

**IT'S
YOUR
LIFE,
YOU
CALL
THE
SHOTS!**



**PURSUE YOUR DREAMS -
SAY IT, MEAN IT, DO IT!**

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Introduction

Do you have a dream? What is it? How long have you been carrying this dream within you? Have you been able to realize it?

Or, don't you have a dream at all?

Well, whether you have a dream or not, please allow me to share a little story with you.

One cool, breezy dawn, two brothers, Alex and Adam, decided to go hiking. They packed some necessities in their haversacks and began their journey.

"Isn't it a beautiful day, Adam?" Alex said to his brother. Adam took a deep breath and answered, "Yes, it certainly is!"

They talked and laughed while trekking up the hill. It was a delightful experience and they hardly felt the weight of their haversacks on their backs.

Two hours later, they had reached the peak. The morning sun was warm, and the wind gently stroked their cheeks. They sat on a rock, closed their eyes and enjoyed the beautiful moment.

"Shall we head back?" Alex asked his brother, after hours of contented admiration of nature in all her loveliness.

“Sure. Let’s go home now.” Adam stood up and grabbed his haversack.

Slowly, they trekked down the hill and then drove home. They talked and laughed while walking to the elevator in their apartment block. Then they saw the notice on the wall, and their smiles froze on their faces.

Dear residents, the elevator is temporarily out of service due to power failure. Please accept our sincere apology for any inconvenience caused.

The Management.

The faces of both men turned pale -- their house was on the 80th floor!

“Well, I guess we have no choice but to take the stairs,” Alex said, shrugging his shoulders.

“All right, we’ll just treat it as another trek up a hill, huh?”

Adam replied, trying to make light of the situation.

They took the stairs. When they reached the 20th floor, they felt a little tired with the weight of the haversacks pulling down on their backs. Alex suggested, “Why don’t we leave our haversacks here and collect them when the power supply is back up again?”

“That’s a great idea!” Adam put down his haversack too, leaning it against the wall.

The relief they felt after putting down their haversacks was great. They continued their way up the stairs feeling much lighter in mind and body. They even managed to crack jokes as they trudged up. However, the good feeling did not last long. Soon they started to feel the exhaustion creeping in. They did not seem to be nearing the top at all. “40th Floor! That’s only half way up!” Adam groaned aloud when they had reached mid-point.

With fatigue and strain setting in, the brothers started to blame one another. “It is all your fault! You are the one who suggested going for a hike!” Alex accused his brother angrily.

“Oh yeah? Then who was it who couldn’t wait to pack his bag?” Adam shot back.

“Who was the first to rush out the door?” Alex responded heatedly.

As they quarreled, they continued their way up and before they realized it they were on the 60th floor. By then, both men were simply too tired to argue anymore.

“Let’s just get ourselves home, okay?” Alex said to his brother, gasping for air like an asthmatic patient.

“Fine,” Adam agreed, completely exhausted.

So, they continued walking up in silence. Neither uttered a word.

Finally, they reached their destination -- the 80th floor.
Home sweet home!

Alex instructed his brother, "Adam, open the door!"

"Me? I don't have the key. Isn't it with you?" Adam answered in astonishment. A thought began to occur to him, and he felt dread spreading within.

"Where is the key? I thought I had it in my pocket," Alex muttered as he began to search in every pocket for the key. Every empty pocket he discovered heightened the sense of doom that seemed to have surrounded them. This cannot possibly be happening, he told himself. He was beginning to think the same as Adam. Then it became impossible to delay the inevitable, and he said in a small voice, "I think I left the key in my haversack."

"What! Are you kidding me?" Adam's eyes were as huge as saucers. He hoped he was dreaming, but he knew Alex was not joking. They had left the key on the 20th floor! That was the cold, hard truth.

Does this story sound a little like life to you?

Well, you wouldn't be wrong to say it did. From the time we are born up to age 20, life tends to be rather carefree, perhaps even uneventful. We do not think much about what lies ahead. We do not really carry any burdens on our shoulders. We play hard, we study hard, we do our school work, and time passes without much incident, somewhere beyond our conscious awareness. We take our

cues from our parents, teachers and the people around us. We learn from them, and role model their actions and behaviour, generally without many questions. Physically too, we have few complaints, as we are young and full of life and energy, and we are, in fact, getting stronger every day.

Towards the later part of the first two decades of our life, however, we gradually start to feel that life is becoming burdensome. Suddenly, there are expectations to fulfill – expectations of parents, teachers and perhaps even some strangers! This is also the time to make some tough decisions on important issues such as university study, career and relationships. We begin to feel all this weighing on our shoulders. This is the time when most of us want to explore life as independent individuals; we want to cast off the weight of those expectations and move in the path of our own choosing.

Then for the next 20 years, we continue to work hard and play hard, trying to get ahead as smoothly as we can. Most of us work very hard and must face a fair amount of struggle in these two decades. It is certainly taxing, both physically and mentally.

So time has flown and all of a sudden, we are in our 40s. We come to the realization that we do not have much youth left to spend, and yet we seem to have many unfulfilled goals festering within us. The road ahead still seems long and ponderous, and we do not quite have the same amount of energy and vigour that we used to. Indeed, the road ahead even seems daunting. We become frustrated

and we begin to look for someone or something to blame, and so we blame everything and everyone who comes across our path! We no longer feel fulfilled and no longer do we seem to enjoy life. Rather, we seem to dread every single step forward.

This blame game continues for the next 20 years, and then, just like that, we find ourselves in our 60s! “Well, the time left is too short. Let me stop focusing on blaming people and situations, and focus instead on living what’s left of my life.” Our inner voice whispers this to us, as we feel desperate in the face of fatigue and weariness. We simply do not have the energy to keep up this futile fight. Then come another 20 years – what seems like an uneventful journey. It is not so much that nothing happens anymore, but that we have resigned ourselves to our life the way it is, and have decided to quietly see out our remaining days. Whatever comes along we will take in our stride.

One day, it is time for us to leave the earth. Lying feebly on the bed, we suddenly recall something, “There is something I didn’t get around to doing!”

Then we realize that we have laid aside the aspirations and dreams of the first two decades of our life! In the face of life’s burdens, we lost sight of our dreams! Carrying those dreams at that time had seemed like lugging a heavy burden. But can we return to that lost time to rescue our dreams and make them come true now? NO way! It is too late. We missed the boat, and we now can only leave the world in despair, having failed to have lived our dream.

