.

Have we brightened the world with our (inner) beauty? Have we made an effort, through the little things we do in life, to change things or the world for the better? Have we lived in such a way that when people think of us, they smile because we enrich their lives? Have we given love, encouragement and hope to the people who need them the most?

Have we been true to ourselves and responsible for our own actions, even when no one is watching? Do we have the courage to live the lives we really want and not let others' standards be a benchmark for our own achievements?

If your answer to the above questions is yes, I believe you are already living a meaningful and purposeful life. If not, every day is an opportunity for you to improve yourself. Change is always possible. If you are willing to improve, you, too, can bloom like a flower.

Mirror, Life, Mist

When we look into the mirror and frown, what do we see? A frowning person. When we look into the mirror and smile, we see a person smiling back at us.

The mirror is like life. What you put inside is what you get out of it. If we can be positive and learn to always count our blessings, then life will be an amazing journey filled with joy and pleasant surprises. On the other hand, if we are always unhappy, bearing grudges and filling ourselves with anger and resentment, then life is definitely going to be a journey filled with pain and suffering.

Sometimes, when you smile into the mirror and you do not see the person in the mirror smiling back, it is because the mirror is misty. Be patient and keep the faith. The mist will clear and you will see the smiling person again. The mist is like the setbacks and challenges we face. Don't let the mist take away your smile. Keeping smiling, for the mist will not last forever.

One Month Left

* Touch Wood * If you realised you had just one month left to live, what are the things (you are doing now) that you would choose to give up during your last month of life?

Some will say work. For others, it is excessive worrying, a feud with someone, imaginary fears that are robbing you of precious moments of happiness, or a really bad habit, or seeking perfection, or living in others' expectations and so on.

Whatever is on your list, they are things that are not meaningful or important, especially when you have limited time left. In your precious last month of life, you will want to do things that bring you meaning

and joy, like spending quality time with those closest to you or doing things that you enjoy.

Why are we holding onto the things (work aside) that are on our list now? Because the time has not yet come for that final one month, so we still have a lot of time left. But who can guarantee this, on the basis that we are young? Youth does not mean more time.

Start reviewing your list now so you can live a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Alien Invasion

If the aliens came to invade Earth, it might not be a totally bad thing. It might be the stronger enemy we need to unite humanity.

It is sad to see that most of the suffering happening around the world today, except for that related to natural disasters, is man-made. If you think of terrorism, the Rohingya killings, the fighting in the Middle East, tension over North Korean missile testing and the previous wars, they are all driven by humans.

We humans have always found ways to differentiate ourselves, be it through nationality, race, religion or even skin tone. With these differences and corrupted ideologies, humans turn on one another, with the aim of destroying the other party.

I think we may need a stronger enemy, like the aliens, to make us

understand that we are all equal and that we are all part of the human race. However, I do not think the aliens are coming soon; they are probably wary of the nuclear weapons that we have. Maybe they will come when we have used nuclear weapons to wipe out our own people. Then they will have an easier time finishing up the job.

Actually, we do not need aliens to unite humanity. What we need are five elements: kindness, tolerance, respect, humility and, most importantly, love. We need more love in this world, love not just for others but also for ourselves. How can we expect to love others when we cannot even love ourselves?

Most of our own suffering is self-inflicted, as we struggle with negative emotions like stress, anger, envy and hate. We also struggle with our expectations of many things until we cannot live a simple life.

The future will give us more reasons to be unhappy and more things to compare and envy, especially with the ever-higher cost of living, more negative news all around the world and people stirring up hate and anger. To reduce our own suffering, we must find our own source of happiness and ways to diffuse the negative energies.

It Is All About the Journey

The most successful movies of all time, such as *Avatar*, *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars* or *The Avengers*, have something in common: The good guys win in the end. No movie with an ending whereby the bad guys win has ever made it big. The same goes for the fairy tale stories, which

always have happy endings. When we read stories about the weak being bullied, we get angry. I think it is in our human nature to embrace goodness, righteousness and justice.

Another interesting observation is that despite knowing that the good guys will eventually win, people still pay to watch these movies. In recent years, the box office has continued to set new records for blockbusters. The same fairy tale storybooks are read to children generation after generation.

So, what does that imply? It simply means that the ending does not matter to us. What matters more is how the good guys overcome great challenges, fight nasty villains, handle failures and eventually save the day and win it all. We are inspired by the journey of getting there, rather than by the actual destination itself.

The same goes for life. We all know what the ending will be: We are all going to die one day. However, what truly matters is the journey of life itself: the challenges that we overcome that make us stronger, the great friendships we forge, the love from our family and fulfilling all our dreams, one by one.

We seem to be obsessed with achieving milestones in life, especially in a competitive society like ours. We want to quickly get our degree, our first car, our first condo, our first million dollars, early retirement, financial freedom and so on. We want to show others that we are capable and successful because we have these material achievements and we have attained them much faster than the rest. In the end, this

obsession clouds our ability to realise that it is the process and journey that matter. If we do not enjoy the process, it is meaningless, even if we eventually achieve what we want.

Lastly, I hope that through this sharing, you can understand that a beautiful life is about the memories we create and the moments (not the milestones) that take your breath away.

Everyone Has a Purpose in Life

A toilet roll is used to hold all the toilet paper together. However, once the toilet paper is used up, the toilet roll can be used for other purposes, for example, as a holder for stationery, as a craft item or as a toy for small pets. A toothbrush is used to brush teeth but once it is time to change to a new toothbrush, the old one can be reused for cleaning purposes. The plastic bags we use to contain our groceries can be reused as garbage bags.

Everything in life has a purpose. So do every one of us. We can have more than one purpose if we know how to constantly keep ourselves useful. When we are young, we are full of energy. As we age, we lose that energy but we gain more knowledge and experience. At any point in life, we have something to give. What we can give to the world defines our purpose, so do not ever think that you are too insignificant to contribute to our world. Your gifts and strength are what make you unique. They are exactly what the world needs.

You are not just a student; you are a great study companion and an encouraging friend. You are not just a teacher; you are a great

motivator and someone whom the youth look up to. You are not just an engineer; you are a great innovator and architect of the future. You are not just a serviceman; you are a great protector and a symbol of courage and honour. You are not just a chef; you are a creator of taste and flavours. You are not just someone's child, someone's spouse, someone's parent; you are so much more. Find your purpose and rock the world!

You Can Buy a Clock But You Cannot Buy Time

I was searching around for a clock when I realised something: I can buy the most beautiful clock or the most expensive clock in the world but I cannot buy time. Every hour, every minute and every second that ticks away will not come back. We may think that a lot of time is left because we are young but the fact is, no one knows exactly how much time we have left.

Every minute we waste doing something unconstructive or not beneficial to us is a minute that we trade-off doing something more useful and meaningful. The time we spend bearing grudges, hating someone, getting angry over people, worrying about something that may not happen, having irrational fears, envying others or playing politics is the time we could have spent with our loved ones, doing more for society, exploring new hobbies, trying good food, visiting new places of interest (home and abroad) and rejuvenating in nature.

Every minute is precious, so make it count. We are all trading our time for memories. Unlike tons of cash in the bank, this is one thing that we

will hold onto until the very last moment. If you have not been trading your time for happy memories, now is a good time to start.

The Ones Who Really Love You

There will be many who love you in this lifetime, but the people who love you the most are the ones who want nothing from you and are willing to make sacrifices for you. They are the ones who genuinely want us to be happy. They are there to care for and support us throughout the many phases of life. Yet, sadly, they are the ones we tend to neglect the most.

Have we tried hard to impress our bosses at work, to be extremely polite to them, but then we bring work-related frustration and stress back home and are easily irritated with our loved ones? If a superior called after office hours and a loved one called during office hours, do we have the same attitude towards them? Are our minds fixated on how to score points at work or on how to create beautiful memories with our loved ones? You are always replaceable at work but you are indispensable to your loved ones.

Let us take a moment to think it through. Have we taken for granted those who love us the most? Have we shown appreciation through the simplest of gestures—for example, buying something they like to eat or saying a word of praise, gratitude or encouragement?

If you realise that you have not been doing this, you still have time to show them the appreciation that they deserve. Life is too short for regrets. Today and this moment are the only guarantees, so show the

people closest to you how much you love them while you still have the chance.

Your Time Is Your Life

Your time is your life, so I hope that what I have written in this book is worth your time to read. When you spend that bit of time reading what I have written, you give a part of your life to it and to me.

My time is my life. When I write, I, too, give a part of my life to you, in the hope that I can add some value to your life. It has to be this way, or else I am wasting your time and your life.

Your time is your life. You can decide what and whom you wish to give a part of your life to. Do you want to give a part of your life to things you cannot control, to the opinions of others you cannot change, to bad memories so that you hurt yourself again and again, to the hate and anger which drive you further down?

Or do you wish to give a part of your life to the people who truly deserve it, to building beautiful memories, to helping people, to making a difference and living a meaningful life?

Your time is your life. You decide.

The Beauty in Taking the Longer Route

I took the wrong bus one day and it took me a longer time to reach my destination. In our fast-paced society, in which time is money, I could probably have done more if I had not taken the longer route.

However, instead of being self-critical, I spent the journey admiring the scenery and witnessing some new developments in an unfamiliar area.

We may encounter detours and longer routes in life because not everything will go according to plan. However, this does not matter because we will eventually reach our destination. The longer route may bring some pleasant surprises to us.

No matter which route you take, always remember to enjoy every bit of the journey. Slow down if you can because life is meant to be an enjoyable process. Too much stress, living in others' expectations, being over-competitive, could make you feel unhappy and cause life to lose its meaning. The next time you have to take a longer route to reach your destination, tell yourself that there is beauty in going the extra mile. It is up to you to unravel what's in store for you.

Taking Good Care of Our Health

The best gift we can give to our loved ones, other than our time, is to take good care of our health. When we fall sick, we are not the only ones who suffer; our loved ones suffer along with us.

Taking care of our own health requires discipline and hard work. For example, if you have time on the train to take a short rest, will you choose to surf the net or social media instead? When it is time to sleep at night, will you sacrifice your sleep to watch addictive Korea dramas? When it comes to eating, will you choose healthy steamed dishes or will you choose oily, flavourful and deep-fried food? When

you are hungry, will you think that it is okay to delay your meal for an hour or two because work comes first? When stress and anger come, will you learn to let go or dwell on the negative energy and make yourself feel worse?

I do not believe in taking shortcuts to good health. We need to moderate ourselves in every aspect, physically and emotionally. Less of the negative stuff (fatigue, unhealthy food, sugar and negative emotions) and more of the positive stuff (exercise, rest, water, clean vegetables, fruits and good thoughts).

Our loved ones wish for us to be healthy and to be around for them. Everything will be so different after we lose a loved one, just like no matter how big and magnificent the jigsaw puzzle is, missing one piece makes a world of difference. Therefore, taking good care of ourselves and staying healthy is a great gift we can give to our loved ones.

My Vacation Job as an NTUC Cashier

One morning, when I woke up, I was feeling sleepy and tired. However, as I looked out of the window and saw many staff members at the supermarket opposite my block, already hard at work, I felt blessed. If I were one of them, I would need to wake up much earlier.

I recalled my working experience as an NTUC cashier many years ago. The working hours were long due to the rule that cashiers had to arrive an hour earlier and knock off an hour later, to verify the accounts. If the accounts did not tally at the end of the day, our pay

would be deducted. Mealtimes were at odd hours; for example, lunch at 2 pm or dinner at 3 pm. The pay was "peanuts" and I frequently met nasty customers, especially during the festive seasons.

Somehow, to some people, the long queues were the result of the cashiers' inefficiency and never because of a large number of customers. If you think that sitting a whole day at your desk is tough, trying standing a whole day as a cashier.

While it was not the most enjoyable working experience, it did enrich me in other ways. It made me more appreciative of what I have now. I can eat lunch during the usual lunch hours. I am able to sit comfortably during work and I do not have to regularly face nasty customers. Everything in life happens for a reason. Every experience, good or bad, serves to teach us some valuable lessons, to help us grow and become stronger and better people.

We Are the Creators of a Better World

We all hope to see a better world; there's no doubt about that. The only problem is that some people see it as the responsibility of others, or they have no confidence or belief that they can make a difference.

The story of how a 65-year-old hawker gave meal vouchers to the poor elderly to redeem for free food at her stall is a fine example of how ordinary people can make a difference in their own unique ways. According to the hawker, she does not have many skills, nor does she have higher education, but she felt that she could give back to others through this initiative.

I have a friend who collects donated pre-loved clothing and accessories, sells them on Carousell and donates what she earns to purchase groceries for children's homes, old folks' homes and volunteer welfare organisations. Through her efforts, she has helped donors clear their pre-loved stuff and do good at the same time, as the beneficiaries also got a fresh supply of groceries.

Ordinary folks can achieve extraordinary feats. The most important factor is to believe in yourself. We are all born with unique strengths and talents. Make them count and add value to the people around you.

Life, Ferris Wheel

Life is like taking a ride on a Ferris wheel. At times we are up and at times we are down. When you are at your lowest point, rest assured that it will pass and the Ferris wheel will lift you up to the highest point again. When you are at your highest point in life, enjoy every moment of the beautiful scenery and make the best out of it before it passes. Do not let unnecessary and meaningless thoughts disturb your peace and stop you from fully enjoying the best that life has to offer.

Life is never boring in a Ferris wheel. While it may seem like such a routine to repeat the cycle of life daily, every day can bring about a new adventure. You will meet people from all walks of life, you will build relationships and form new networks, you will hear others' stories and you will share your stories. You may create new stories with some of them. The scenery is constantly changing and there will always be new and exciting things for you to explore.

Our lives can be like the Ferris wheel, lifting people when they are down and bringing them to places with magnificent views and scenery. The Ferris wheel will always be an icon, as it stands out among other infrastructures. We can also stand out by doing extraordinary acts in our ordinary lives, by impacting the lives of others through our gifts and strengths, by making a difference in the lives of others. If someone's life is enriched because of us and if someone is thankful that we exist, we will have succeeded.

Be inspired by—and be as inspiring as—the Ferris wheel.

Christmas

When we celebrate Christmas every year, I hope we also learn some valuable lessons from it.

May Christmas remind us of the reason why we work so hard: to see our loved ones live well and in comfort.

May Christmas enlighten us as to what we really need as compared to what we think we need. A celebration in a three-room HDB flat is no less meaningful or significant than a celebration in a condo or a bungalow. What's really important is the people you are with. A big house cannot fill your heart if that house is empty.

May Christmas teach us more about humanity. We did not come to this planet to live alone or to destroy one another. We form communities, help one another and progress forward together. The

"spirit of giving" must extend to our everyday lives if we wish to see a better and happier world.

Lastly, may Christmas remind us of the many blessings we already have. On Christmas Day, someone out there has no loved ones with whom to celebrate the occasion. This person has no food on the table and may not even know the story of Christmas, let alone celebrate it.

We are all blessed in our own unique ways. We just need to look at what we have and not at what we don't.

The World Is Your Mirror

The world is your mirror. If you are nice to people, if you are kind and positive, chances are that you will meet kind people and people will be nice to you.