If only we had been mindful of this earlier, most of us would say. Indeed, many people are left at the end of their lives with regret for the things they should or should not have done. Yes, all too frequently, they realize too late that they had failed to live out their dreams. If we lived every day in the conscious thought of the outcome of our life, perhaps we would not have to deal with so much regret at the end of our limited lifespan.

All of us are entitled to our unique dreams, no matter how small or unconventional they may be. What is important is for us to know that, and live our dream. We should live every day in such a way as to bring us closer to our dream. We should not wait until it is too late. We are fully responsible for our effort and persistence. There should be no place for the blame game in our life. It is futile to blame anyone or anything else for what we reap in life. We are responsible for our own future, our destination. Nobody owes us anything in life. If we spend our life bitching about everything without taking a moment to consider our own flaws, I can assure you that the outcome will not be pleasant.

We pass through this world only once. It is important that we seize every moment and live life to the max! Who better than we ourselves would know what our dreams are, or should be. If we do not know what our dreams are, we should sit down and work them out. The longer we live without a dream, the more we waste of the precious time given to us. Only after knowing what our dreams are can we live our life in alignment with them, our goals. That is why we should take all the necessary actions to move in the direction of discovering what our dreams are.

At the end of our life's journey, we should feel proud of our accomplishments, not regretful that we did not achieve our dreams or that our achievements have been paltry. No achievement is too small to celebrate. Never lie feebly in bed and ponder on something that you have yet to actualize – instead, stand up now and lay hold of your dreams! Can you smell achievement? Can you see triumph? Can you feel success?

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PART I

What do you
want in life?
Have a dream,
have a vision!

How far would you go for your dream?

Having a dream is important

I have always believed that everyone should have a dream to begin with. Have you ever boarded a plane that did not know where it was going? Would you want to be in a plane that had no destination? This should be our attitude towards life as well. Do we want to live a life that is without a dream, without a clear destination?

We should know what we want to achieve in life and what we want to get out of it. Having the end goal in mind is very important because it determines where we will most likely end up. If a person does not have a dream to start with, does not know where he or she wants to go in life, then he or she will wander around aimlessly every day.

I have always been clear about my dream and what I want to achieve in life. I come from a small, humble town in Sarawak, Malaysia called Sibul. The people there generally live a very simple lifestyle. There is little luxury or excess to speak of. However, it is big in one thing: the can-do spirit. This spirit is pervasive everywhere in this otherwise quiet and unassuming town. The town is full of people who propel themselves forward by the power of big dreams and the sheer determination to materialise those dreams. They know what they want in life and they go for it wholeheartedly. Resilience is a given. If they fall, they get back on their feet and try again. Giving up is not an option. Being brought up in this environment has influenced my thinking and character quite significantly.

I was born into a simple, average family. Growing up, my life was never filled with luxury but it was filled with a lot of love and the practice of timeless values. My parents instilled in us a set of strong life values. They did not preach. They simply walked the talk. With this solid foundation having been built in us, we were well prepared to face and overcome the many challenges of life. We fully accepted the need for diligence and respect for others. We did not dwell on setbacks nor did we waste time complaining about them. When life dealt us a blow, we chose to face it head on.

As a kid and then a teenager, I wasn't really pro-actively thinking about what I wanted to do in life. At that time, all I knew was to live one day at a time. I woke up every day, had breakfast and then went to school. After school, it was homework and sports. Dinner and TV would follow, and then the day would end.

I only started to think about dreams and goals when I was in secondary school. In secondary school, my schoolmates would share with me what they hoped to do in the future. I did not want to be left out and started to dream my own dreams too!

Initially, my dreams were wild and fantastic: I wanted to be a kung-fu master one day, and the next, a race car driver. After a while, the need to be practical took over; reality had begun to kick in. I was already in upper secondary school and needed to start thinking about university courses that would suit me.

Out of the blue, I started to explore the idea of studying medicine. That was a big dream, something that seemed beyond my reach. Nevertheless, a voice within, although it was a soft one, urged me to consider this option.

On hindsight and further analysis, I realized that my parents might have played a big role in shaping my dream of becoming a doctor. My paternal grandparents and intellectually impaired uncle were living with us when I was growing up. All three had various medical conditions that required close care and attention. My grandfather suffered from hypertension and diabetes and had had a disabling stroke. My grandmother had diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and Parkinson's disease, another disabling medical illness. My uncle required special care.

My parents took up the full responsibility of taking care of all three despite the immense challenge that posed. Not only did they take care of them, they took immaculate care of them. I was really touched by the unconditional love, care and concern that they showered on my grandparents and uncle. It was simply unbelievable. They had to work during the day. At night, they had to take care of my grandparents and uncle as well as my three siblings and me. Guess what? Never once did they complain about the situation. They just took up the challenge and gave of their very best. In addition, my father took the trouble to visit the library to learn from medical books how to take better care of them. At that time doing anything of the kind was unheard of. I was deeply touched by my parents' commitment to their family.

Apart from being impressed by my parents' dedication, I was also beginning to realize the importance of good health and how meaningful it would be to be a medical doctor. As a doctor, I would have the opportunity to help patients on a personal and meaningful basis. Every patient hopes for good medical care, and every care giver tries to give the best care possible to every patient. I told myself how wonderful and satisfying it would be if I could become a doctor and help people in need. And so I began dreaming about being a doctor.

Upon graduation from secondary school, I left my hometown to go overseas to continue my education. My parents decided to send me to Melbourne, Australia. I was very fortunate to be able to go to Australia. It was a very popular place for tertiary education among Malaysians who wanted to send their children overseas to study due to the high quality of its education system. One cool, breezy Monday morning, I embarked on my journey to this great country for the next phase of my life.

The experience exposed me to some amount of emotional upheaval. I had mixed emotions about leaving home to study so far away. I was sad, excited, apprehensive and hopeful all at once. Sad that I was leaving my family behind – it was the first time I had left home to go anywhere so far away and for so long. I cried continually -- see, men do cry! I missed home so much and no words can describe the longing I felt to be with my family.

Being in a completely foreign and unfamiliar environment, I was also very fearful and worried. I was clueless as to

how to live my daily life in this new place. I simply had no idea. I was at a loss about what to do. It was a tough time for me. In the end I had no choice but to find my way around as soon as possible. Call it the need to survive!

The first year was absolutely critical. It was the year that would decide what I was going to do for the larger part of the rest of my life. I went to Australia with the dream of entering medical school. It was an immense, almost impossible task that I had set for myself. Who was I? I was a simple nobody from a small town in a remote area of the island of Borneo. What did I want to do? Enter medical school? Was I kidding myself? It appeared to be something that was completely beyond me and my capability at that time. I did not have a strong foundation in English, which was essential as every subject in university was taught in English. If I wanted to do medicine, I not only had to pass all the subjects, I had to excel in them and be in the top five per cent of students in the whole state or country for that year.