The world is what you perceive it to be. If you see it as cruel, cold and selfish, chances are that events will happen to support your perspective. If you see the world as a warm and loving place filled with hope, you are more likely to experience the good side of humanity and continue to keep the faith.

What we want to get out of life, how we wish to be treated, really depend on what we put into life and how we treat others. Be nice to people. Help one another. It will change your perception of society, for people are as good (or bad) as what you believe them to be. Mix with positive people who are encouraging and you will definitely be more inclined towards positive thoughts and good habits.

No one gets through life without experiencing a single act of kindness. We have definitely received some form of advice, encouragement or guidance at one stage of our lives.

What differentiates all of us is how much kindness we are willing to pay forward or give back to society. This ultimately determines our behaviour and our perception of the world.

Photography, Memories

The way we take photos has changed over the years, from analogue photography to digital photography.

The way we share photos has changed over the years, from printing out hard copies and putting them in photo albums to sharing them online through social media.

The number of photos we take has also changed, from the limited numbers available on a roll of film to the thousand photos that a memory card can store.

One thing that has not changed is that we still love taking photos. In fact, we are taking more photos.

Why is that so?

Every photo captures a part of our lives because every photo is a piece of memory. When we capture plenty of photos throughout our lives,

what we really want to safe-keep are our memories, because that is what life is all about.

Memories tell us that we have lived lives filled with happiness and meaning. When you grow old and there are two items on your desk, a thick album full of photos of yourself and your loved ones, and a file containing your bank statements and shares statements, which one will make you happier?

Sunset

No matter how beautiful the sunset is, it is less meaningful if no one is beside you to admire it with you.

Our loved ones are the reasons why we work so hard but they are also the reasons why we should not overwork ourselves. It is our responsibility to maintain good health for as long as possible so that we can be there to take care of our loved ones when they need us and to enjoy life's best moments with them.

The world is moving at a faster pace. Work is becoming more demanding and challenging. Stress levels are increasing. However, we must always bear in mind what is most important to us, which is our health and our loved ones.

No one is indispensable in any organisation but you are indispensable to your family. Always remember that and seek to strike a balance. There is a time to work and a time to rest.

Carousell, Life

There are quite a number of wacky users on Carousell, the online marketplace platform. I personally met a few of them, people who gave ridiculously low offers, people who went missing online and people who never showed up for arranged meetings.

However, that does not mean it is not a useful platform or that there are no good users. Also, instead of condemning this platform and losing opportunities to sell unwanted stuff, why not take the lead by being a good user and spreading more goodness and positive energy into it?

I once met a young lady who came with her helper to buy a toy. I decided to give it to her for free, which made her very happy. I also met a student who married young and was looking for cheap second-hand items for her new house. I was supposed to sell her a brand-new pair of scissors but I decided to give them to her as a gift because her financial situation was pretty tight. She politely declined the offer because she said that I had paid for the scissors, so I gave her a discount.

Carousell is very much an analogy for life. When you meet nasty people or experience unhappiness, you either let them define your whole outlook on life or you do something about it by focusing on the positives (the good users, the wide platform outreach) or making things better by being a good user and adding value to others.

Carousell is not the only marketplace app available. There are a few more buy-or-sell apps, just like Singapore is not the only place where you can live. However, just like there is no perfect app, there is no perfect place in which to live. If you go elsewhere, you will have new issues to deal with.

Sometimes, after going one big round, you realise that your home country is where you want to be because that is where your roots are and where your heart lives.

Turning Back Time

We often wish that we could turn back time and make better decisions. However, who can say for sure that turning back time would lead to a better outcome? While we may be able to change the outcome of some events, there is no way we can live a perfect life by controlling the past or the future.

To appreciate life is to live in the present moment, trust that every decision is your best decision and appreciate all that you have been blessed with.

In fact, we do not have to turn back time and restart everything. We can start now, in the present, to improve on our shortcomings and live lives of which we will be proud. Learn a new skill, find a new hobby, upgrade your knowledge, give kindness, volunteer your service, chase your childhood dreams, explore the world, do whatever is positive and enriching and you will live a life with fewer regrets.

The IT Revolution

It started with the Internet. Then came social media. Finally, the game-changer arrived: smartphones, which took our era by storm. It is hard to find someone who does not have a smartphone and who is not logged into social media. Even the elderly are embracing this change. It is definitely a fascinating world out there, as we are entertained on the go.

However, cracks are showing as we see the side effects of this evolution. Many people are glued to their phones everywhere they go. Young people are losing sleep so they can check their social media accounts. Social influencers are pushing the boundaries to earn more likes (engagements). People are communicating less physically because what is inside the phone is more interesting than what is outside the phone, i.e. real-life conversations.

We are not going to stop here. The next phase is the virtual reality (VR) space, which makes the virtual world even more real and makes us even more detached from the real world. Theme parks in Korea are already doing this to scale up physical space. What's even more appealing is that you can interact with your favourite pop stars virtually. Currently, you can still give your colleagues or kids the death stare when you see them glued to their phones but, in the future, they probably will not notice your presence because they are wearing their VR goggles.

We need to understand why we are behaving this way in order to eradicate these shortcomings and make things better. I believe all these behaviors are driven by a few factors. The first factor is the quest for knowledge, which has been fuelling all our evolution and advancements since the Stone Age. In previous years, we were in a library with 10 books but now we are in a library with 100,000 books, and not just physical books but also eBooks, which you can take with you after you leave the library. So much information yet so little time in which to process it all.

The next reason is, ironically, the need for social interaction and communication. In the past, we learned how everyone was doing, especially our not-so-close relatives, only through annual gatherings. However, now we are plugged into their lives through social media updates. We are no longer satisfied with dual-party communications, and understandably so, because it takes more effort to relay messages as compared to group chats, in which information is disseminated to all at one go. All the types of online communications, often fast and furious, are taking our attention away from real-life conversation and interactions.

How do we feel when someone likes what we share? We feel good, don't we? The power of encouragement and being loved is a big reason why social media is gaining so much popularity. Deep down, we yearn for love and affection from the people around us. Social media significantly enhances this aspect because you can have many

people, several more than those you know in real life, loving what you show them.

To get your loved ones to put down their phones is actually to compete with what the smartphone can offer them. The good news is that human biology is on our side, i.e. we are not meant to live in the virtual world, survive on vitamin water or breathe virtual air. Human connections are made meaningful through physical, real-life interactions. We must make use of technology to complement this mode and not to totally replace it.

The Dragonfruit

I often wonder: Who was the first human being to taste the dragonfruit? Because, on the outside, it does not look very appealing. The skin is similar to a dragon's scales and the color is dull. However, if you can look past the exterior, you will see that the flesh inside is extremely sweet, the color is rich and the fruit itself is packed with many health benefits.

There are people who are like the dragonfruit: ordinary on the outside but packing a punch on the inside. The world belongs to them. What we are made of on the inside (our intellect, our compassion, our virtues) is lasting and of value to the world. Besides, if good looks were everything, then models and celebrities should be ruling the world.

I have also worked with people who had really bad reputations, which made me hesitant to engage them. However, some of them turned

out to be really nice people. It is like people around me telling me that the dragonfruit is yucky and advising me to not eat it. However, plucking up the courage to try it creates immense rewards for me.

When people gather together to gossip about other people, negativity often overwhelms the conversation. If you are the unfortunate subject, keep your chin up and keep doing what you believe in and what you are good at. Let your inner virtues shine amid all the negativity that others can possibly heap on you.

You are the dragonfruit and once people get to know the person you really are, they will like you even more than ever because you will have won them over and totally changed their perception of you. Let your actions and achievements speak louder than the noise that surrounds you.

Dealing With Competition in Life

Twenty years ago, when I was in lower secondary, I had a classmate who was my fierce rival in studies. He was first in class while I was second in class, but we both had very different styles when it came to dealing with the competition. I was the happy-to-share-my-notes kind while he was very protective of his study materials, to the extent that he became very angry when someone looked at his textbook because all his study tips were inside it.

There is nothing wrong with being competitive. In fact, I think Singapore has come so far thanks to our competitive spirit. However, in the midst of being competitive, are we happy? Do we want to excel

at every opportunity and be the best we can be? Or are we competitive because we fear losing? Can we accept losing while being competitive? Or have we become so bent on winning that we do not allow ourselves to fail?

If we do not enjoy being competitive or if we are being forced to be competitive, we will not be happy. If I put down the competitive side of myself and learn that not every peer is my competitor and that we can help one another to succeed together, then I gain friends and lose more negative emotions instead of having to guard against everyone.

Have we stopped to think that the world is big enough for all of us to succeed together, not just those with better academic grades and qualifications?

Monday Blues

The more I try to unravel the mystery of Monday blues and help everyone, including myself, cope with it, the more I understand the significance of Monday blues and why we need them. Taking away your Monday blues is also taking away your excitement when Friday comes. It is taking away the joys of the weekend. Sounds like a really bad deal to trade one not-so-happy day for three happy days.

We need the blues of Monday to appreciate the beauty of the weekend. If there is no hard work, you will never appreciate the fruits of your labour. If there is no storm, you will not appreciate the sun and the rainbow. If you have not truly given from your heart, you will not

understand the joy of giving. If there are no bad days in your life, you will not appreciate the good days.

Monday symbolises the temporary end of a couple of happy days. That is why we do not look forward to it. We want the good times to last forever, don't we? However, nothing lasts forever, be it good times or bad times. The Monday blues, happy weekend phenomenon is a reflection of life: sometimes down, sometimes up. When you can get through Monday and the rest of the week, the good times await you.

If you are feeling the blues today, tell yourself this: I am thankful for the Monday blues because it means that I love my weekends and that I will feel excited again when Friday comes.

Broken Ornament

When your favourite porcelain ornament drops to the floor and is broken, it is damaged permanently. No matter how hard you try to glue it back together, the cracks will remain and it will never be the same.

There are things in life that are fragile, like the porcelain ornament, and that, once broken, will never be the same. For example, our health, once damaged, is difficult to restore to its original state through medicine, supplements or tonics.

When we hurt our loved ones with our words or actions, we leave cracks and scars on them. They become damaged ornaments. When

we neglect our family members and lose them, no amount of tears and regrets will bring them back.

The trust that we build with the people around us, when broken, will be difficult to gain back, as there will always be lingering doubts.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we are unable to prevent our favourite ornament from being broken due to unforeseen circumstances. The scary thing about life is that you do not know what is going to happen next. You never know when a strong gust of wind is going to blow your ornament off the shelf and onto the floor.

My own experience has reminded me to not take anything or anyone for granted. My uncle was fit as a fiddle and could complete a 10km run faster than many people half his age. One night, he fell and was hospitalised. Unfortunately, he fell again at the hospital and hit his head. He then went through two additional brain surgeries and never woke up. My grandma had a fall and lost most of her memories overnight. Now she behaves like a child. We occasionally read about the premature deaths of famous people, which further reminds us about how unpredictable life can be.

We have worked hard so that we can improve the quality of life for our loved ones. However, wouldn't it be ironic if the house got bigger but the number of family members decreased and the house became emptier? True blessings come from the ability to love and be loved. Let us always remember that. Tell or show your loved ones how much you care for them. Make time for them. A simple gesture can mean a

lot. Take good care of your health, too, as it is your most basic responsibility to do so.

You can say that you are busy with work and many other pursuits in life. However, everyone is busy and it is likely that we will be busy for years to come. It is really a matter of prioritising and giving time to what is truly important to us.

Fame, Glamour, Fortune

What is a billion dollars when you cannot live to see your child grow up, develop into a fine gentleman, settle down and set up his own family?

What is fame and glamour when you cannot walk down the aisle with the love of your life, continue to write your love story, build your love nest and fill it with children's laughter?

Many people desire fame, glamour and fortune and envy those who have these things. Yet, not many realise that those people who have such things do not have the best of everything, because no one is always a winner in life.

When Chinese New Year comes around, you wish that more expensive food, such as abalone, was on the table, you wish that you could drive a continental car to impress your relatives, you wish that you were slim enough to fit into that cheongsam, you wish that you could cover those wrinkles, like how celebrities maintain their youth. Yet, somewhere in another household, there are people whose only wish

is for their loved ones to be around so that they can have a simple reunion dinner with them.

Life can give you the things you wish for but it can also brutally take away the things you wish you could hold onto. The moment when you feel like you are in control can be the moment when you are most vulnerable. No one can predict or control the future. All we ever have is here and now.

So, instead of being unhappy because we do not have the things we wish for, let's be thankful for all that we have been blessed with. Let's be thankful that we have food on the table, we can wear nice untorn clothes, we have good health to enjoy the Chinese New Year goodies, we have our loved ones by our side and we have the opportunity to tell them "I love you".

I wish everyone the wisdom to understand that true prosperity is not measured by the amount of money you have in the bank or how popular or good-looking you are. Rather, it is measured by the blessings you have in life and how well you are able to appreciate them.

Learning From a Resilient Granny

An old granny, who was hunching badly and supported by her walking stick, was trying to climb a flight of stairs to cross an overhead bridge. The pedestrian crossing was just beside the bridge. Her daughter, who was watching out for her, told me that this elderly woman insisted on

using the bridge because she wanted to exercise. I was certainly impressed by her character and resiliency.

We live in much comfort today, driven by technological advancement. We stay inside aircon facilities most of the time. If there is a stop or two between the bus interchange and our destination, we probably choose to take the bus. When we choose to not sweat, to not walk, we lose out on detoxing through sweating and the chance to exercise. These are the things that make us healthy.

On top of that, we lead stressful lives, whether because of school or of work. We lack rest because we have too many distractions (online) and we are eating more processed food which is unhealthy and contains high levels of salt and sugar. All this is bad for the body.

When we have less of what we need and more of what we do not need, we fall sick more often. Some illnesses, like diabetes, cancer and even dementia, are affecting more young people today.

We must take a step back and re-evaluate our lifestyles. We must do the right thing before something serious happens to shock us out of our comfort zone.

Lastly, do not be afraid of the challenges that life throws at you. It may take you a longer time and more effort to reach your destination but it will serve the good purpose of toughening you. Be like the old granny, who knows what's good for her.

The Poorest and Loneliest People in the World

One evening, I had the worst tummy ache of my life after a bad dinner. For over 30 minutes, I felt like I was in labour. I endured intense pain and cold sweat was streaming down my face. The only difference was that I was not pushing out an adorable baby. Rather, I was trying to flush out an alien that was creating havoc in my stomach.

There were moments when I wanted to call someone to come "rescue" me and a few names came to mind. Thankfully, I did not need to activate anyone and I felt much better after taking medication. That episode made me ponder a few points.

The poorest people in the world are not the homeless or those staying in rental flats. Rather, they are the people without good health. On the Internet, you will be able to find many inspiring stories about people going from bankruptcy to being millionaires. However, without health, all the riches in the world count for nothing. It does not matter if I am in the toilet of a rental flat, a bungalow or a six-star hotel because the amount of pain and suffering is the same.

The loneliest people in the world are not the singles or those without a partner. Rather, they are the ones who have no one to comfort them when they are in great pain. When you are in trouble and you know that you have someone to count on, someone who will stop whatever he or she is doing and help you, then you are blessed. If you can think of one such person, treasure your relationship with him or her because not everyone is willing to make you their top priority.

Lastly, I am thankful that I live in a country where medical facilities are

not too far away. Even in the middle of the night, transportation is available to reach them quickly and help is often a phone call away. In this aspect, we are better off than the folks living in rural areas with poor communication reception and limited medical resources.

To live another day is such a great blessing.

Finding Your Purpose

Sometimes, you can better appreciate your strengths or skillsets when they are put to good use. I was on my way home when a Chinese lady approached me to guide her in making a phone call to a local bank for housing enquiries, as she did not understand English.

I tried to get a Chinese-speaking customer service officer for her. We chatted briefly and she shared that she was accompanying her son on his studies here. Her husband was in the military and had a very strict arrangement that did not allow him to travel up to two years after his service had ended. I feel more fortunate in this aspect because my travel plans are not restricted by my work.

Our bilingualism is our strength and we should be proud of it. When we can use our skills to help others and make our community a better place, we get a sense of purpose in life. Bringing happiness to others also makes us happy.

Finding one's purpose may sound like such a big thing, like you need to scale the Himalayas or meet some wise old monks to gain enlightenment. However, it all comes down to the little things: making

your strengths, talents and skillsets count, on a consistent basis, repeatedly over a prolonged period of time.

You may be a hawker selling Char Kway Teow but if people go crazy over your food and are willing to bear the heat and a long queue just to eat what you prepare because it makes them happy, then you have found your purpose. So, I encourage you to find that thing in yourself that is different and to use it to create an impact. When we lose ourselves in the service of others, we truly find ourselves. And when you find your purpose, your life will be far from ordinary.

10 Life Lessons I Hope to Share With the Young and the Young at Heart

1. The World Is Your Mirror.

What you put in is what you get out. If you set the world ablaze with hate and anger, you will most likely be burned by your actions. If you spread love and care for others, you will likely meet good people who will help you in times of need.

2. Anger.

Anger is the most powerful weapon you use against yourself. When you fill your mind with anger and reiterate angry events, the person who suffers the most is you. Anger makes people do crazy things and, in the end, they live to bear the consequences.

3. Envy.

Envy starts when you stop seeing your blessings and what is good about yourself. Envy leads to dissatisfaction, which in turn leads to

unhappiness. To stop envy in its track, be thankful for what you have. Love yourself and count your blessings every single day. If you really need to compare, do it with people who are worse off than you are.

4. Love and Kindness.

Without love and kindness, our world will perish. For someone to receive is for someone to give. So, be generous in giving if you can. Someday, you may be on the receiving end of someone else's kindness. The journey of giving will also bring immense rewards, often in the form of happy and heart-warming moments.

5. Money.

The most valuable things in life cannot be bought by money. This includes your health, kinship, close friendship and time. In your pursuit for more material wealth, if you sacrifice your personal health or quality time with loved ones, you will one day realise that no amount of money can bring back the years so that you can relive treasured moments or enjoy your good health.

6. Work.

You are always an employee at work, no matter how high your position is. When you are down, someone will replace you. However, no one can replace you at home and in the hearts of your loved ones.

7. Life Is an Adventure.

Life is an adventure, so never stop exploring. Life passes by pretty fast. The future is always unknown and something we cannot control. It is important that we start doing what we have always wanted to do and

not wait till we finally have time. After all, those retirement years or free time may not come for some. Have the courage to live the life you have always wanted and not a life focused on others' definitions of success. This is your life, not theirs.

8. Positive Thinking.

Positive thinking lets you get the best out of every situation. However, negative thinking is always a reflex reaction. So, you must continually train your mind to be positive. Remember that you always have a choice to be positive and that you can turn positive thinking into a habit through practice.

9. Needs Vs. Wants.

There is a difference between a "need" and a "want". When we are confused and treat a "want" as a "need", we set the wrong expectations and allow unhappiness to consume us.

10. Every Day Is a Gift.

Every new day is a gift and a chance for redemption. Every morning when you wake up, you receive another opportunity to change, to make all the wrongs right, to live a life that makes you proud. Do not waste it because it is a privilege denied to many.

Visiting Grandma

When my mum asked me to go visit my grandma at the hospital for one last time, I became anxious. I was worried that I would not make it in time to see my grandma, who had taken such good care of me

when I was young. She fetched me from school every day and fed me so many of her signature home-cooked dishes.

She is the mother of mothers. Women of her generation have one very admirable trait: their dedication to serving their families and ensuring the well-being of everyone at home. They live for that great purpose. Even when every day became a routine of going to the market, cooking for everyone, doing the chores and taking care of many kids, I never heard my grandma complain about her life being tough or boring. Her biggest joy and satisfaction came from seeing everyone well and happy.

She often said, "If you have time, you can come to visit Grandma" and "If you do not have time, you do not need to come. Your work and your family matters are more important". I would always answer, "Okay," but the next time I saw her was usually one year later, at our Chinese New Year celebration. She is close to 90; how many more "one years" does she have left?

We are always so busy, with endless work, with our personal commitments, with wanting to have what others have, with wanting to get the best deals in life, with all the distractions of social media and the Internet. We consider time catching up with our loved ones, our parents or grandparents, to be the lower priority until time finally does catch up and the chance for a reunion is gone.

We then realise that, while we pursue the many wishes on our bucket list, our loved ones are ageing by the day. While they long to see us

more, they do not say so because they do not want to inconvenience us. When the chance is gone, we start to realise that it is such a blessing to have someone around who loves you unconditionally. We realise that in the midst of all our pursuits of the best things in life, the real treasures have been with us all the time.

I rushed to the hospital but I did not see my grandma. She had gone in for emergency surgery, which saved her life. I was so relieved and happy to see her recovering well from the surgery. I know it was my redemption. I was given time to spend more moments with her. Time is something we cannot buy with money. So are health, kinship and memories. Life is too short for regrets. I hope this sharing gives you a moment to ponder what is truly important to you in life.

My Three Guiding Principles In Life

I regularly practice three guiding principles in life to help myself attain happiness. This, in turn, makes my life meaningful.

1. Practice Contentment and Enjoy Every Process

Be contented and enjoy every stage of life. If you are single, enjoy being single; enjoy the freedom to make decisions without having to answer to a spouse. If you are married, enjoy being married; enjoy the companionship of your spouse and the things you can do together. If you have no kids, enjoy married life without kids; enjoy the ability to travel anytime, anywhere, without the need to pack extra bags or factor in contingency plans. If you have kids, enjoy watching them grow and spending quality time bonding with them, guiding them

and exploring the world together. Whether you are a student, a working adult or a retiree, enjoy the things that you can do in your role and be contented and happy with what you are given.

2. Giving Kindness

Nothing is more empowering than lifting people up and helping to make their days brighter or their lives better. In bringing joy and hope to others, we gain happiness and hope ourselves. All of my community projects have the essence of kindness in them. I give kindness to the strangers I meet on the street, I advocate kindness online, I created community groups and I write motivational articles, all for the same reason: I care about your well-being and want you to be happy. The world can advance technologically but if kindness is missing, then humanity will fail. Giving kindness often takes minimal time and effort yet creates a big impact on the beneficiaries as well as on the givers. Just think of the kind deeds that others have done for you. How do they make you feel?

3. Positive Thinking

If you can be positive, you will get the best out of every situation. You will find courage in challenges, you will find lessons in setbacks, you will gain enlightenment in failures, you will count your blessings in misfortune and you will find hope in despair. You rise above the negativity all around you, and you will love your life more because you have given yourself so many reasons to be happy. It is a reflex action to have negative thoughts when we face a challenge but we can train our minds to be positive so that we reach the solution faster than we would have had we focused on the problem.

I hope these three guiding principles are useful in helping you find your well-deserved happiness. May you continue to live life to the fullest and find meaning in what you do.

No-Smartphone Pledge

Many years ago, if you wanted to know the 4D results, you would have had to tune into the radio at a specific time to listen to the broadcast. And you had to write it down because they announced only twice in the span of a short interval. Today, the 4D and TOTO results can be accessed at any time with a click by using your phone.

Many years ago, if you were bored while waiting at the hair salon or at the hospital, you had to make do with the magazines, the newspaper or the TV, which repeated the same health program over and over. Today, your phone keeps you entertained while you wait.

Many years ago, if you needed to learn more about a country, you would have to talk to people who had been there, read books about it or watch travel programs on TV. Today, you can use your phone to search for pictures, reviews and tips about the best season to visit. You can also watch videos of a particular attraction.

There are so many things you can do with your phone other than making phone calls. You do not need a radio, an MP3 player, a DVD player, a TV, a torchlight, a fitness tracker, a portable gameset, a GPS, a watch, a computer, a membership card, a physical credit card, an organiser, a notepad or an alarm clock because your one phone can

handle all these functions. With only your phone, battery power and data, you are ready to take on the world.

The smartphone, backed by the Internet and social media, is so fascinating that we can literally spend hours on it. But at what cost? We cannot reap the benefits without giving up something in return.

How long has it been since you properly sat down with your child without using your phone? And not just chatting about how the day went but truly being present with them, without the distraction of the phone. How long has it been since you listened properly to your spouse and engaged in meaningful conversation while your eyes were not glued to the phone screen as you spoke? How long has it been since you conversed with your parents, asked how they were coping, taken a proper look at them and realised that they were ageing by the day? How often have we secretly wished for our kids to sleep earlier, for our spouses or parents to nag us less so we have more time to use our phones and be in a more fascinating world?

The phone may be a Pandora's box that we unwittingly open because it seems like such a necessity (to make phone calls, to communicate). However, the wonders hidden inside it can suck us in so much that everything else seems less important. We carry our phones with us all the time without realising that there is a hidden danger.

I am equally guilty of neglecting relationships with my loved ones because of my indulgence with my phone. I give myself valid justification that I am serving the community through my projects but

that is just an excuse; for there is time to play, there is time to work, there is time to rest, there is time for my hobby and there is time for my family. Overindulgence in one area means less time for other areas.

Lastly, I hope that we can all make a pledge to stay away from our phones for as long as we can when we get home so that our families will get our undivided attention. We are in the generation of the smartphone revolution. If we do not lead by example, future generations will become more absorbed in the virtual world.

In the post-chapter exercise, you will find a sheet on which you can record the hours during which you stayed away from your smartphone and the meaningful tasks you did instead. After you realise that you can achieve so many things when you are not using your phone, you should be motivated to pledge more hours away from it.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT IS YOUR INTEREST/ HOBBY IN LIFE? HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP YOUR INTEREST AND HOBBIES INTO A PASSION? (E.G. I LOVE ARTS AND CRAFTS AND I CAN TURN THIS HOBBY INTO A SIDE-LINE BUSINESS.)

WHAT ARE YOUR UNIQUE STRENGTHS/ GIFTS? HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP YOUR STRENGTHS/ GIFTS AND HELP OTHERS IN OUR COMMUNITY? (E.G. I AM GOOD AT BAKING, SO I CAN BAKE CAKES FOR FAMILIES THAT ARE UNABLE TO AFFORD A BIRTHDAY CAKE.)

WHAT ARE SOME PROJECTS YOU HAVE DONE OR EVENTS IN WHICH YOU HAVE PARTICIPATED WHICH MADE YOU VERY EXCITED? HOW CAN YOU BE MORE INVOLVED IN EVENTS LIKE THIS?

RECORD SHEET FOR NO-SMARTPHONE PLEDGE

TODAY	I SPENT _ HOURS AWAY FROM MY PHONE	AND DID SOMETHING MEANINGFUL INSTEAD
E.G.: 2/6/18	3 HOURS (8 PM TO 11 PM)	READ BOOKS AND PLAYED BOARD GAMES WITH MY FAMILY; HAD A GOOD TIME BONDING WITH THEM.

CHAPTER 12

THE SPELL FACTORY (OF INSPIRATION & MOTIVATION)

The Spell Factory contains all the magical spells that you need to propel yourself further with motivation and inspiration. Come to the Spell Factory to find much-needed morale-boosting spells to help you achieve your goals, aspirations and dreams.

[Author's Note]

We need injections of motivation from time to time. There is no better way to motivate ourselves than by reading inspiring stories about people who have overcome great odds to find success in life. In this chapter, I hope to share with you stories that will make you feel inspired and that will motivate you to live each and every day to its fullest. I also hope that you never stop believing in your dreams and that you take small steps each day to fulfil them.

Finding Motivation and Happiness

For friends who have been feeling unhappy for various reasons, such as relationship issues, work issues or mid-life crises, or who are simply unmotivated to do anything, I have a suggestion.

Take a day of leave from your usual schedule.

For the first half of the day, visit the nearest hospital and walk around the main clinics. You will find hardly any happy faces. Some patients are in wheelchairs, some are on crutches, some are waiting to consult the doctors and some are waiting anxiously for their test results. Remind yourself that you are blessed with something they may not have: a healthy body. Because you have a healthy body, you have the time and energy to solve your problems, work on your issues and make things right.

Then, give yourself a good lunch treat. Go to your favourite eatery and eat your favourite food. This is a way to love yourself. The whole world

can be against you but the most important person who can stick by you and not give up on you is YOU.

For the second half of the day, find a place where you can explore nature: for example, MacRitchie Reservoir, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Mount Faber or Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. Let yourself rejuvenate in nature, breathe in the fresh air and let the healing begin. Temporarily keep yourself away from the bustling city life and appreciate what Mother Nature can offer to you, along with the healing powers it brings.

When we look at the wide forest land in these scenic places, we will realise that we, as human beings and occupants of Earth, are so small. Through this humbling experience, we will realise that the issues we face are even smaller. As you exit these scenic places and return to city life, remind yourself that the city was once part of nature. It is human beings, with all of our intelligence, who harness raw materials from nature and build our cities and homes. Therefore, never underestimate the potential inside you, the power to transform your environment to suit your evolving needs.

You may be slower than your peers in studies or at work but that does not mean you cannot achieve anything in life. As long as you are healthy, you have the time and ability to make a difference. Remember that Colonel Sanders (founder of KFC) did not start selling his KFC franchise until he was at the Singaporean retirement age of 65. Even so, he was rejected more than 1,000 times and achieved success (sold his first franchise) only when he was 74 years old.

If you have a problem and do not wish to do anything about it, no one can help you. If you have a problem and wish to do something about it, no one can stop you!

My Kindness Story

I would like to share with you my kindness story, in the hopes that it will encourage you a little in terms of whatever interests or dreams you are pursuing at the moment. If you do not give up and keep trying, you just may find success one day. If you have a rough start, it does not mean that your ideas are not good. It probably means that you must do a little fine-tuning to make everything gel.

When I started Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.) in September 2013, I was full of enthusiasm and energy. I could not wait to share with the whole world the joy and benefits of giving kindness, how acts of random kindness can change our world for the better, one at a time. I started blogging and giving kindness whenever and wherever I could. My lifelong journey would be to give kindness. I also hoped that I could influence some friends to join me on this journey. It was my vision to build a community of people who would come together to give kindness and love, to help those in need and move everyone forward together.

After weeks of blogging, I came to realise that the only person who was seriously reading my blog was me! Every day, I wished someone would leave a comment on my blog posts, even if it was a negative comment, but there was none. I later figured, "Why not create a Facebook page instead?" If there are friends who like my page, it

would be an acknowledgement that I was engaging people and moving in the right direction. So, I set up the P.A.R.K. Facebook page. While I tried to promote the page by answering questions on Yahoo Answers, there were no "likes" after weeks of waiting. The person who was reading all the kindness quotes and stories that I shared on the Facebook page was, again, none other than myself.