Despite this overwhelming pressure and the immense challenge, I kept my dream alive. In my mind, it was clear to me that medicine was what I wanted to do at the end of the year. There was no other road that I wanted to take. I had burnt all my bridges by applying only for medical courses in different universities. Had I failed to achieve the necessary scores, there was no other course to fall back on to say later that I had been to university. So I worked really hard. I was focused. I made sacrifices. I monitored my progress. I made the necessary adjustments. And then I went for my final examination. Much to my great joy,

I aced all the subjects and came out top of my batch. I was so completely overjoyed that I did not know how to celebrate the great news! My dream had come true!

I was glad that I had stuck to my dream. I could have given up in the face of the huge challenges I had faced at the beginning of the year. Had I gone through pre-university without a clear dream, I would probably have chosen the easy way out and opted for an easier course.

Doesn't this sound familiar? A lot of us tend to go with the flow and choose the easy path when things get difficult because we do not know what we want, and had no idea what our goal was when we started out. It is only logical. If we do not know what we want, we are not going to make ourselves face and overcome the challenges that are bound to come our way. Trying to overcome challenges is not easy, and the mission is often painful. However, if we know what we want, and want it badly enough, we will do the necessary to cross every hurdle in our path.



So, before you start anything, set a goal and then go for it! We only live once.



It is not easy, but it can be done

My pre-university year was a huge challenge. I was competing with very bright students from so many other countries – Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia. They seemed much better prepared and better equipped than I was; many of them came from big cities that boasted first-class education systems. In addition, students from Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong had been studying and speaking English from childhood. I came from a non-English speaking background which made my learning curve extremely steep indeed. However, I did not give up. Instead, I was conscientious, and put up a good fight. I made sure that I mastered my work really, really well.

Despite feeling apprehensive and hopeless at first, I made a firm resolution and commitment to myself. I told myself that I wanted to enter medical school and I was going to achieve that no matter what. As you might guess, I was under tremendous stress because I really did not know how to achieve the impossible! I became an ostrich and hid myself from the fear and worry. I persisted in achieving my dream, however, and put in all the necessary hard work and made all the necessary sacrifices. The dream was etched in my mind as if written in stone.

In the early part of the year, I took the initiative to approach the school counsellor to seek advice on how to do well in my studies. She sensed that I was rather anxious and stressed out, and advised me not to be too hard on myself. She suggested that I take it easy and take one step at a time. I appreciated her kindness and understood her rationale for advising me in this way. However, I had a feeling that that approach would not work well for me. Indeed, if I had adopted a more relaxed approach, I would not have got to where I am today. I had to make a choice between the two, 'humane' versus 'tough' approach. I could have conveniently taken the easy way out and relaxed my pace, but after considering all the factors, I chose the 'tough' approach. It was clear to me that I had to put in the hard work and long hours and make some sacrifices to make my dream a reality. The responsibility was mine. Nobody else was going to realize my dream for me.

Over the next few months, I worked closely with my friends, teachers and family members. I checked with

the teachers regularly on my progress in school and on my performance. They were very helpful and gave me all the necessary support and guidance I needed during that extremely challenging time. Their input has left a positive impact on my life.

I learnt from this experience that if you are determined and clear about what you want to achieve in life, you will get the necessary support and resources to achieve your goals. There will always be people who will feel your positive energy and lend you a helping hand. That is the law of nature, I believe. You will be surprised by how wonderful some of your loved ones and friends can be!





Success awaits you if you genuinely want it

From that point onwards, I became very goal-driven and fully believed in living life my way. Isn't this how we order our food or buy our clothes? When you order your food or buy

clothes, do you choose something that you do not like? Do you simply take things offered to you or do you pick something based on what you want or like? When we care about the outcome, we make the decision ourselves. When the outcome does not matter to us, choice is not an issue. Obviously, there will always be people who will not be bothered about some things in life. If that is their approach, there is nothing much that can be done. At the end of the day, it is all really up to the individual.

In life, it is often not just how much effort you want to put in to make a dream come true. It is also about whether or not you are willing to make sacrifices in order to make your dream come true. A lot of people think that if they just put in more effort and time, they will be able to achieve their goal. Unfortunately, life does not work this way. Frequently, apart from the additional effort and time needed, a certain level of making sacrifices is required too. Sometimes you just have to give in order to gain. When people fail to take this into consideration and things do not turn out the way they want them to, they become disillusioned and disappointed. The degree of success we

enjoy is more often than not determined by the extent to which we are willing to make sacrifices, and not just the effort we are willing to invest in the endeavour.

Ask yourself: Do you have a dream? If you do, how far are you willing to go to achieve it? Are you willing to take action? Are you willing to work hard? Are you willing to make sacrifices? Do you have the necessary determination and persistence to reach your destination? How far are you from realising your dream now? Do you think there is a real chance that your dream will materialise within the given time? Only you can answer these questions. Be honest with yourself even though the answers may be painful.

Remember, a dream without any action remains just a dream; only dreams accompanied by real action and sheer persistence will materialise!

So, what are you waiting for? Stand up and chase after your dream.

Words of wisdom:

*All our dreams can come true if we
have the courage to pursue them.*

~ Walt Disney ~

How badly do you want it?

Taking the first step

A lot of things are possible in life. The only question is how badly you want something. If you want something so badly that you cannot live without it, trust me, you will do whatever it takes to make it come true. Having said that, taking the first step is never as easy as saying you are going to do it. Many of us face great inertia in going beyond our comfort zone and daily routines to venture into the unknown and unfamiliar. The unknown somehow always has a mysterious feel to it. We never really know what to expect exactly. Sometimes, our mind starts to run wild and comes up with every possible worst-case scenario. This stops a lot of us from taking action. Why do you think that there are many aspiring entrepreneurs who are stuck in their current state and never become real entrepreneurs in the end? Our mind is a very powerful part of us that can take us to all sorts of places. It can carry us to great heights but it can also drop us to abysmal depths. Managing our mind can be an art in itself.

Back in the mid 2000s, I was guilty of neglecting my physical health with the common excuse of having an extremely busy schedule. I was indeed living a super-herctic lifestyle at that time. I worked in the clinic during the day, seeing between fifty to seventy patients from morning to afternoon. Then I would have a quick dinner before rushing off for my MBA class at night. On nights I did not have a class, I would work in a night clinic. Weekends were usually spent on MBA group assignments

and discussions. I could hardly breathe; I thought I was going to die of a heart attack pretty soon. It was not conducive to healthy living.