It was starting to get a little demoralising. After weeks and months of spreading the message, I was getting no responses. I then decided to be more proactive. I "shamelessly" added friends whom I had not met in real life. These friends had demonstrated the will to give kindness in some way (by supporting kindness initiatives posted on Facebook). Because I wanted to be the messenger, I would have to engage them first. I started sharing my thoughts and reflections on my wall. The response was better—much better than when I tried to communicate via my blog or page. Thereafter, I seized the opportunity to get them to like my Facebook page *evil grin*. To enhance interaction and engagement, I set up our Facebook group, P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P), to serve as a platform for sharing kindness opportunities with anyone who is willing to give kindness.

I know we all lead busy lives, so it might not be feasible for most of us to commit to regular volunteering. The ad hoc volunteer events and requests for pre-loved items should serve us fine. I also hope that, through P2P, the volunteer leaders can get the support (manpower, sponsorship) they need after putting in so much effort to organise an event or initiative. I also hope that the interaction in our group can

inspire more people to join the kindness journey and experience the true joy of giving.

We have more than 13,000 members as of the time of this writing. Many of them joined us willingly. That said, it is not the number of members that I am proud of. Instead, it is the amazing volume of kindness shown by group members that touches me. While all seemed gloomy at first, their tremendous support has helped many volunteer groups achieve their goals of assisting more needy folks. I always feel that P2P is just a gathering place; the true greatness comes from the people, the members who make our group such a special and heart-warming place to be.

The point I am trying to get across is that if you strongly believe in something, you must keep trying to make it work. Don't give up when you encounter setbacks or they will be your stumbling blocks. Instead, make them your stepping stones to move towards something bigger and better. I wish you all the best in whatever you are striving for. Live for the moments that take your breath away, chase your dreams and live life to the fullest, for it is too short to go through the motions.

The Indestructible Cockroach

The cockroach is my most feared insect, especially the ones with wings. However, underneath the fear lies an admiration for this insect. If you observe the cockroach, by its appearance alone, it has to be one of nature's least glamorous creations. The cockroach is hated by many and regarded as a pest that spreads germs. Cockroaches are often

hunted down in households, while fogging exercises usually result in many casualties.

Despite all efforts to exterminate the cockroach, this creature has continued to evolve, to become stronger and to prosper in living among us. The cockroach has survived millions of years; its ancestors can be traced back to the age of the dinosaurs. Cockroaches are incredibly hardy and can live for days without their heads. For all the reasons to hate the cockroach, it has a role to play in the ecosystem. Cockroaches are food for some organisms and are important decomposers, eating away at any plant or animal remains they can find. Removing cockroaches from the food chain will cause an imbalance in the ecosystem.

I think the existence of the cockroach is nature's way of telling us that even if the whole world is against you, it is okay. You just need to find your own kind: people who will stick by you (your family, your friends, your loved ones). Continue to play your role and you will be just fine. You may even outlive all your haters and have the last laugh!

Decluttering Your Mind

When you first move into a new house, an abundance of space is everywhere. You start filling up the space with essential items. Along the way, you probably buy things that you do not need, so you put them in the storeroom. Fast forward a few years. The storeroom is full. The rooms, wardrobes and drawers, which were previously empty, are also filled. If you do not declutter, you will find that your house, which

had so much space initially, no longer has room for you to walk about freely and easily.

The mind starts out like an empty house. We gather essential information that we need for survival. Over time, we also accumulate things that we do not need, as worries, fears, anger, hate, stress and envy occupy a part of the mind. The mind has only so much room to store thoughts and emotions. So, if no mental decluttering is done, we will have no room for the new and good stuff to come in. Living with a mind full of emotional clutter is painful, just as living in a house full of unsightly clutter restricts movement and increases the risk of tripping.

If you wish to live a healthy and happy life, it is time to do away with all the physical clutter in the house and all the emotional clutter in the mind. Be courageous and let go. Leave behind the things you do not need and that have no value to you.

5 Lessons Learnt From the Highly Successful MCU Series

As the movie, *The Avengers: End Game*, continues to smash box office records and become the fastest film to hit the \$1 billion mark, I thought we could learn some valuable lessons from the roaring success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) series.

Lesson 1: You Do Not Need Superpowers to Be a Superhero

Out of the original six Avengers, three of them (Iron Man, Black Widow and Hawkeye) do not have any special powers. They depend on their wits and technical expertise to stand out as superheroes. Iron Man is

never bothered by the fact that he cannot fly. He simply designed a suit that allows him to fly as high as he wants.

Similarly, the people who achieve success in life never focus on what they cannot do or compare themselves with others and feel unworthy. They simply focus on their strengths and maximise their full potential.

Lesson 2: Superheroes Have Bad Days and Encounter Setbacks

As almighty as superheroes seem, there will be times when things do not go according to plan and they feel down and defeated (for example, when Thanos successfully collected the six infinity stones and wiped out half of the universe's population).

An extraordinary life is not one without setbacks, challenges or failures. Rather, it is one in which the person overcomes all of them and emerges wiser and stronger. Why do superheroes meet supervillains? It is because they are strong enough to handle the massive challenge. Similarly, if life throws you a major obstacle, it is because you are strong enough to overcome that obstacle. You will become a better person after that.

Lesson 3: The Bad Guys With Good Intent

The world is a dangerous place not because there are bad guys but because there are bad guys with good intent. The supervillain Thanos wanted to wipe out half of the universe's population because he felt that overpopulation would eventually lead to the extinction of the planets. He wanted to create a "better world" for the surviving species.

Many people can differentiate between what is right and wrong. However, if a leader starts to convince his followers that doing wrong, like killing and creating suffering, is for a greater cause, the followers will start to get confused. Terrorism has thrived for many years because those who support it believe that it is absolutely necessary to sacrifice millions of innocent lives to achieve a brave new world.

Lesson 4: Family Still Occupies the Biggest Part of Our Hearts

For all the fame, honour, respect and accolades that the Avengers gained for their noble aspirations, they can never replace the void left in their hearts when their loved ones are no longer around. Ultimately, what inspires the superheroes to fight and defend Earth from the bad guys is the fact that they want to protect their families and the families of others.

For the people who are living (or working) like the superheroes, sacrificing family time in the process, please keep this lesson in mind. You can win the world but there will be a void that can never be filled if your loved ones are not with you anymore.

Lesson 5: No One Owes It to Us to Believe in Our Dreams

The first movie of the MCU series, *Iron Man*, was a big risk because it was based on a character that many thought would not sell well. Furthermore, they chose an actor, Robert Downey Jr, who was seen as being problematic, with years of drug and alcohol abuse behind him. However, Marvel Studios believed so strongly in its vision that it borrowed money from the bank and used the films rights to 10 key characters as a mortgage which they would lose if the movie was a

flop and they were unable to pay back the loan. The film not only grossed close to \$600 million but also paved the way for the future success of the movies in the MCU series.

No one sees our dreams clearer than we do. If we strongly believe that our dream can work, it is our responsibility to convince others to believe in it. There will definitely be doubters, naysayers and people who will put us down. However, history shows that the people who find success rise above all the noise and keep going when things did not initially seem rosy. The critics, challenges and obstacles just make the fruit of success sweeter.

Three Things We Can Learn From Babies

1. Always Curious, Always Learning.

Babies are always curious and always keen to explore the world around them. As a result, they learn a lot within a short period of time. As we age, our curiosity and desire to learn things slow down because we think that we already know a lot. However, the world we live in is big enough for everyone to keep learning and exploring, until the last day of life. Technology advancements, such as the rise of the Internet, make information more readily available than it was 20 years ago. So, keep learning and keep improving.

2. Keep Trying Until You Succeed.

What happens when babies first learn how to stand or walk? They fall, then they get up, then they fall again, then they get up and keep trying until they succeed. No babies ever thought that it was too tough and decided to not try anymore. As we grow older, the negative thoughts

and self-doubts inside ourselves made us want to give up more easily and, thus, prevent ourselves from reaching our goals. Be like the baby: Ignore the negative voices and keep trying until you succeed.

3. Love the People Who Love You and Ignore the Rest.

If a baby loves you, he or she enjoys playing with you and wants to spend time with you. Babies do not waste their time on people whom they do not like, nor do they do harbour hate in their minds. As we mature, we start to get affected by negative people and negative events. These are things that do not matter, yet they take our focus off those things that do matter. So, be like the baby; focus your time and energy on the people you love most and ignore those who are not deserving of your time.

A baby's traits represent those of the purest form of humanity. There is no prejudice, discrimination, hate among the different races, religion, nationalities or skin tones. If we truly want the world to be a better place, it is time that we "almighty" adults took a leaf out of a baby's book and start bringing out what we are truly made of.

Don't Let Unfulfilled Aspirations Define Your Life

Life often does not go according to plan. Some people wish to experience love but end up finding the wrong person. Some people love kids but have difficulty conceiving. Some people dream of traveling the world, living in big houses and driving posh cars but cannot accumulate enough wealth to fulfil these dreams. Some people may have found happiness but it is short-lived.

There will be hits and misses in life but that is okay. No one lives a perfect life and everyone is bound to have unfulfilled dreams and aspirations on this journey. What's more important is to not let these unfulfilled goals define us, making us think that our life is a bad one because we did not achieve what we hoped to achieve. Your life is not defined by what you did not achieve; it is defined by what you have achieved. Shift the focus away from what you did not achieve and find all the right reasons to define your success.

I believe the reasons revolve around happiness, for a happy life is a meaningful and successful one. So, think of all the happy moments in your life and how they came about. Write them down if you can, so the next time you are hit by these "regrets" that randomly pop up in your mind, you can remind yourself that they are part and parcel of life and are so minimal compared to your happy moments. Do not let what you cannot control (life's events and outcomes) influence what you can control (your mindset and attitude in life).

Life is short. Make it a good one.

Nothing Is Impossible to a Willing Heart

I watched a story on TV and found it to be very inspiring. Two handicapped friends, one blind, one without arms, embarked on a tree-planting mission and planted more than 12,000 trees over 13 years. They have a dream of leaving a stretch of green for the next generation. Their work not only helped improve the air quality of a heavily polluted province but also aided in flood control. It was an uphill task not just because of their physical disabilities but also

because the land was not optimal for planting. They had limited funding and fellow villagers were cynical about their project. However, they persevered and gained more support as the area became greener.

This story inspires me in a few ways:

1. Realising a dream is not always easy. The starting phase is usually the most difficult one, as you lack support and self-doubts are in abundance. If you truly believe in your idea, you must persevere and make it work!

2. If two people with disabilities can work together and complement each other's strengths to complete a difficult task, what can't the able-bodied youth of today achieve? Can they work together to achieve a bigger goal? (Come on, young men and women, the world is your oyster!)

3. What more can we do for our society and our world? We always hear about Singapore being an urban jungle, the rising temperature, the fact that there are too many vehicles on the road polluting the air, etc. However, what are the green initiatives that we can start or existing campaigns that we can support? We may not be able to solve the country's environmental problems or reverse global climate change but at least, within our small circle, we can do something to make things better (even if only slightly). You never know how your idea can inspire others. In today's world, where everyone is connected via the Internet, one good idea can really change the world.

I leave you with a quote from this article:

"This empty riverbank was only dry sand and pebbles. It was deserted for many years. For normal people, it was impossible to plant trees there", Wenqi said. "But as the saying goes: Nothing is impossible to a willing heart".

I Have a Dream

I dream of a world with more love, kindness, tolerance, humility and respect. I dream of a world with less anger, hate and suffering.

I dream of a world where our valuable resources from Mother Nature are conserved and where our children and their children will be able to see many of the plant and animal species we see today.

I dream of a world where the standard of living does not get so high that "wants" become "needs" and where it is not essential to pursue material wealth in order to achieve happiness.

I dream of a world where we find happiness in doing simple things, like spending quality time with our loved ones. I dream of a world where we can all learn to continually count our blessings and always be thankful for what we are given.

I dream of a world where we create purpose and find meaning in life by giving love, by helping others succeed and by creating hope for those who are in despair.

I dream of a world where the disadvantaged are not forgotten, the frail and the weak are not neglected and the poor are not despised, where everyone is given the opportunity to succeed.

I do not wish to be a forever dreamer. I wish to be an achiever and I have faith that I am with the right group of like-minded friends, my brothers, my sisters, who will go on to achieve the above with me. I have confidence that, with love in our hearts, we will go on to achieve the world I dream of.

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one".

~ John Lennon

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".

~ Margaret Mead

Better Late Than Never

One morning, I missed all the buses I could take on the way to work but I still reached the office in one piece. Life may not always be smooth-sailing but we will still achieve our goals if we keep moving forward.

I am not going to stop trying to reach my goals because I face certain issues, just like I am not going to give up going to work because I missed the buses.

I missed the buses by a whisker, as I saw them leaving the bus stop before I could reach them. Similarly, opportunities can slip through our fingers before we can fully grasp them. But that is okay. Opportunities come and opportunities go. The most important thing is to keep going and not give up.

When life does not go according to plan, be patient enough to wait for your opportunities, be courageous enough to persevere and be wise enough to enjoy every moment because you just may make some amazing discoveries while taking the longer route.

Unleash Your Full Potential

What if you have the best kitchen appliances but you do not know how to cook?

What if you have the world's most expensive sports car but you do not know how to drive?

Our resources are only as good as our ability to use them.

Most of us are blessed with an able body and high intellect. However, have we made full use of this resource to do more and add value to our community and society? Or have we thought that it is the responsibility of others to do so and continued to let our own resources be under-utilised? If you do not know, you can learn but do not let the "don't know" conveniently become a "don't want".

Society builds us into who we are today and society needs us to build others and help them succeed. I cannot tell you what you should do

because you know best what you are good at. We are all different, yet we can complement one another and fill in the gaps with our unique strengths and talents.

You can be that dazzling sports car in the showroom when you raise your value through service to others. So, make full use of your kitchen appliances and whip up the most sumptuous meal for our community. The rewards will definitely be more than you expect.

"I WANT TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING TODAY"

Have you ever woken up on an off day or weekend with so much time to spare, only to laze off, indulge in some aimless activities and then realise that it is evening and soon to be night time? The day just passes by without your knowing it.

To prevent this from happening and to make your day more productive, you must make a conscious effort to make your mind work in your favour. To prevent your mind from going into autopilot and engaging in unconstructive activities (for example, aimless surfing of the web or social media, continuous gaming, long hours of watching TV), you can repeat this phrase in your head: "I want to achieve something today!"

You need not specify the things you wish to achieve because your logical mind can take control and tell you what the possible achievements are. Every time you feel like lazing off and going back to that autopilot mode, you can repeat this phrase to bring yourself back and reignite the momentum. You will find that your day is spent

in a more productive way, with fewer regrets that you could have spent it better.

With social media and addictive games entering our lives, we may soon get swept away and lose precious time to do something more important and meaningful. Every minute of our lives is a gift. There will be time to relax but there must also be time to achieve and bring value to the people around us. Ultimately, life is a balance.