At the height of my fatigue and stress I made up my mind to take charge of my health. I told myself, "If I do not bother to invest one hour of my time every day in my health, then I seriously should not blame anyone or anything for my poor health in the future. I love my family deeply and I want to be around to be able to take care of them. I need to be in good shape to be able to take care of them." I was fully responsible for my health and the way that I lived my life. I sat down and started to draft an exercise plan. That was the beginning of my lifestyle of regular exercise.

I still remember vividly the first evening I went for a short brisk walk. I asked my brother to join me. My wife reminded me not to jog for more than 100m for fear that I would collapse from a heart attack! I was that unhealthy and unfit then. You would not want to know my body weight at the time! Let's continue to keep it a secret. That first brisk walk was my first step, and I can tell you it was a big step forward. That brisk walk was a lot more significant and important than all the other exercise sessions that followed. As the saying goes, the first step is the hardest, and I totally agree! Taking the first step requires a certain level of vision, commitment and desire to achieve something. The first step forward wins half the battle.

I wanted good health badly at that time. I was willing to put in the effort and time to make it happen. I was willing to sacrifice some things in order to achieve it: time for TV, reading and social outings. A lot of people do not start a regular exercise regime simply because they do not want it badly enough. It is more to a good-to-have for them, not a must-have. When something is not a must-have, do you think it is likely that anyone would make sacrifices for it? Very unlikely!





I did it!

As I embarked on the regular brisk walking and jogging regime, my fitness improved significantly. I was able to jog a few kilometres a time at a comfortable pace. Towards the end of the first year, my mind started to explore the possibility of participating in a race. That was something that I had never thought possible and had never bothered to think about before. All of a sudden, I was tempted to register for the end-of-year Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon. However, as much as my mind was keen on the idea, my physical body was not quite ready for the challenge yet. Still, one Sunday morning, due to a surge of adrenalin I did register online for the race. That was it! I was going to participate in the race. I enrolled in the half marathon, knowing very well that a full marathon would probably shorten my life!

For the next couple of months, I picked up the pace of my training and prepared myself mentally for the very first race in my life. Finally the day came, and I was there bright and early to take my place at the starting line. The race began in a beautiful part of Singapore near Collyer Quay. I started running and was soon enjoying myself. It was really quite cool! I managed to finish within a decent time and found myself still very much alive! I was absolutely thrilled that I had finished the race, or more importantly, had won the challenge. I had done it!

From then onwards, I became addicted to exercise. When I stopped running for a few days in a row, I could feel the withdrawal symptoms, like a drug addict! I felt really fantastic after every run; it was the perfect way to relieve the stress brought on by work.

I didn't stop at that first race. Because I love challenges, I went on to run in a full marathon the following year. That was a significant milestone in my life. In the past, whenever people had mentioned marathons, I would let their words go into one ear and out the other. I had never understood why people put themselves through this kind of torture. I used to think that they were all mad. I no longer think that, of course.

I thought I was satisfied and would stop at the full marathon, but I did not. I was reading The Straits Times one day and came across an advertisement for a mini-triathlon. I could run. I could swim. I could cycle. Put the three together, and it meant I could participate in a triathlon. It sounded logical, but combining all three was

a totally different story. The level of speed, coordination and fitness required was something that I had never attempted before. I felt it was beyond me but somehow I was attracted to the idea. Having the option of a mini category also made it less daunting and more manageable. I asked my wife for her opinion but she killed the idea before it even had a chance to breathe! I had a feeling that I was not the only one who was not ready for the race. I put down the newspaper but picked it up again shortly after. I repeated this a few times during the day. Then, I went to the computer and signed up for it online! I kept the news from my wife until it was closer to the race. As expected, I got a big scolding from her. So you see why taking the first step can be harder than it appears.

I really had no idea what competing in a triathlon would feel like. I did not even know what to wear for the race, nor did I own a bike! I had to go to Carrefour the night before the race to buy a \$100 mountain bike!

On the day of the race, I wore my usual swimming trunks with my running top and shorts and went to the venue. I felt completely out of place among the other participants who were geared up in the coolest tri-suits. I looked more like a bike-repair person. I think I was the only one in swimming trunks, and I know I looked completely ridiculous, but I just went for it. I cast off my pride and rushed for the sea. I swam as fast as I could. That was the very first time that I had swum in the sea! I used up so much of my energy during the swim that I was panting hard as I ran to get my bike for the bike run. I almost died! The ordeal did not stop there. Cycling on a \$100 mountain bike in a triathlon was a real challenge. I was cycling to

the best of my ability but the bike just refused to pick up speed. Everyone raced past me, leaving me behind like the tortoise in that children's story. I kept at it, of course, and finally completed the race. I had started out aiming not to come out last, and to my pleasant surprise, I ended among the 60th percentile, meaning that I had ended ahead of forty per cent of the participants.

There you go. Taking the first step was the hardest part of my journey into marathons and triathlons. That initial hurdle has been crossed, and I am now a regular participant in these grueling races. In fact, I went all the way from mini triathlon to Sprint Distance, then Olympic Distance and finally Aviva Ironman Triathlon in 2010! The feeling was just remarkable.

As you can clearly see from this, a lot of things are possible in life. All you need to do is to take one step at a time; however, it must start with a dream or goal. You must want to do something, and do it badly enough before you can make it happen. Why on earth would anyone start running a marathon without having dreamt about it in the first place? Nobody would entertain such an idea considering the amount of training required and the physical



pain that would have to be endured. Once there is a dream, all you need to do is to pace yourself appropriately, give yourself enough training, and you can make it come true.



I was once a person who rarely exercised. I was as idle as one could possibly get. Needless to say, I had a big spare tyre around my waist! However, all this changed the day I decided to take good care of my health. With the help of strong determination, proper planning and sheer persistence, I was able to complete in not only a full marathon but also many triathlons subsequently. The journey will not stop here. There are many more races to conquer!



The 100m brisk walk back in 2006 still seems like a fresh memory to me but I have since moved on to multiple long distance duration races every year!

Is it worth it?

Success does not come only from incremental effort and time investment. Quite often, the need to make sacrifices is required to take a person to greater heights and closer to a cherished dream. “No pain, no gain” is certainly true. Let me give some examples here. When I went to Australia to further my studies, I had to leave my beloved family behind for the first time in 18 years. That was a huge sacrifice to me and my family but we all knew that it was necessary. Another example is when we choose to marry or have children; we may lose a certain amount of personal freedom. That is a sacrifice as well. However, we need to look at the value of our dream or goal. In the case of marriage or having children, the value one gets from them often way exceeds the sacrifices made.