A Single Action Benefits a Thousand People

There is this bus stop which I love and hate. I love it because of the direct bus to town but I hate it because of the mosquitoes. Every time I go, I am sure to get bitten by mosquitoes.

This situation lasted for months and even years, until one fine day I decided to do something about it. I wrote to NEA and asked them to do a check. The first round of assessment was done and no breeding spot was found. I told the NEA officer to try staying at the bus stop for 15 minutes to see what would happen. I also attached a photo of a mosquito which I hit. The second round of assessment was done and a mosquito breeding spot was detected and cleared. I went back to the bus stop after NEA updated me that the third round of assessment had been done and no mosquito breeding spot was found. For the first time in many months, I was not bitten.

I hope this post offers a gentle reminder that every one of us has a part to play in making things better. If we are expecting NEA to catch every single mosquito in Singapore, we are in for a big

disappointment. Ultimately, we and our loved ones will suffer if an outbreak occurs (remember Zika and dengue fever?).

Nowadays, when I pass the bus stop and see the many people waiting for their buses, I know I have played a small role in making their lives better. If the bus stop can house 100 people throughout the day, it is nice to know that these 100 people are free from mosquito bites because of the single action of one individual. That is a pretty empowering feeling, isn't it?

Taking a Leap of Faith

If I had waited for someone's consent or someone to tell me what I could or could not do, we would not have established our P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P) kindness group and achieved what we have achieved today. We yearn for support and encouragement but sometimes we have to take a leap of faith, to embark on something special and extraordinary.

When we first started, members were leaving our group as I added them. Some requested to not be added again. Promoting kindness was not the most glamorous thing to do back then and we could not reach even 1% of the number of members we have today. I came to realise that it was not because the idea was a bad one but because I had not found the right group of people to work with. I had yet to find the birds with the same feathers to flock together. When we finally connected with like-minded people, the rest was history.

Today, I am very heartened to see individuals who stepped out of their

comfort zones to create something special and heartwarming for the less fortunate. I share a few in the hopes that their actions will inspire you:

Yvonne Lim: She bakes cakes for children from underprivileged families who are unable to afford cakes for their birthdays. Cake shops are everywhere but there are people who see buying a cake as a luxury.

Joann Tan: She and a group of colleagues cook many yummy dishes during their company charity lunch events and raise funds for charities like the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Drina: Her children did a charity bake because they wanted to raise funds for a renovation at Lee Ah Mooi Old Aged Home, so that more needy elderly people can get the help and support they need.

Yvonne Kua: She collects pre-loved clothing and sells it on Carousell. The proceeds support the grocery needs of various homes and charities.

Have you always wanted to give back to society but kept procrastinating? Or wondered whether your idea would work? I encourage you to take that leap of faith, to make the first move, to start small and slowly progress from there. No one taught us what to do. We followed our hearts, went through trial and error, and got there eventually. I hope that, someday, I will be reading about your inspiring project and story.

How to Gain an Extra Hour Every Day

Most of us lead very busy lives and time is often lacking. We wish that we had more time to do something we enjoy or something meaningful.

What if we are given an extra hour a day to do the things we have no time to do? When the 25th hour comes around, what activities do you want to do? Maybe you want to read that book that you never have time to read. Maybe you want to drop a message to a friend or a loved one and check on how they are doing. Perhaps you will use this time to learn a new skill or pick up a new hobby. Maybe you can do something more for the community.

Now let me ask another question: What if you have only 23 hours a day instead of 24 hours? With one fewer hour, what activities will you cut down on because you have even less time? Maybe you want to spend 15 fewer minutes playing a particular game which gives you little accomplishment in life. Maybe you want to cut out another 15 minutes of aimless Internet surfing. Maybe you can wake up 15 minutes earlier. Maybe you can watch 15 fewer minutes of TV. Maybe you can find a shorter route to work.

So, let's put together the two answers to the two questions. Each of us has 24 hours per day.

We wish to have 1 hour more per day to do the activities we always wanted to do, so $24 \text{ hr} + 1 \text{ hr} = 25 \text{ hr}$.

We can save 1 hour per day by not doing certain activities that do not add much value or accomplishment to our lives, so 25hr - 1 hr = 24 hr.

The same 24 hours that everyone has every day.

Thank You, Nathan

Singaporean contestant Nathan Hartono came in second in one of China's biggest singing competitions, Sing! China, for which many had tipped him as the clear winner. While others cried foul over rigged results, the man himself (Nathan Hartono) reflected on the biggest adventure and achievement of his life. That is the spirit of a true winner. It may seem a pity that "he got so far" but "did not win the biggest prize" but why does success always have to be defined by "winning first prize" rather than by the process of "getting so far"?

You win not because you finished first or took the gold medal or because of the As you received. You win because you have put in your best efforts, because you kept raising the bar for yourself. Most importantly, you win because you enjoyed every bit of the journey and find meaning in the whole competition. The end results are secondary. The same goes for life. How do you define being successful in life? Is it because of all the assets you own, the cash you have in the bank? Or is it because the journey is memorable, you enjoy every moment and it brings you joy and inner peace?

Maybe history will not honour the silver medallists, nor will it remember the one who almost made it. However, the people you have touched and inspired will never forget what you have taught

them. That is the power of dreams. You can be anything you want if you dare to dream. The final outcome may not be what you imagined initially but to be able to live the whole experience makes you a true winner.

I say thank you, Nathan, for the inspiration.

Those Who Think They Can Change the World

Ever had a great idea to change something for the better but gave up due to a lack of support? I hope this sharing can encourage you to keep your dream alive.

When I first started our kindness group, P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P), a few years ago, the support was overwhelmingly poor. The idea of giving love and kindness was not the most appealing one back then. I tried a few methods which did not work but I persevered and eventually shifted the focus to creating the values that make people want to join our group.

For example, Singaporeans love to buy things and have many pre-loved items in good condition waiting to be donated. Therefore, I created a comprehensive list of organisations and groups to which people can donate their pre-loved items. Singaporeans lead very busy lifestyles but they are kind at heart and wish to give back. I created a list of ad hoc volunteer events so that our group members can choose as and when they wish to volunteer. Our group also has threads seeking sponsorship of items for needy elderly and special needs

children. When people see the value we bring to them and the community, they are excited to be part of our group.

When I first started our TATA SMRT group to help commuters deal with train breakdowns and congestion, the concept did not take off immediately. For over a month, we had fewer than 150 members—a tiny minority of the whole commuter population. It took a major breakdown to bring about the big break we needed to reach out to more people and convey our purpose. Coverage by the various media agencies further aided our cause. Now we are steadily serving more people every day by providing valuable information during times of need.

No one owes it to us to believe in our vision or dreams. It is our responsibility to convince people to do so and make people buy in. If you have not received the support you need, it does not mean that your idea is not a good one. Focus on the value you can bring to people; the support will come to you. Those who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones who really do. All the best!

The Desire Tap

I am going to make a bold prediction. In 20 years' time, the one thing that will cause the biggest damage to humanity is not terrorism, a major illness or World War III.

Technological and medical development will progress so rapidly that

our life expectancy will keep increasing. We will no longer fear falling sick because, by then, we may all have vaccines in our bodies already. Countries will work even closer together for the greater benefit of enjoying wealth and prosperity. Terrorism may be minimised because extremist organisations cannot gather enough support to launch a substantial attack.

The biggest damage will come from us. It will come from our desires and expectations. In 20 years' time, the privileges we are enjoying now will become entitlements because we already expect to have them.

Our desires are like water in the pipes, waiting to gush out. If there is no control mechanism like a tap, the water will overwhelm us. When we want more and more, we will face disappointment over and over again when things fall short of our expectations.

This mindset of wanting more will also increase our insecurities because we will constantly worry about not being able to sustain our lifestyles, especially in the future. We will use the most powerful tool—money—to cover our insecurities. However, not being able to earn fast enough will further increase our level of frustration, which leads to more unhappiness.

Imagine the time when our planet of six billion people (a number which is likely to increase in 20 years' time) is filled with mostly unhappy and angry people. What is likely to happen?

When people are constantly anxious, frustrated, angry and unhappy,

they are less likely to be kind and to care for their fellow human beings, not to mention other living things or the environment. The only things that most people care about are themselves and probably how to earn more money. We will be in a self-destructive era when that happens.

In 20 years' time, our children will be adults. We can help them cope not by giving them more money, because you can give them millions of your hard-earned dollars and they will still find a way to spend it in the shortest time if their desires are overwhelming. Instead, we can help them cope by "installing a tap" on them when they are young and by encouraging them to practice control. We impart virtues and values that will never age or go out of style over time. When our children have control over their desires, they will find contentment and, in turn, happiness.

As adults and parents, we must lead by example. Do we have the tap on ourselves already? Are we able to count our blessings and find contentment in what we have now? If not, it is not too late to start. If we really care about our future and our children's future, it is worth making that effort to change.

Encouragement Through "Likes"

The fact that no one gives you a "like" on your post does not mean your post is no good or that no one appreciates it. If you have good stuff to share, something that can benefit others, by all means, go ahead and share it. Some friends could be busy reading your content and forget to "like", while some may not have the habit of clicking the "like" button. However, this does not mean that they are not reading

your post or that they do not like what they have read. Let your kind intent to share good things overcome the fear of rejection or the need for appreciation.

While the number of "likes" may not truly reflect the level of appreciation, it is definitely encouraging for the initiator to receive this form of appreciation. So, be generous in giving your "likes". Be an encouraging friend because human beings thrive on support, love and encouragement. We need all these to keep going and achieve greater things. Thank you for showing that act of kindness.

The Secrets of My Tutoring Success

I took on tutoring assignments as a means of earning some pocket money when I was studying and to supplement my main income after I started working. There are two students worth mentioning because I helped improve their grades drastically from Fs to As or Bs. I achieved this through my "teaching formula", which, amazingly, still worked despite the fact that I was teaching the two students 10 years apart. I would like to share with you this set of principles, in the hopes that you can help yourself or your child achieve academic improvement, even without engaging a private tutor.

Background

Student A: In the year 2003, I took on a tutoring assignment to coach a Sec 4 'O' Levels student who was very weak in Pure Physics. I had less than half a year to help him prepare for his 'O' Levels, as I received the assignment only around June, while his 'O' Levels exams were around

October. His physics grade eventually improved from an 'F9' (Mid-Term Exams) grade to a 'B3' ('O' Levels Exams) grade.

Student B: In the year 2013, I received an assignment to teach a Sec 4 'N(A)' Levels student who was very weak in Combined Science (physics/chemistry) and Maths. Similarly, I had less than half a year to prepare him for the three subjects because I had taken on the assignment around Mid-April and his last paper was due in October. His grades improved from 'F9' for both subjects to 'A2' for Maths and 'B4' for Combined Science in his N(A) Levels Exams. Due to his good grades, he was allowed direct entry into Polytechnic and, thus, skipped a year because he did not have to study Secondary 5 and take 'O' Levels.

My tuition formula is based on five key principles. They are as follows:

1. Motivation.

The first guiding principle is motivation. A student who is not motivated to study is akin to an employee doing a job that is not to his or her interest. Without motivation, a student will just be going through the motions and studying for the sake of studying. I try to instil motivation in my student by giving them encouragement when they do well and explaining to them the true purpose of education: to equip us with useful knowledge that might be applicable to our everyday lives.

I highlight their strengths to make them feel confident in their abilities because they will be more motivated to study when they develop

more self-confidence. At times when the student is losing motivation, I work with the parents to see how we can best motivate the child. The parents have spent years nurturing the child, so they know the best way to motivate him or her. If the student is motivated to study and improve, half the battle has been won.

2. Foundation.

This is the part which caused many students to struggle in the latter part of their study curriculum, especially when they were nearing the major examinations. We must understand that any structure built upon a weak foundation is prone to collapse. Therefore, I believe that we need to painstakingly build the foundation in any subject before we move on to other things. I will not let my students practice assessment questions before they get their foundation right because it is a waste of time and they will not likely do well on those questions.

For major examinations like 'O', 'N' or 'A' Levels, the curriculum usually spans two years. Some students may do just enough to get past the first year but when the syllabus gets more difficult, they find themselves in a pool of doubts because their foundation in the subject is not strong. Besides engaging a private tutor to explain these concepts, students can do their due diligence and clarify, with their school teachers, those concepts about which they are unclear.

3. Hard Work.

Thomas Edison once said, "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration." I strongly believe that hard work is the key to success in any area of life. No matter how smart a student is, if he or she does

not put in the effort to study, the student will not score as well as he or she would have if he or she had put in the effort to study. This gets truer as we progress in our education journey. (If you do not believe me, try not studying for your modules in your undergraduate studies.)

I always encourage my students to do two things: summary notes and mindmaps. I believe that reading through the textbook is not enough to make you understand and remember. When you put pen to paper, you gain a better understanding because you break down paragraphs of text into point form. Also, these notes will be useful because they enable easy revision and references the next time around. (Just imagine having to comb through your thick textbook for a reference or revision.) Mindmapping is a good way of giving yourself a pictorial overview of a chapter and is useful for last-minute revision, especially hours before the examinations. You certainly do not want to carry your thick textbooks to the examination venue, let alone browse through them for any last-minute revisions.

4. Plan Ahead.

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. I advocate that my students have their own study timetable. It must be planned far ahead—say, two months before a major examination such as the Prelims or the 'O' Levels. The study timetable will provide a guide on what subjects to study, how many hours to study and what topics to study on a particular day. It can be vague as to which subjects to study on that day or it can be as detailed as the chapters to study and the time allocated to each chapter. The idea is to ensure that all subjects are covered and sufficient time is allocated to studying every subject.

Planning ahead means that you do not leave everything to the last minute, which will add on to your stress if you find yourself having to cope with too many subjects. I did study plans from secondary school all the way to University and they always gave me the reassurance that things were under control.

5. Practice Makes Perfect.

Once a student is motivated and has the right foundation, the difference between passing and scoring lies in the amount of practice he or she does. I like my students to finish all the papers in the Ten Years Series (TYS) at least once. It is good if they can do a few more rounds. The student with the greatest determination to do well will stop at nothing. He or she will do the TYS a few times, go through his or her Prelims papers, practice other school Prelims papers and so on. The more a student practices, the more confident the student gets.

Another key point is to practice under exam conditions, i.e. if the student is allowed only two hours for a paper, the student will time himself or herself and make sure to stop writing after two hours. The student will then be able to gauge whether he or she is too fast (may be more prone to carelessness) or too slow (need to speed up or questions not attempted will get zero marks) and then fine-tune accordingly with more practice. I also encourage my students to bring a watch or a small clock to the examination hall so that they can keep track of the time during the examinations.

There you have it. All the secrets to my tutoring and academic success are listed above. I hope it is useful and can help you or your child on

an educational journey. If you have the gift of being a cut above the rest, please be generous and help your friends. We do not have to keep everything to ourselves. That type of behaviour will make us more selfish and will not make our world a better place. Helping your friends with their studies is a way of reinforcing your concepts. You may even discover what you do not know as you guide someone along. The bottom line is, be kind and be generous in sharing your knowledge. What you achieve will definitely be more satisfying!

Yes, I Can!

This is a children's song but the lyrics are meaningful.

Little bird, little bird, can you clap?

No, I can't. No, I can't. I can't clap.

Little bird, little bird, can you fly?

Yes, I can. Yes, I can. I can fly.

Elephant, elephant, can you fly?

No, I can't. No, I can't. I can't fly.

Elephant, elephant, can you stomp?

Yes, I can. Yes, I can. I can stomp.

Little fish, little fish, can you stomp?

No, I can't. No, I can't. I can't stomp.

Little fish, little fish, can you swim?

Yes, I can. Yes, I can. I can swim.

Gorilla, gorilla, can you swim?

No, I can't. No, I can't. I can't swim.

Gorilla, gorilla, can you climb?

Yes, I can. Yes, I can. I can climb.

Buffalo, buffalo, can you climb?

No, I can't. No, I can't. I can't climb.

Buffalo, buffalo, can you run?

Yes, I can. Yes, I can. I can run.

Every one of us is like a bird, an elephant, a fish, a gorilla or a buffalo. We have our own unique strengths and weaknesses. There are things we do very well and there are things we simply can't do at all.

Not everyone will excel in their studies. Some have the potential to be great chefs, talented musicians, brilliant artists, skilful carpenters, gifted sportspeople or even bloggers who make great videos to inspire people.

Our society must use a common indicator—for example, education level, salary or material assets—as a benchmark to define our capabilities, status or success. However, not meeting the social benchmark does not make one a failure or deem one as useless.

You must believe that greatness lies inside you and that you have so much more to give to this world. Find that unique strength to fulfil your great destiny.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE YOUR CHILDHOOD / ADULTHOOD DREAMS? (E.G. I WANT TO EARN MY FIRST MILLION DOLLARS.)

ARE YOU ACHIEVING THEM? IF NOT, WHY? (E.G. NO, THE COST OF LIVING IS HIGH, I HAVE NOT SAVED QUICKLY ENOUGH.)

WHAT ARE SOME SMALL STEPS THAT YOU CAN TAKE TO EDGE CLOSER TO YOUR DREAMS? (E.G. I STARTED A SIDELINE BUSINESS TO EARN ANOTHER SOURCE OF INCOME.)

HOW DO YOU FIND MOTIVATION / INSPIRATION IN LIFE? (E.G. DISCOVER YOUR PASSION, FIND A PURPOSE, LEARN FROM OTHERS WHO INSPIRED YOU, READ GOOD BOOKS, START A CHARITY PROJECT)

CHAPTER 13

SCALING THE MOUNTAIN OF GIANTS (OVERCOMING ISSUES)

Scaling the tallest mountain in the magical realm is in itself an uphill task. However, the challenges do not end there because the mountain is home to a thousand giants. You will need to get past all of them if you wish to enjoy the spectacular view at the pinnacle of the magical realm.

[Author's Note]

Life can be painful because we have to deal with so many issues and setbacks throughout the different stages as we grow. However, these issues arise for a reason. Often, they are blessings in disguise. I hope that through the sharing in this chapter, you find courage and inspiration to get through your current woes and become stronger while emerging from all the challenges you have conquered.

From Failing English to Motivational Author

I failed my English examinations when I was in Secondary One, so my class position dropped from Top 10 to Bottom 2. Back then, I had a choice. I could have let this setback define me and told myself that English was not for me because I had scored badly. I could also have blamed my parents because they were too poor to hire a tuition teacher for me and too lowly educated to guide me in my studies.

If I had made either choice, I would not have written articles to promote kindness, to campaign for charitable causes or to promote positivity. My English standard back then was so bad, I could not string a sentence in my mind. I had to do it in Chinese, then mentally translate it into English. Today, the English language is a powerful tool I use to articulate my thoughts and to spread the message of doing good and being positive.

What I did back then to catch up was nothing but hard work. I knew my foundation was weak so I bought many thick English assessment books starting from Primary 4 (three years earlier). Then I started

practising. No one taught me what to do but I figured that I had to work doubly hard if I wished to catch up.

I thought I did not enjoy reading. I later realised that I simply did not enjoy reading what I was reading back then. Therefore, I happily read news articles and match analyses related to soccer, which helped raise my English standards because those articles were written in perfect English.

In summary, I hope that my sharing can bring across a few points. Firstly, when you face an issue in life, you can do three things:

1. Let the issue define and destroy you.
2. Find someone to blame for your "misery".
3. Do something about it, find a solution and shift the focus away from the problem.

Secondly, some issues in life are there for a reason. They can make you stronger or mould you into a finer product. Remember that carbon goes through extremely high temperature and pressure to become a diamond. To be a diamond or to remain as carbon: you decide.

Lastly, motivation is the key to learning. I am thankful that I do not have tutors or overzealous parents who forced me to buck up or who gave me lots of stress. Instead, I found my own motivation to excel and it worked better than an external influence. I hope this sharing gives some food for thought to parents who are clueless about why

their children are not improving despite tons of tuition and enrichment classes.

Getting Into the Pool

When you go swimming and the water is too cold, you wait. However, no matter how long you wait, the water is not going to turn warm for you. If you slowly put in a foot, then your legs, then half your body, very soon your body conditions itself to the coldness and it will not be as cold as it was before.

The same goes for the problems and challenges we face in life. If you keep waiting, they are not going to get better. You must take small steps to slowly resolve them. When you take the first step, you will build momentum to carry you through resolving the issues that you are facing.

There is great satisfaction in solving problems and overcoming challenges, so do not be afraid of getting into the water. You will appreciate the beauty of swimming after you overcome the obstacle of getting into the water.

Scaling the Mountain of Life

I had a near-death experience when I was scaling Mount Kinabalu a number of years back but it turned out to be the most memorable expedition for me.

We had plenty of training prior to our trip, to build our fitness and to be mentally prepared, but nothing could fully prepare us for the real

thing. Carrying a 5 kg bag and climbing 3,000 meters up a mountain with no clear structured steps, braving strong winds and rain while trying to keep warm is certainly no walk in the park. I remember clearly that I was on the verge of hypothermia because my body could not warm up by itself fast enough, despite my being wrapped in warm blankets and five to six layers of clothing. Luckily, I survived to tell my story.

As with all the trials and challenges that life can throw at you, getting out of it and conquering it all is truly and immensely rewarding. Even on the first day on the climb, before reaching the Laban Rata Rest House, we were already above the clouds. Watching the sunset there and then was simply magnificent. It was an experience that no photo can capture. You have to be there to feel it yourself.

The following night, we had to wake up very early (2 am) to continue trekking. With exhausted bodies and barely a few hours of sleep, we were mesmerised by a breathtaking view of a star-studded sky that was just above us. At the darkest point in the night, the stars shine the brightest, just like how an act of kindness will alleviate your pain when you are at your lowest point.

Some people feel like they are scaling mountains every day because they are overwhelmed by so many issues in life. I wish to encourage these friends, through my sharing, that great rewards await you when you get through all the challenges and pain. Just like trekking on a mountain, every step is crucial. One step taken is one step closer to where you want to go. So keep going, one step at a time

When I look back, I remember the pain. Yet, I also remember the magnificent scenery and the great friendships I forged with the people on the expedition. And that is what life is all about: overcoming obstacles and coming out of it stronger, with support and encouragement from our loved ones during our most difficult period.

Of Fingernails and Issues

What happens when our fingernails or toenails grow long? We cut them. Then what happens after that? They grow long again and we cut them again.

Our nails are like the issues we face in life. They are with us our whole lives. When you solve one issue, soon after, another issue comes out again, just like how our nails keep emerging.

The nails are there because they are part of our finger. Similarly, issues are closely linked to what we have in life, be it our health, our emotions or the relationships we have with our loved ones, work or studies.

Before we get all gloomy about the never-ending issues of life, let's remember that issues, just like fingernails or toenails, make us stronger. I know what it is like to be without a fingernail. The finger is so much weaker. There is no protection for the delicate flesh on top of the finger and there is less strength when the finger presses against something. Issues will help us become better and stronger.

Just as no one stresses over having to cut their nails regularly, deal with your issues as gently as how you cut your nails. Focus on the solution (trimming the nails) instead of the problem (never-ending

growing nails). Even better, get a manicure or pedicure and make lemonade when life gives you lemons. The nails are growing because you are alive! Enjoy every day that you are blessed with.

Brushing Teeth With My Non-Master Hand

I did something for the first time in my life; I brushed my teeth using my left hand because I had a wound on the right (master) hand, which was bandaged and wrapped up. It was challenging and awkward to brush my teeth with my non-master hand. I truly came to appreciate my right hand.

There are many things in life that we never consider to be blessings until we lose the use of them. From the very basic five senses (the ability to see the beauty of the world, to taste the delicacies, to smell aromas and fragrance, to hear beautiful music and to touch and feel with our hands and limbs) to our general health, our freedom, the peace we enjoy, the clean air we breathe and the clean water we drink, I consider them all blessings rather than entitlements.

If you constantly believe that there are no reasons to be happy or that life is tough and stressful, take some time to appreciate and shift the focus to the blessings you already have. A happy and meaningful life is all about contentment and being thankful.

While I spent almost thrice the amount of time brushing, things got easier towards the end. Life will throw us challenges, especially when we least expect them, but we all have this amazing ability to adapt and overcome them one by one. So, if you are facing issues in life, stay

positive and do not give up. Keep trying and you will soon be able to overcome all your challenges.

Issues Exist for a Reason

Have we sometimes wished that some people had never come into our lives, especially those who hurt us, heaped misery on us or cheated us? However, these people came into our lives for a reason. Because of their existence, we can better appreciate those who truly care for us and are always there for us.

If we have never experienced the harsh, cold winter, we will not cherish the warm summer months. If we have not scaled the heights of a mountain, we will not truly appreciate the spectacular view at the top of the mountain. If there are no Monday blues, there will not be weekend or holiday joys. If there are no mean people in this world, the good and kind people will seem very ordinary.

As our wounds heal, we become stronger, just as how healing from blisters makes our skin tougher and less prone to future blisters. Let's not harbor any hate against these people. We will suffer further if we hold onto the negative emotions. If we cannot forgive them, let's just ignore them, move on with life and channel the energy and time towards our true friends and loved ones. We will find inner peace and be happier this way.

Time of Regeneration

From time to time, my plant will go through a phase which I like to call "regeneration". What happens is that the leaves will start to turn

yellowish-green. Some leaves will slowly dry up, become brown and drop off. The plant with all yellowish-green leaves will look lifeless, as though it is dying.

I will follow my mother's bizarre advice of cutting away all the leaves, leaving the plant totally bald. This is completely against what I learnt in biology, whereby the plant needs its leaves to make food through photosynthesis. But what happens after that is really amazing.

The "bald" plant starts to grow very small red leaves, which later become bright green leaves. In the space of a week or two, the plant is growing radiantly and healthy leaves cover all its branches. It looks so full of life.

I wish to share this amazing transformation with friends who are going through a major setback now. The issues that you face may make you feel depressed. You may feel like dying or even feel dead inside, but trust me, you will get through this and be reborn again, just like what happens to my plant, time and again.

The yellowish-green and brown leaves are the negative influences (emotions, thoughts, people) that are sucking away your energy and vitality. Get rid of them immediately! They will convince you that they are necessary for your survival but that is a lie. Having them by your side will drag you down further.

If you cannot prune your own leaves, get someone to help you. In this aspect, do not be ashamed to seek help and admit that you are vulnerable. No one can be iron-strong all the time. The faster you

prune the leaves, the faster you will regenerate fresh and healthy leaves once again.

And if you ask why this is happening to you, I can only say that this is life's way of creating a better you. Do not give up hope. Keep going. You have inside yourself what it takes to get past all your issues and to be reborn to become a more beautiful you. All the best!

The Obstacles of Life

There will be times when you feel unappreciated by your loved ones in your role as a partner, a parent or a friend. It is alright. You know you have done your best and you do it because you love them, not because of the encouragement that you deserve. The sun rises every morning, regardless of whether it receives any appreciation, because the sun is great and knows its purpose. So do you.

There will be times when nothing seems to go right and you feel like the world is against you. You have great ideas but you lack great support. It is alright, for the time is not yet ripe and you have not found the right people who will resonate with you. As I mentioned earlier, Colonel Sanders, the founder of KFC, started trying to sell his fried chicken franchise at age 65 and was rejected more than 1,000 times before he sold his first franchise at age 74. Sometimes, you just need to find that spark that will ignite your rocket.

There will be times when you feel stuck in the deepest and darkest pit, waiting for a lifeline to save you. Keep calm and keep going, for the crisis may bring opportunities that can turn your life around. J.K.

Rowling, the world's first billionaire author, once saw herself as a failure, as she struggled with the loss of her mother, a failed marriage, single parenthood and being broke. She was diagnosed with clinical depression and even contemplated suicide. She found hope in writing and her depression inspired characters in the Harry Potter series. Sometimes, you just need to chin up and keep doing what you enjoy most, or at least do something to keep your sanity.

When Rowling finished writing the first book and sent the manuscript to 12 publishers, she was rejected by all of them. She was also told to get a day job by her eventual first publisher because they thought she could not make money in children's books. Sometimes, you just need to find that one person who believes in you.

There will be times when you make a big mistake and you feel like your life is a failure. It is alright because life is a never-ending journey of learning. Every mistake we make helps us become better people. Robert Downey, Jr, who plays the most successful Marvel comic superhero Iron Man and is the highest-paid actor in the cast, struggled with years of drug abuse and went in and out of rehabilitation centres and prison many times.

Despite being a talented actor, he was written off by many. He also lost interest in acting. Through months of rehabilitation, he slowly picked himself up before his breakthrough role in the first Iron Man movie, which made him an overnight Hollywood superstar. Sometimes, you just need to see past all your mistakes and know that they do not define who you really are.

Life can hit you hard and make you feel lousy and defeated but this could also be life's way of refining you into a gem to fulfil your great purpose and destiny. For those who are lost, helpless and demoralised, do not give up hope. As long as you still have one breath, you stand a chance of turning it all around. You are like an extremely bouncy ball that is falling to the ground at high speed. Once you hit the rock-bottom ground, you are bouncing off high—so much higher than before.

A Kitchen Sink Full of Plates

What if you find yourself with a sink full of plates, pots, pans and utensils to wash?

It can be an overwhelming feeling when you think about how long you are going to be standing at the kitchen sink, washing dishes. In life, we can face a similar situation, be it in our studies, our work or the issues we face in life.

What do I do? I start with the easiest task first. I wash the utensils before moving on to the plates and, finally, the bigger cookware. The idea of starting with the easiest task means to build momentum as we deal with our challenges. We also gain more confidence as we solve the issues, one after another. Very soon, all issues will be solved, just like all the dishes will be washed.

For friends who feel overwhelmed with issues in life or at work or in their studies, remember to take one issue at a time and try to solve the easiest one first. Build good momentum as you solve one issue

after another. A good start will win half the battle. Remember, all problems can be solved. Just focus on the solutions and not the problems. All the best!

The Inspirational Story of Wesley Wee

If you have not read about the story of Wesley, you would not have imagined how cruel fate can be to a person and how blessed we are to be born healthy and to have parents who love us.