I first began appreciating this concept after coming across a great book called *‘Thick Face, Black Heart’* by Chin-Ning Chu. This is one of the best books that I have ever read in my life. It has left a very deep mark on me. According to the author, it is not so much the extra effort but rather the degree to which one is willing to make sacrifices that determines how far one will go in life. Everybody knows how to put in a little bit of extra effort, yet a lot of the time we seem to reach our limits all too soon. We only have 24 hours in a day. We simply cannot go beyond that. We can add one more hour of work to our already busy life, may be even more. But, can we add thirty hours more to our day to get the extra result? NO. That is the reality. When I started my exercise regime, I also had to sacrifice an hour each day for jogging. When I decided to take part

in marathons and triathlons, the sacrifice I had to make was greater. Now, ask yourself: are you willing to make the necessary sacrifices that will realize your dream?

Do I today think the sacrifices I made in order to achieve my dream of a healthy lifestyle was worth it? Definitely! First of all, I feel a lot more energetic and refreshed. I also have the confidence that I am able to do more in life. I am generally in a better mood. When I am in a better mood, the people around me start to benefit from it too! The benefits are proving to be way beyond the small sacrifices that I made long ago.

You never know how you can benefit your loved ones!

Although my determination and perseverance did not really influence my wife into joining a triathlon, it did have a positive impact on her life too. After graduating from medical school, she had worked in different hospitals and clinics in Singapore. She was not really thinking of specializing in any particular area. It was routine clinical work day in, day out for her. This started to change after she started work at a palliative medicine centre. She found that palliative medicine was highly meaningful and interesting. She could help a lot of terminally-ill patients to improve their symptoms and well-being and deal with some end-of-life issues including finances, family and social matters. Her passion started to grow and she started to ponder the option of specializing in palliative medicine. However, going through the specialist training program can be a highly stressful and exhausting. One has to take multiple stressful examinations, go through

different hospital postings, study hard, work hard. So she was hesitant about taking on the challenge knowing the huge commitment and the sacrifices that would be required. She was worried that she could not spend much time with the kids and me. However, knowing very well where her passion lay, I strongly encouraged her to follow her dream and consider this path. I told her, "If this is where your passion lies, and you feel a great sense of satisfaction doing it, just go ahead and do it. True, it is going to involve a lot of hard work and sacrifices but at the end of the day, you can say to yourself that you have lived a beautiful and fulfilled life. If you miss this great opportunity, there will forever be a big vacuum in your life." After much persuasion and convincing, she agreed to bite the bullet and pursue her dream of becoming a palliative medicine specialist.

The journey is not that different from preparing for a marathon or triathlon. She needed to make a lot of sacrifices in terms of family time and social outings especially. In fact, she needed to settle for a part-time job in the later part of her studies simply because her work load had become really heavy. However, she took on every challenge with a positive attitude.

I am not saying that it was I who caused her to take up the challenge. The dream began with her, and she had to have the persistence and resilience to endure the hardship. However, I believe my courage and persistence in life had provided some kind of inspiration to her and had aided her in making her decision to pursue her dream.



Keep running and you will win!

Life can be like an Ironman Triathlon. It is a huge commitment physically, mentally and emotionally. It calls for a clear goal (finish the race, finish it within a time goal, finish in a certain position), strong determination, discipline and commitment. In a race, pacing is particularly critical. There is no point in pushing ourselves so hard at the start that it causes fatigue that prevents us from reaching the finishing line.

If a triathlete has no clear goal before she begins, the race is going to be pretty painful and tedious for her. Every single step will be a struggle, and she will hate the whole process and find it completely meaningless. On the contrary, if she begins with a clear goal, she will be focused from the start and more likely to find the true value of the race. No matter how tedious she finds the triathlon, reaching her goal will be worth it. The exhilaration at the end of the race will be so uplifting that she will probably want to

do it again! If there is no goal, do you think anyone who finishes a race would be completely happy? What has he run for? Do you think he would want to do it again?

Similarly in life, if you are clear about your goals, you will find the journey an enjoyable one. You will set off on it energetically, making your way steadily towards your destination. So, if you already have a good start, keep running, and you will see success waiting for you at the finishing line!

Do not become your own worst enemy. Very often, we sabotage ourselves even before we have a chance to go out there and put up a decent fight. In life, competition is expected and should be welcomed as a means to keep improving ourselves. However, if we do not give ourselves a good chance, if we don't even dare to dream, then we really do not deserve to win at all. At the very least, put up a good fight.

Words of wisdom:

*Gold medals aren't really made of gold.
They're made of sweat, determination and
a hard-to-find alloy called guts.*

~ Dan Gable ~



It is all right to take a break

“Guess what? It’s summer break now, I’m coming over to Singapore for a holiday!” your friend from overseas tells you over the phone, getting really excited about the vacation.

“Dad, the school holidays will begin soon. Where are we going this year?” your daughter asks you with bright eyes. “It’s year end, I’m going to take a short break before starting the New Year. It’s time to reward ourselves after a full year of hard work,” your colleague tells you over lunch with a smile on her face.

Take a break!

Taking a break can be as simple as getting away from your normal routine; it could be going for an overseas holiday, staying at home doing things you enjoy, hanging out with people you like or just sleeping in. The choices are plenty and they differ from individual to individual. The fact is

everyone needs a break every now and then!

Some people get so excited about going for a holiday that you can see 'rainbows' in their eyes! Others, however, feel guilty about taking a break. Why should this be? I do not believe that



anyone should feel guilty about taking a break. In fact, taking a break is an opportunity to reflect on ourselves before we move on to the next step in life. It can bring us a clearer and refreshing perspective. Sometimes a short pause in life can have a major impact on how we live the rest of our life – it could even be the turning point in our life!

Exhausted!

After my pre-university year, I went to medical school as planned and started to train to become a doctor. The medical course was demanding, and it really pushed every student to the limit in terms of persistence and stamina. There was so much knowledge to pick up, understand, memorize and apply.

About halfway through my course, I lost my momentum and became disillusioned. I was on the verge of giving up and was really unsure whether I could continue the journey. I was pondering on the issue for months and I

spoke to many people about the dilemma. Then it suddenly dawned on me that I had set off on this journey wanting to become a doctor. How could I just drop out midway then and give up my dream of becoming a doctor? That was just unacceptable. At the same time, I could really feel fatigue bearing down on me and I wondered how much longer I could last. I was in a very difficult position. There seemed no way out for me.