Wesley was born with cerebral palsy and multiple disabilities and is unable to walk. If that were not bad enough, he suffered tremendous physical and emotional abuse from his parents. They would ask him to practice walking, which caused him extreme pain. If he did not do so, they would cane him. His parents banned him from family gatherings and constantly told him that he was useless and good for nothing. They even had plans to send him away.

The only person who cared for him was his grandma. When his grandma passed away, he returned to live with his parents and they continued to abuse him. Life was a struggle and he had to rely on his friends outside his house to help feed him. There was finally some light at the end of the tunnel for Wesley when he received help from strangers to pursue an education and, later, married his wife.

Wesley is exemplary proof of how resilient the human spirit can be, especially when it faces great adversity. Wesley hopes to use his life story, how he overcame all odds to live on and, eventually, get to where he is today, to inspire the people around him. He has published an

inspirational book about his life story, which took five years to complete because he typed using just his big toe. I hope we can all think of Wesley when we face challenges and be inspired by his courage and resilience.

[Guest Post] Overcoming Disability

In 2007, I was involved in a major road traffic accident that rendered me paralysed from the neck down. My whole life changed in a split second. The once-active and independent 20-year-old me had to resign myself to being bed-bound and depending on others for every single aspect of my life.

On difficult days, I used the darkness of the night to grieve, sometimes crying myself to sleep. When I woke up the next day, though, I made sure I was strong. Frankly, at times I did put up a strong front, as I did not want my family to worry about me. Even though it was just a front, I think it did prevent me from indulging in self-pity and spiraling down into depression.

To be honest, I was not a religious person before the accident but I have always believed in one true God. Slowly, I turned back to my faith and I am certain it was my saving grace. Strange as it may sound, I now believe that my accident was for the better. It was not the worst thing that happened to me.

Having been an active person, I was, of course, not made to lie around on the bed, watching TV all day long. I tried to do quite a few things

to keep my mind active. I even tried to write a book, which turned out badly. I am no writer!

Although I managed to start a small online business three years after the accident, I always felt like there was a void in my heart. And because I still require help in many aspects of my daily life, I felt somewhat useless in general. That changed when I started to volunteer. Not only did my role as the admin of the group made me realise I am still useful to society, but my voice could be heard again.

Whatever setback you are facing, it is not the end of the world. If you have a physical disability like I do, remember that your body is just a vessel. What matters is your soul. Do something meaningful for yourself or for society. Keep your day occupied. You will be a much happier person when you count your blessings and always see the positive in every situation.

Working on the Weekend

I received a last-minute order to go back to work for half a day on a Saturday. Ironically, it turned out to be one of the most productive and charged-up weekends I ever had. I probably achieved more than I would have if I did not have to go back to the office.

I reckon that when something is taken from you unexpectedly, it makes you more determined to make up for lost time. The reason why we always procrastinate in achieving certain things is that we think we have plenty of time left to do them ... but no one really knows!

Also, not working on a weekend seems like such a normal thing. There is nothing to be excited about until you realise that you need to work on the weekend when everyone else is relaxing. Actually, there are many occupations (think the retail, transport and entertainment sectors) that work on the weekend, to serve us and our loved ones. It just did not dawn on us because we are not in their shoes.

We often wish that life could be easier but we fail to realise that every hardship or challenge we face serves a purpose. If you have been hungry, you will realise that it is a blessing to eat on time and have food readily available. If the aircon in the train is faulty and it is hot and stuffy, you realise that having airconditioning all the time is such a blessing. If you have to work for one day under the sun, you will better appreciate the days you spend sheltered in the office. If you have never lost, you will never cherish the beauty of a victory.

For friends currently facing issues in life, I hope you can remember that whatever doesn't kill you will make you stronger and that you cannot have the rainbow before the storm. Hang in there and be positive, for good times are just around the corner.

When You Think That Your World Is Over

To friends who are facing issues in life or who are at their lowest point, I want to share this inspirational quote with you:

"Just when the caterpillar thought that the world was over, it became a butterfly".

Under the facade of happy pictures posted on social media, there are many people facing real-life issues which they are not comfortable enough to share with anyone. Some of these issues could be social stigmas, which makes it more difficult to confide in anyone. Some people could be experiencing sadness, loneliness or loss of direction and meaning in life. If you are not facing any issues and are very content with life, I am very happy for you.

If you are facing issues and possibly at your lowest point, I hope this message brings some encouragement to you. May this encouragement grow into strength and courage. Keep the faith that things will change for the better and that there is light at the end of the tunnel. When the ball hits the ground (lowest point), the only way it can go is up, and even higher up after that.

No Pain, No Gain

Water tastes the sweetest when you are very thirsty.

Air is most refreshing when you are suffocating.

Rice is delicious when you have not eaten for a day.

Health is most treasured during a major health scare.

Time is most precious when it is limited.

The weekend is worth anticipating when the weekdays are hard.

Work is truly satisfying only when there are challenges to overcome.

Friendship and kinship are the most valuable in times of need

The good in this world shines the brightest when there is evil around.

Happiness is highly sought after because we experienced sadness, pain and suffering.

Life is most meaningful throughout all its ups and downs.

You can live a life with no issues, challenges or sufferings but you will also lose out on the rewards that come after the pain. Everything in life happens for a reason and makes you a stronger, wiser and more enriched person. We came to this world with nothing and will leave the world with nothing. What are in between are experiences and memories. So, make the best out of these experiences, learn the life lessons from them and create beautiful memories.

The Whole World Is Happy Except for You

Life can sometimes make you feel like you are all alone in the world facing your troubles.

The people around you are posting on social media, sharing their favourite foods, beautiful photos of their holidays, anniversary celebrations with their spouses, adorable photos of their kids or birthday celebrations with their parents.

Here you are, dealing with a dreadful illness, going through a separation from your spouse, coping with a difficult or special needs child, dealing with the loss of a loved one, struggling financially or undergoing another major crisis in life. The whole world is happy but you are picking up the broken pieces and licking your wounds.

While you may feel all alone in dealing with your troubles, help is out there. Many people have been in your situation and walked out of it stronger. Your family and friends are there for you, so do not be

embarrassed about seeking their comfort and support. Someday, they will need yours, too. And there is always one person whom you can trust and who will never let you down: that person is YOU. You can dig from within to find the strength and courage to overcome your crisis.

Lastly, there is a purpose for your suffering. Some people are thankful that they had a major illness because it inspired them to start appreciating the blessings they had taken for granted. It is also the time when they foster greater bonding with their loved ones and understand what truly matters in life. As long as the sun still shines for you, as long as you are still breathing, anything is still possible and you can still turn it all around. Don't give up. Keep going!

Dealing With Never-ending Life Issues

Life is a series of problems. You solve one problem, another problem crops up. Can we not have problems? Can we not have worries? Can we not be afraid? Can we not be angry? Can we not experience loss? Can we not be sad? Can we not have negative thoughts in our head? When life is smooth-sailing, with no issues, no challenges, with everything mapped out nicely for you, it will gradually lose its purpose. If we have never been afraid, how will we have the opportunity to overcome our fears and build our courage? If we have never experienced sadness, how will we treasure our happy moments? If we have never experienced loss, how will we appreciate the time we have with our loved ones?

Every problem or issue we face in life gives us the opportunity to come

out of it stronger and to improve ourselves or our relationships with others. Do not be afraid of problems. Stay focused on the solutions and get the best out of every situation you are in, good or bad, for that is what makes life interesting and meaningful.

Letter of Encouragement to the Future Me

Dear Future Me,

This is you in 2019, writing you a letter of encouragement, as you are facing a major setback now. May this letter help you cope better with your current challenge and get through your issue soon.

Firstly, I want you to know that you are not alone in facing this issue. You have many friends and family members around you who care about you, so seek their comfort and support to help you get through this difficult time of your life. You have me, so remember to love yourself.

I want you to keep moving forward, one step at a time. If a month is too long, try a week. If a week is too long, try a day. If a day is too long, try an hour. Just keep moving forward in spite of all the pain. Every minute you press on becomes a minute of triumph, a minute of overcoming the odds and a minute of courage and strength. If you keep moving forward, one step at a time, you are definitely going to see the light at the end of the dark tunnel.

I also want you to know that, by 2019, you overcame many setbacks and challenges in life and came out stronger each time. You overcame

your weaknesses, you survived the onslaught of difficult people and you even battled some serious health issues. You conquered them all. So, as long as you are alive, there is hope for you to overcome your current setback and score another handsome victory. I have absolute faith that you will get through this eventually.

I want you to keep believing that everything will be okay and to remain as positive as you can. A glass is half full only when you see it that way, so keep going and keep filling your glass with hope, courage and joy. I wish you the best of luck. Be sure to look forward to the rainbow that is coming your way after your current storm.

This Too Shall Pass

Bad times, good times—they will all pass and what we are left with are memories.

If Monday is the most dreadful day of the week, it will pass 24 hours later and soon the weekend will be here. Then, the weekend will pass and Monday will be here again.

If you are experiencing a rough patch, remember that bad times do not last forever. This too shall pass and you will see the light at the end of the tunnel. Hang in there!

If you are experiencing good times, treasure every moment and derive as much joy as you can out of it because, like life, someday it will pass. Live in the moment and make every moment count.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE THE TOUGHEST TIMES YOU HAVE BEEN THROUGH IN LIFE?

WHEN YOU OVERCAME THESE CHALLENGES, HOW DID YOU FEEL?

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM EACH EXPERIENCE? HOW DID IT MAKE YOU A BETTER PERSON?

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES YOU ARE CURRENTLY FACING IN LIFE?

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS YOU CAN THINK OF OR POSSIBLE SOURCES OF SUPPORT FROM WHICH TO SEEK HELP? (E.G. FAMILY, FRIENDS, GOVERNMENT, COMMUNITY)

HOW CAN YOU DRAW ON PAST EXPERIENCES OF PROBLEM-SOLVING TO TACKLE TODAY'S ISSUES?

IF YOU COULD SEND A LETTER TO THE FUTURE YOU TO ENCOURAGE YOURSELF WHEN YOU FACE A CHALLENGE OR ARE GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME, WHAT WOULD YOU WRITE?

WHEN YOU ARE GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME IN THE FUTURE, REFER TO THE LETTER ABOVE.

CHAPTER 14

ELIXIR OF IMMORTALITY (INSPIRATIONAL FALLEN HEROES)

The Heroes who fought bravely with gusto and fell on the battlefield will be bestowed with the Elixir of Immortality. Their legacies will live on forever, and their amazing stories of victories and the overcoming of odds will pass down as folklore for many generations to come.

[Author's Note]

In this chapter, I pay tribute to the real-life heroes who have passed on but lived life so brilliantly that they left footprints on our hearts and taught us valuable lessons about life. While it is unfortunate that they are no longer around, their legacies live on forever, as will their amazing life stories. It is my great privilege to narrate their stories and share with the many who are inspired by their guts, courage and willpower.

Story of Aden

I feel privileged to be writing Aden's story because he has taught me so much about life. He is a truly great inspiration for all of us, even at the tender age of two years old.

For those who do not know Aden, he was a brave little boy who fought a very rare and aggressive form of leukemia at just three months old. Over the next two years, he went through two bone marrow transplants. However, because his leukemia was so rare and potent, he relapsed both times. In those two years, the hospital had become his second home as he battled infection, surgeries, chemo treatment and plenty of pain and suffering, while still being a toddler.

Yet, he was such a brave warrior. Every time his cancer tried to pin him down and give him a very low chance of recovery, he fought bravely and came back stronger. He taught us to not give up, even when the odds are stacked heavily against us.

However, his body eventually had taken too much of beating and he was no longer able to keep up. The doctors ran out of ideas for treating him and advised his parents to let him stop treatment so that his body could finally get some rest.

While the body was broken, the spirit was indestructible. I hope we do not see his passing as a gloomy affair filled with sadness but, rather, as a celebration of his life, his indomitable character and willpower. Let's be proud of him for fighting the good fight.

Let the story of Aden remind parents in Singapore that what matters most is not how smart your kids are, how many As they can score or how many skills they learn but, rather, that they are well and healthy. That was a blessing denied to Aden right after he was born. So, give your child a hug, tell your child you love him or her and stop stressing so much over grades or how your child will turn out in life. Your child will be fine, trust me.

For friends facing issues, be they at work, in studies or in one's personal life, let Aden's grit and determination inspire you to keep going, even through the darkest moments. This is the story of a boy whose journey had ended before it even began. He had been through an incredible amount of pain and suffering over two years of treatment but always seemed to be in a cheerful spirit. When we look at him and read his life story, we know that we are so much more blessed. Make full use of every day to be happy.

Is Life Fair?

You might find yourself asking, "Is life fair?" Why do some people seemingly have everything going so well for them? Why do some people have so many more riches than you do?

If you cast your sight further, if you look at people struggling to survive in other parts of the world, people living in war zones, children deprived of proper nutrition and clean water, refugees whom no country wishes to accept, people who do not know whether they will see the sun tomorrow because a natural disaster could hit them at any time ... then you realise that you are much richer than you thought because you have so many more blessings than others do.

Still, you ask if life is fair when you read the story of Aden. Why did all this pain and suffering plague a child so young? Why was his life all about needles, surgeries, chemotherapy, hospital stays and medicines that made him lose interest in everything else?

But his life was more than that. There were many who loved him, from his parents to his doctors and nurses to the many strangers who were touched by his courage and determination. He lived every moment of his life as best as he could, overcoming the odds and inspiring others with every battle won. When we look at him, our issues seem so small. And that is a purposeful and well-lived life, though not necessarily a long-lived one.

Finally, I hope you understand that life is not about fairness. We all have unique adventures waiting for us. Life is about making full use of

what you are given and making the best out of everything. You can have lots of time but if you spend it on meaningless activities, it is as good as not having any time at all.

May the story of Aden remind us that there is so much more to life and that every day is worth treasuring and fighting for. The value of time is relative to how well you use it.

Tribute to Aden

Dearest Aden,

I got to know you when I read about your condition two years ago. Since then, you have always had a special place in my heart. I wish to tell you that I enjoy and cherish every encounter with you, watching you grow from an adorable baby to a cheerful toddler.

This is an amazing journey for you, a journey full of triumphs and overcoming odds. You were the youngest and smallest soldier on the battlefield but you fought with so much bravery and gusto that it inspires all of us to be brave and strong when fighting our own battles and demons. We are all so proud of what you achieved in the past two years.

You showed us that while there are pain and suffering in life, we can always choose to be happy. In the treatment process, you were always happy with your Elmo toys, ice cream, snacks or chicken rice. You never asked for anything more.

It doesn't matter if you stayed in the hospital most of the time and were not able to go home. Instead, you made friends with the other patients, the nurses and the doctors. That is an exemplary example of how you can make lemonade when life throws you lemons.

I can say that your life was full of suffering but you will tell me that your life was full of triumphs. I can remember you for your pain and tears but you will want me to remember your smiles and laughter. I can say that your life was short but you will tell me that it was well-lived and you have made the most out of it. I say that I will mourn your passing but you ask me to celebrate your life instead!

Thank you, Aden, for teaching me that there is so much more to life than being unhappy all day about the things we do not have. Let me bring these valuable lessons to those friends who need a reminder and also to those friends who need courage and hope. Thank you, Aden, for all the inspiration and for this amazing friendship. Please watch over those who love you.

Story of Nickson

Nickson was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of leukemia when he was just 13 years old. He went through cancer treatment for a further two years, including chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant which was unsuccessful.

Nickson had a deep passion and talent for basketball and was even offered a slot in the Singapore Youth Basketball team. However, his illness cut short his dreams and aspirations. He eventually lost the

fight with leukemia just before his 16th birthday. The following article is a tribute written in honor of his courage and the inspiration he has given to us.

Tribute to Nickson

Life is like a game of basketball. It is fast-paced and action-packed. It is never boring. In this game of life, you realise that time is very precious and that every second counts.

Life can be unfair at times by pitting you against bigger and more formidable opponents (like leukemia). However, you have shown great courage in stepping into the court to face your mighty opponent—something which players beyond your age may not be brave enough to do. You played and fought with valor, and not just for the sake of playing but with the intent of winning. That, to many of us, is simply inspirational.

Life is like a game of basketball. The court is the place where winners and champions are crowned. But winners are not only those who bring back the gold medals. Winners are those who have given their best performance on the court, even at times when they face overwhelming odds. Winners are those who never give up, despite the great pain, and who keep going until the final buzzer sounds. The body may be broken but the spirit is indomitable. And you, Nickson, are the perfect example of a true winner with championship class.

Life is a game of basketball and you have played the best game of your life. Now is the time for you to finally take a rest, take a place in

the grandstand seating and continue cheering for those who are playing. Cheer on Papa, Mama and Didi, as they still have a long game ahead. Cheer on those who are inspired by your story, cheer on those who need some courage to play their game and cheer on those who are currently fighting very tough opponents in life. They will all look up to you now, Nickson.

Thank you, Nickson. We are all very fortunate to have met you. You have taught us that life, in spite of all the issues we face, is meant to be enjoyable and that every day is a blessing to treasure. Life is never about how long we live but about how well we live. You may have passed on but your legacy lives forever.

Tribute to Michelle

I was sad to read about the passing of a friend, Michelle, founder of "Chope Food for the Needy", at the age of 43 due to brain cancer.

When I started Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.) back in 2013, Michelle's project inspired me greatly because it was exactly what I am trying to advocate for: Ordinary folks like you and me, giving an act of kindness to someone in need and helping to make our society a better place, leaving no one behind.

The whole Chope Food concept involves giving extra money to our regular hawkers, as a sponsorship of free meals to those who are needy and hungry. Michelle referred to the hawkers as the "eyes on the ground", who can keep a lookout for those who are hungry and in need of a meal.

Michelle had so much drive and determination to make her project successful and it was very inspiring to watch her actively reach out to gather more support for her cause. She won the "Hero of the Year" Award in a contest organised by radio station Power 98 FM and her "Chope Food For The Needy" Facebook Page had gathered more than 12,000 likes.

She had such a big heart and was always encouraging people to be kind and watch out for those in need. Even when she was overseas, she made it a point to buy food for the homeless and needy. During the dry months of 2014, she actively supported our "Let It Rain In Singapore" initiative, a movement to encourage friends to water trees and grass with reused water, to prevent them from dying off and to help bring about the rain. When she fell very sick, Michelle was still actively encouraging her supporters to reach out to Chope Food for the Needy while she was unable to do so. When she was hospitalised for treatment, she sang a lullaby to comfort a scared old lady in pain. She had so much love in her heart.

While we lost an angel in Michelle, I hope that we celebrate her life and remember her for what she has done for our world. She would very much hope for all of us to continue her legacy by chope-ing food for the needy and spreading kindness. I think death is not the scariest thing we may face. The scarier thing is, when we are about to die, to realise that we have not achieved anything or did not have the courage to live the life we always wanted. I am sure Michelle had lived the life she always wanted. It was a life well-lived, despite being shorter than expected.

I quote these very meaningful messages Michelle left for us:

Smile more at people on the street. Chat more with the people you see around you. Our life & world are how WE make it. Let's make Singapore a sweeter, kinder, friendlier place. Why not?

I feel proud of you all! Thank you for believing in my dream & making CHOPE FOOD for the Needy a reality.

Always dream big and be kind. You never know when you or your loved one may be the one needing help one day.

Thank you very much, Michelle, for the inspiration and all the love you have given to those in need. You will always be remembered. To everyone who wants to make a difference and spread more love around, please do it now. Do not wait till you are retired or decades later, for today is the only guarantee. We do not know what will happen tomorrow.

What My Late Hamster Taught Me About Life and Happiness

If there is a non-human being that can remind me that I can always be happy regardless of the circumstance I am in, it has to be my late pet hamster.

Two-tier bungalow house downgraded to a single tier, no problem; big cage became a smaller cage, no problem; toys to no toys, also no problem. He continued to live each day as happily as he could, often entertaining himself by climbing up and down his cage, playing with

his food tray or simply lying on his back to enjoy his food on his wheel. He sometimes put some litter on his wheel to act as a cushion so it was more comfortable. His existence is a perfect example of the fact that we can choose to be positive and create fun and happiness despite getting less than what we had previously.

Sadly, he passed away before the average lifespan. It was shocking, as he was healthy and active all along (save for some skin problems) and was still very energetic and excited on the night before his passing. He passed away peacefully as though he were still asleep. I had known this day would come but never expected it to come so soon. However, life is all about expecting the unexpected, isn't it? There is nothing we can do to control the future, so why try so hard? Why not live each day the best we can, to make happiness our choice, just like my pet hamster did?

I am not going to mourn his passing, though it is sad that I will never get to see his wacky antics again. The memories he gave me live on forever and I am very grateful for the spirit he has shown me. He, as a little hamster, taught me how I should live my life. I will choose to celebrate his life instead of being saddened by his departure. In the hamster world, you have no friends (most hamster breeds cannot co-exist with one another) and a low chance of finding a mate or having kids, but who cares? You have yourself to be your best friend and companion for life. Love yourself, love your body, take good care of yourself and you can be happy every day.

To my beloved hamster: I hope you are in a better place now, where there is an abundance of your favourite foods and where you can run free all day long. Thank you for coming into my life and bringing with you all these beautiful memories and life lessons. Till we meet again, continue to have fun wherever you are.

Tribute to Inuka the Polar Bear

It is sometimes not easy to be Inuka the Polar Bear.

You were born in a place far away from your natural home in the Arctic. You had never experienced snow or been allowed to run freely on the ice cap. You did not experience the joy of hunting with your polar bear friends in the wild.

However, all this did not make you a grumpy, sulky polar bear. Instead, you rose above it all to enrich the lives of many Singaporeans and their children. You have shown us that while circumstances placed you in an awkward situation, adaptability is the key to happiness. When there were no polar bear friends, you made many human friends, including the zookeepers and the millions of fans who adored you.

You took us to places we may never reach in this lifetime. Through your presence, you gave us a piece of the Arctic. If you had not come into our lives, I am not sure how many of us could have said "hi" to a polar bear in close proximity. We would probably have run off if we saw one of your kind in the wild.

You were always meant to be different and special. You were not just

another polar bear, you were THE polar bear. You were Inuka, whom we grew up with and who dedicated your life to serving us, bringing us plenty of joy. You have lived a purposeful life and cemented your legacy in our hearts. Your name will be remembered and mentioned for years to come.

While it is unfortunate that you were not able to live like other polar bears, you taught us that this was okay and that we can still live an extraordinary life. When things go beyond our control, which they often do, it could be the perfect opportunity to achieve something really amazing. We just need to make the best of what we have and live every day as happily as we possibly can.

Lastly, you showed us that life is meant to be fun and enjoyable, like how you enjoyed taking dips in your private pool and getting "hydro massages" under your waterfall. You showed us that life is never complete without that little bit of cheekiness and humour when you invented your own games and hid your toothbrush from the zookeepers.

Thank you, Inuka, for all the memories and life lessons. You were among the animal greats and will always be fondly remembered. We are all honoured to have had you as a part of our lives.

Tribute to Xue Min

She was young. She was beautiful. She was about to marry the man whom she loved very much and they had just collected their house keys. But she is gone now. Gone too soon.

How soon is soon? To the ones who are suffering, an hour of physical pain or a day with a depressive mood can feel like an eternity. For my friend, she had been fighting years of depression and anxiety before the last battle became too much to handle.

When she first shared with me that she had depression back in 2016, she made a remark: "I don't look like someone with depression, do I?" She was right. People with depression can look perfectly healthy on the outside. They may even look happy but, deep down, they are hurting.

Depression is like a cancer of the mind. It eats away at your mental health, day by day. You often do not think it is serious until it starts affecting your everyday life and you feel that your world is going to end. Just like cancer cells, what is invisible is more dangerous than what we can see with our eyes. There might be no symptoms until, one fine day, the onrush of emotions and mood swings just sweep you away like a tsunami.

There may be times when a person is crying for help, so when a friend or family member approaches you and tells you that he or she is depressed, do not play it down or think that the person is overly emotional, just like we do not ignore our loved ones when they have a high fever or a bad cough. It can be tough on the caregivers, too, especially when they cannot fully understand depression. However, help is available, for both the sufferers and their loved ones. Organisations offer professional help and support to those in need. I

am glad that I lent some support and encouragement to my friend when she was feeling very depressed.

My biggest concern is how mental illness will hit future generations, especially with the intense competition and pressure in schools. More youth are being diagnosed with mental issues. The main reason why I am writing these motivational articles is to encourage you to be positive. While these articles are not going to take away your problems, they may help get you through a difficult phase, which can pass sooner than you think. For parents: You are your child's best bet against depression when you can live your life with positivity. If you live your life with anger and unhappiness, there is a high chance that it will impact your child the same way.

To my dearest friend, Xue Min: You were brave for the longest time and climbed out of the dark hole so many times. You experienced pain and suffering that would have broken even the strongest minds, so I am very proud of all your triumphs in this life. For this last battle, I know you tried your best. While you may have lost, you are still a winner to me. I hope you are now in a place with no heartbreak, no sadness or unhappiness. I hope it is filled with love, sunshine, rainbows and maybe unicorns because you deserve all of them. Please watch over your loved ones from above.

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHICH STORY OR HERO INSPIRES YOU AND WHY? (E.G. MY CURRENT ISSUES ARE NOT AS HUGE AS I THINK THEY ARE.)

WHAT ARE THE VALUABLE LIFE LESSONS YOU LEARNT AFTER READING THESE STORIES? (E.G. LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST AND CHERISHING EVERY MOMENT)

IS THERE ANYONE YOU KNOW WHO HAS LEFT A DEEP LEGACY AND MANY VALUABLE LESSONS FOR YOU? WHAT ARE THE LESSONS YOU LEARNT FROM THIS PERSON?

HOW CAN YOU CREATE YOUR OWN LEGACY AND LIVE AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE? WHAT ARE THE LITTLE THINGS YOU CAN START DOING NOW TO MOVE TOWARDS THAT GOAL?

BONUS CHAPTER

MOTIVATIONAL QUOTES

"If we can live forever, then time will no longer be precious. We will forever procrastinate and not achieve anything, knowing that we can always do it tomorrow. That is the beauty of life. Anything good is always limiting. So, make the best out of the time you are given. Don't waste it, as you may not always get it tomorrow".

~ Jason Cai

"Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you".

~ Princess Diana

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing".

~ Edmund Burke

"Be the change that you wish to see in the world".

~ Mahatma Gandhi

"Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly".

~ Proverb

"In the darkest nights of your life, the stars shine the brightest for you. They can be a friend, a family member or a loved one. Find them, for they will illuminate the path and guide you through your darkest moments. And someday, when you have the chance, be a shining star for the people around you".

~ Jason Cai

"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right".

~ Henry Ford

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".

- Margaret Mead

"The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty".

~ Winston Churchill

"When you wanted something so badly and have tried all sorts of ways but are still not getting it, you need to listen to what the universe is trying to tell you: The time is not right yet. Be patient and go with the flow, for everything is beautiful in its time".

~ Jason Cai

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one".

~ John Lennon

"The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do".

~ Steve Jobs

"For every reason it's not possible, there are hundreds of people who have faced the same circumstances and succeeded".

~ Jack Canfield

"The magical realm of happiness is not a place you can go to and be happy forever. It is here and now. You make it work for you".

~ Jason Cai

"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream".

~ C.S. Lewis

"The world is full of magical things patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper".

~ Bertrand Russell

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel".

~ Maya Angelou

"If there are no Monday blues, there will be no TGIF and weekend joy. One day of not-so-looking-forward-to, in exchange for three days of looking-forward-to, is very worth it!"

~ Jason Cai

"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination".

~ Jimmy Dean

"Believe you can and you're halfway there". ~ Theodore Roosevelt

"Change your thoughts and you change your world".

~ Norman Vincent Peale

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, Dream, Discover".
~ Mark Twain

"Unhappiness usually revolve around a comparison with others who are better off than us, while contentment comes from seeing the blessings we already have."
~ Jason Cai

"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed".
~ Michael Jordan

"When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it".
~ Henry Ford

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any".
~ Alice Walker

"In every photo we take, we try to capture a snapshot of a memory, something that is precious to us. If you want to know what is really important in life, look at what you are capturing in most of your photos".
~ Jason Cai

"I would rather die of passion than of boredom".

~ Vincent van Gogh

"Build your own dreams, or someone else will hire you to build theirs".

~ Farrah Gray

"Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck".

~ Dalai Lama

"McDonald's fries without that tinge of salt are still McDonald's fries; but it never tastes the same. Just like a family without any of its member will never be the same again. So, there is a time to work hard but there is also a time to rest. Take good care of your health so you can enjoy life's finest moments with your family. That includes enjoying a pack of McDonald's fries".

~ Jason Cai

"A truly rich man is one whose children run into his arms when his hands are empty".

~ Unknown

"A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new".

~ Albert Einstein

"What's money? A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night and in between does what he wants to do".

~ Bob Dylan

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else".

~ Booker T. Washington

"If you are motivated and determined to do something, you will find a way. If not, you will find excuses not to achieve it. Just like if you don't want to do something, no one can help you; but if you really want to do something, no one can stop you!"

~ Jason Cai

"When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us".

~ Helen Keller

"When I was five years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down 'happy'. They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life".

~ John Lennon

"The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be".

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Some people use anger as a tool, like a knife, to hurt others. One day, they will realise that this knife actually has no handle and they are hurt too, every time they try to hurt others".

~ Jason Cai

RESOURCES

Facebook Profile:

<https://www.facebook.com/projectARK2013>

Jason Cai's Motivational Writings

<https://www.facebook.com/jasoncaimotivationalwritings>

Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.)

<https://www.facebook.com/projectactofrandomkindnesssg>

P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1437902803105381>

Fundraising for Children Cancer Foundation (CCF) [3rd Run]

https://www.ccf.org.sg/giving/fundraisng_event.php?id=test-fundraising-for-children-with-cancer

The Encouragements for Little Fighters (ELF) Project

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Elf-Project-162446774429787>

The Alternate Transport Advisory & Singapore Magnificent Rescue Team
(TATA SMRT)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1428899323871165>

What Makes Us Happy In Singapore?

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1553301294943067>

Coffee & Tea Chat! Climate and Sustainability

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/483427181762132>

CONTACT

Email: jasoncaimotivationalwritings@gmail.com