Then, a wild idea popped into my head. Why not take a break and then try again? So instead of giving up my dream of becoming a doctor, I decided to take a year off. It may appear to be a straightforward and logical decision but it was a lot tougher than that. In Asian society, taking a break in the middle of one's university studies in a foreign land was frowned upon. It was nothing to be proud of nor was it anything to share openly with strangers. There was a lot of negative criticism of people doing this. It was considered a 'loser's' decision, something only a person who could not make it in life would do. This cultural expectation placed a heavy burden on me. However, I knew that my determination in reaching my destination had never changed. The only issue was that I needed rest. If I did not take a break just then, chances were that I would probably not complete the course.

Perhaps you are wondering how my parents reacted to my decision. Well, they were very understanding and helpful from beginning to end. Initially, they tried to help by looking for ways that would help me continue my medical training without taking a year off. However, none of the proposed solutions worked out. After a while, they

realized that I really just needed a break. So they respected and supported my decision to take a year off. I am still grateful for the unconditional and enduring support my parents showed me during my pursuit of my goals.

A 'clean' break

During my precious one-year break, I did quite a number of things. I read a lot of books on various topics ranging from management to hobbies. I would read approximately two to three books a month. The intensive reading enriched my life significantly. It enabled me to broaden my perspective on life, and I learned a lot from the wisdom shared by others. Much of my later thinking was moulded during that period of time.

One of the books that had a huge influence in my life was *'Thick Face, Black Heart'* by Chin Ning-Chu. The author imparted a lot of wisdom in that book. The book inspired in me courage to pursue my dreams and determination to strive for my goals in life. Chin-Ning Chu in her book guides readers on how to deal with challenges, criticism and negative distractions that everyone faces in life. I absolutely love the book and still have it on my bookshelf today.

Apart from reading ferociously, I also took up some part-time jobs such as tracking the number of vehicles on the road for survey companies and cleaning in a large factory. I enjoyed pushing the cleaning machine around the factory floor every day – it was quite a cool machine. I enjoyed those jobs as they allowed me to experience

life from a different perspective. I also found time to take short holidays touring different parts of Australia. At that time, I just wanted to go out and try things that I might not otherwise get the chance to experience.

After a full year of recharging myself, I was ready to go back to medical school. I was refreshed in mind and body when I returned, and managed to get through the rest of the course smoothly. That one-year break had been a time to search for the 'real' me. It had also been a very good way to give myself some breathing space. It brought a much-needed pause in a hectic life so that I could revisit my situation and rest my body and mind before I continued with the next stage of life. The experience showed me that it was all right to take a break when one was truly tired and in need of rest. Taking a break is not a sin and it does not mean that one is a loser. As human beings, we are all subject to physical and mental constraints. All of us need to recharge from time to time in order to complete the journey in one piece. What is the point of pushing ourselves so hard that we fail to make it to the end? It is more important to pace ourselves accordingly in order to finish the journey and enjoy it at the same time. Sometimes, people go to the extreme of pushing themselves beyond their limits and end up missing out on the joy and fun of the journey itself.

Reaching the destination is essential but the journey is not any less important. So, if you feel that you are really exhausted and need to stop, it is completely all right to take a break from a hectic lifestyle. It is no big deal. In fact, it is crucial for long-term sustainability. If you want

to complete a long race, you need to pace and recharge yourself along the way. This is why they have water stations along the route of a marathon! Who says we must run from beginning to end in a marathon? A lot of participants alternate between running and walking. What matters is they get to the destination eventually!

Words of wisdom:

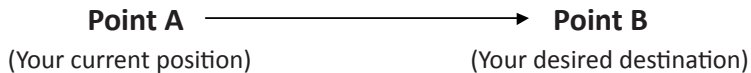
*Once in a while you have to take a
break and visit yourself.*

~ Audrey Giorgi ~

The art of reaching your destination

Contrary to popular belief, success does not usually occur by chance or coincidence. Success does not fall in our lap from the sky. If we rely on success 'happening' to us by pure chance, we will have to wait for a long, long time. You will occasionally hear of some fairy-tale story about someone attaining success out of the blue. As attractive as it may sound, it would be foolish of us to expect something similar to happen to us. Rather than indulging in daydreaming, it would be much more productive and realistic to map our journey to success.

Success does not have a fixed formula. There are countless ways for people to achieve their unique successes. Different businesses, different personalities, different industries and different environments command different formulae. However, there is a general pattern and a certain process to it. To illustrate:



You are now at Point A, and Point B is your desired destination. You need to ask yourself:

- What is the bridge between Point A and Point B?
Is it a straight path or is it a convoluted path?
- What do you need to do in order to get to Point B?
Are there hurdles along the way? How much effort is required?
- How long will you need to get there? What is the best-case scenario? What is the worst-case scenario?
- Are there ways to make this journey shorter, faster, easier and more productive? Is there someone who can help you assess this?
- Who are the people who can help you get there?
Your family? Your spouse? Your friends?
Your colleagues? Your mentor?
Professional consultants?

Getting to your destination successfully involves proper and careful planning. Without sound planning, you risk getting stuck halfway through the journey. This is when

having a macro view, or bird's eye view, of your situation is important. If you are able to see the big picture, you will be able to more or less predict some of the possible hurdles along the way and the paths available to take you there. When soldiers go into battle, they follow a game plan. When players are about to participate in a game, they follow a game plan. When surgeons have to perform surgery, they follow a surgical plan. What makes us different that we think we do not need a plan for our life? One common mistake is that we put the whole burden of achieving the goal on ourselves. This is totally unnecessary and can be highly inefficient and ineffective. There are many people around us who are able to give us a hand, especially those who are close to us, who care about us and who love us. These are the people we can work with to make the journey a lot more enjoyable and to achieve great success. Never be shy about sharing your dreams with them; you will be pleasantly surprised by the support that you can receive from them. When they really care about you, they will also want to see you succeed greatly in life.

We also need to be aware that we are not experts in everything. We may be very strong in investment but we may be lousy at risk management. We may be the best pianist but we may be clueless about nursing our health. We do not need to rely on ourselves for everything. Human beings are interdependent, so let's tap into the expertise of others to fill any gaps in our own abilities. If we are not a great financial planner, we can always engage the services of a professional planner to achieve the good results we expect and hope for.

There are many of us who, unfortunately, do not share our dreams with others for various reasons. One of the most common reasons is fear of embarrassment. It may sound ridiculous but it is very real. This is usually a reflection of how we feel about ourselves and our dreams. It shows that we are not really confident and proud of our dreams. This low self-esteem can potentially distort the way we perceive the true worth of our dreams. If we feel that our dream is laughable, do we think we would feel proud of the achievement once the dream is realized? We must learn to see ourselves in a positive way. As human beings, we are born equal. Some of us might be born into a harsher environment but that does not make us inferior in any way to our fellow human beings. Who is the best person to respect you other than YOU? If you do not respect yourself or take care of yourself, you can never expect anybody else to do so. The person who should take the most care of you is YOU! I strongly encourage you to take full responsibility to live a meaningful life. The choice is yours. You are at your own mercy! Be kind to yourself.



Criticism, take it or leave it!

Always believe in who you are and what you want to be in life. If somebody throws you negative criticism or comments, do not get upset. Instead, take a step back and examine the criticism closely. Does it make sense? Is it true? Is it destructive or is it constructive criticism? Does it have negative intention? Well, then it has absolutely zero value to you. Throw it into the dustbin IMMEDIATELY! Do not even bother to entertain it as you would just be wasting precious time and energy on something utterly worthless.

On the other hand, if it is positive and constructive criticism, welcome it whole-heartedly. Use it to your benefit. You should be very happy to know that someone cares enough to offer this criticism. Constructive criticism can be extremely beneficial as it can help you move closer to your success.

If you have clear goals in life, it will be easy to differentiate between constructive and destructive criticism. Constructive criticism tends to add value for you by making you a better person and moving you closer to your goal. Destructive criticism, on the other hand, does not add value for you, and tends to push you into 'negative territory'.

If you do not have a clear destination in life, you may find all criticism demoralizing, confusing and disturbing. You cannot assess them easily as there is no benchmark to measure against. You will be swayed from side to side by

these distractions as you journey along life.

My suggestion for handling criticism is to proactively ask for it rather than wait for it to come your way. How can you do that? Well, you can, for example, ask people who are close to you, such as family members or friends, to tell you one negative thing about you every week. Take the criticism gracefully, dissect and digest it, and make sure you get something useful and productive out of it. We cannot deny the fact that most of us are hesitant when it comes to inviting criticism. In our subconscious mind, criticism simply implies something negative and unpleasant. However, for our own benefit, we need to erase this common but faulty perception and view criticism as the beneficial input that it really is. So don't wait for it, ask for it! The more comfortable we are in inviting criticism, the better we will be at handling it. View it positively and get something good out of it!

Each of us has blind spots when it comes to how we view life, and they can blur our assessment of people and situations. We sometimes need others to attain proper perspective on life. This is where family and friends can come in to help us see ourselves from a different angle.

Are you a 'good' or 'bad' attacker?

Have you ever criticized others? What was their reaction? Why did you criticize them? Did you have good intentions or did you do it out of vengeance or pure frustration? How did you feel afterwards? Did you feel good or did you feel guilty? All of us have a part to play in improving the world

around us. If we feel that some people need to change for the better, we need to provide feedback in a constructive manner. If we choose to keep silent, things will stay the same. That would not make us responsible social beings. It is our duty to make things around us better.

In the act of giving constructive feedback, we need to bear in mind that the reaction from the recipients can be rather unpredictable. The wise will probably appreciate your gesture and thank you for your input. Some may be indifferent and treat it as a non-event. Others, however, can turn very nasty and aggressive towards you for your comments.

When you come across people who react aggressively or behave rudely when you offer criticism, it is more often than not that they have just raised their defences.



They are fearful of criticism. Often, instead of waiting for criticism, they 'attack' and criticize before others have a chance to do it. This gives them a false sense of security that they will now be spared criticism by others. Generally, the less confident a person is, the more likely he or she will think negatively about others, have a tendency to negatively 'attack' others and be potentially quite aggressive, especially if he or she feels threatened and belittled.



Conversely, if a person is genuinely confident and has healthy self-esteem, he or she will feel at ease in most surroundings, and will not have the compulsion to negatively 'attack' others or to show off. Such a person can generously praise others, feel good about him or herself, see others as equal, and give constructive feedback in a non-threatening manner. This person

displays confidence naturally. Having said that, there are also people who appear confident but who are merely hiding their insecurity underneath a confident exterior. They dress well and act smart so that others cannot see their 'real' selves. Well, the more people try to hide who they really are, the more it is going to show.

No success story is sweet to tell

Good values and principles cannot guarantee anybody success. However, if we live our life in alignment with timeless virtues and good values, our chance of attaining success will be comparatively higher. This is simply the law of nature. We reap what we sow. If we treat others with respect, chances are they will reciprocate with goodwill. If we treat others like dirt, they will not be that kind to us either.

Life is highly unpredictable business. Neither success nor failure is guaranteed. Instead of running away from these uncertainties, we should instead prepare ourselves and

be ready for any eventuality. Dealing with success should be rather easy and straightforward for most people. However, what is more important is to know how to deal with setbacks. If we know how to deal with the downside, we have in our possession one of the most critical skills for success in life. A person who can handle the downside effectively can only go in one direction: up, up and up. Conversely, if we only know how to deal with the upside, then we should be very, very worried! If we do not know how to deal with setbacks and failures, we are vulnerable and can easily collapse when they occur. Success without failure is success untested. In life, one is sure to face setbacks every now and then.

Generally, the more of failure we have tasted, the greater strength and resilience we eventually acquire. If something does not kill us, it just makes us stronger and tougher. If you take a good look at the successful people around you, you would notice that many of them went through a lot of hardship and unbelievably trying situations before they achieved success. They survived hardship! This is the spirit that we should all cultivate – it will take us far in life. No success story is sweet to tell. If you come across someone who has never failed before, who has always achieved success in life, be very reluctant to put all your money on him or her. That person's success may just be about to end.

There is a Chinese proverb that goes, "If you haven't gone through the chill of winter, how will you appreciate the fragrance of the plum blossoms?" Indeed, without hardship, one would never know how sweet the fruits of success are!

Words of wisdom:

It makes one a better person to have had hardships and to have overcome hardships and not to blame anybody else for one's mistakes.

~ Maureen Forrester ~

Part V

The art of
positive living

Are you half-full or half-empty?

Question: There is a glass of water on the table and the glass is half-filled. Do you see it as half-full or half-empty?

Your answer provides the clue as to whether you are an optimist or a pessimist. An optimist will see the glass as half-full, whereas a pessimist will see it as half-empty. Interesting, isn't it? The way we look at things is



very much shaped by our previous experience and by our personality. If you are an optimist, you tend to view things with an upbeat attitude. Life appears to be more joyful, fulfilling and positive for you. On the contrary, if you are a pessimist, you might feel that everything and everyone is against you! You feel that the world is not fair to you, and there will always be things to complain about. To you, life is just not as beautiful as others claim. Can you now see the impact of attitude on the perception of reality? So, shouldn't we adopt a positive and optimistic attitude and live a happy and beautiful life? Why suffer from the half-empty syndrome? It is a choice that we can make for ourselves. Make the wrong choice, and we suffer for the rest of our lives.

Being positive is a habit

Being positive does not come naturally. Instead, it is a habit that can be learned and adopted. We can instill and nurture this habit of thinking and feeling positive if we make a conscious effort to achieve it. Whenever we do something or meet someone, make an effort to look for positive attributes in him or her. If you look hard enough, you will find something worth your time! If you practise this, it will eventually turn into a habit, and you will see amazing results from the change in your attitude.

On the other hand, how do we manage the negative voice in our mind? I will not be surprised if everyone hears this negative voice from time to time. In fact, we hear it every day. “I can’t do this. It is too hard.” “I am going to fail this time.” “The interview is such a scary thought. I don’t think I will do well.” You could probably fill a book with all these negative responses.

The most important thing is to be aware of the way you think, and to be aware of what you are planting in your thoughts. Identify them and consciously eliminate them from your mind. This requires effort and persistence.

Spread the positive vibes!

Perhaps you have never noticed, but a positive attitude can really make a big difference to how your journey of life goes. Imagine there are two groups of people; one is a group of pessimists and the other is full of optimists. The optimists have a lot of fun and derive much joy out of

life. Because they have so much fun, they naturally spread positive vibes to all around them. The people around them catch these vibes and begin to feel and think positively as a result.

On the other hand, the pessimists look for reasons to view things in a negative light, and this causes every situation to become unpleasant. The negative vibes they send out spread to the people around them, and then they too begin to feel and think negatively. This group of people tends to turn something perfectly positive into something completely negative!

So, make the wise choice of being a positive-minded person for yourself and the people around you. You will also be able to achieve a lot more in life and be less burdened by worries and fear. You would be more daring to step out of your comfort zone and venture into the unknown.

Get yourself positively tuned!

In order to maintain a positive attitude in life, we need to get ourselves positively tuned. You will need to consciously cleanse your mind of all negative thoughts. Not only that, you will need to keep a good distance from people who are full of negative vibes. Try not to associate with them too much. I call this mental immunity which protects your mind from the toxic influences out there.

As you develop a positive attitude, you may influence pessimists to become optimists! That will be the ultimate

triumph! Do you know the best way to judge your “positiveness” – it is to measure the extent to which negative-minded people want to stay away from you! If you are full of positive vibes, you are usually not welcome among these people. So if you are not popular with negative people, fear not: you are on your way to success! If you notice that a lot of negative people have suddenly started talking to you, it is time for you to take a good look at yourself and see what is wrong with you!

Say it, mean it, act on it!

The world is full of mind-boggling changes. Due to the rapid development of technology, internet and globalization, the amount of information and the changes we are exposed to can be really overwhelming and unsettling. In this type of volatile environment, it can be a real challenge to stay positive all the time. However, it is exactly in this type of environment that staying positive is crucial. We need a solid foundation of positive attitude and strong personality to deal with the waves of negativity out there. When you stay positive, you act like a magnet that draws more and more positive vibes to you. Believe it or not, good things have a tendency to stay close to positive-minded and upbeat people. When you think, speak and act positively, you will be amazed by how the universe revolves around you in a positive way! It is hard to explain it logically or scientifically but this really happens. Things tend to turn out to your benefit. For example, you will be able to get a parking bay in a crowded car park when you need it; you will find a table in a good spot in a busy restaurant; you will have friendly strangers smiling at you

on the street...the rest is up to your imagination! So, be positive. Just think of it, say it, mean it, act on it, and you will see good results eventually!

Words of wisdom:

There is little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. The little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative.

~ W. Clement Stone ~

About the Author

Dr Tang Teck Nguong is just another man on the street. He comes from a small Foochow town in a remote part of Borneo Island called Sibul. Born into a loving and nurturing family, he enjoyed his childhood to the fullest. His family was not particularly well-to-do, but he was brought up on good values and principles. His family taught him to adopt a humble but harmonious lifestyle.

His primary and secondary schooling was in Sibul. Despite a heavy academic load, he pursued extra-curricular activities as well, and was anything but a bookworm. He knew exactly how to enjoy outdoor activities in school and at home. In short, he had plenty of fun growing up!

After completing his secondary school education, he left for Melbourne, Australia, the popular venue for Malaysian students seeking to continue their education, to study medicine. There, the country bumpkin that he was, he felt completely lost and helpless until some friends helped him to adapt to local life and environment.

Very soon, he was immersed in his studies, and managed to secure a place at Monash Medical School. Not only did he achieve his ambition of studying medicine in Australia, he also met a gorgeous woman who later became his wife. He completed his medical studies in 1998 and decided to work in Australian hospitals for a year after graduation, while his wife worked in Singapore. That one year of working experience in Australia had a very positive impact

on him. He was very impressed with his seniors for their support, patience and guidance. They were ever willing to impart their skills and knowledge to him.

Finally, it was time for him to be reunited with his beloved wife in Singapore. He came back and worked in both public and private healthcare institutions for a few years. However, something within constantly urged him to follow his heart and achieve more in life, and he enrolled in the Master of Business Administration course at the National University of Singapore Business School.

The MBA programme was great fun despite the hectic schedule and highly demanding workload. The learning experience was stimulating and enriching, and there was ample opportunity to interact with people from different industries and backgrounds. This phase of his life was not so much about picking up technical knowledge and skills but more about developing the right mind-set to be a successful businessman and leader.

Empowered with this new mind-set, he took a detour from full-time clinical practice to get involved in healthcare management and pharmaceutical work. He could never have imagined the fun he would have working in non-clinical fields. Of course, there was no turning back.

The exposure to and experience in the commercial world gave him the necessary courage to go even further, earning a reputation as a restless soul never satisfied with the status quo but always striving to do more, to climb higher.

The following may sound like an implausible reason but it does contribute to Teck Nguong's decision to start his own business. Foochows from Sibü are highly entrepreneurial in nature. A large proportion of the population in Sibü are businessmen. It is in their blood to start their own business. Growing up in this environment seems to have given him the inclination to start his own business.

It is still early days but knowing his strong determination and never-say-die attitude, his future in business looks pretty rosy indeed.