



*A 'brainkrapt'
succeeds*



A ‘brinkrupt’ succeeds

I grew up ‘brinkrupt’.

I struggled with studies and failed miserably in my examinations, scoring as little as 22 marks for Mathematics and 19 marks for English. My primary school report book is spotted with red marks.

My ‘brinkruptcy’ was not unexpected, considering my early childhood experiences. My family, even though not officially bankrupt, was extremely poor. My mother had to take on two jobs – as a school cleaner in the day and as an illegal food hawker at night, selling bread with the help of my two sisters, who never went to school. In spite of this, meals at home usually consisted of nothing more than rice porridge with soy sauce, or some pickled vegetables.

The major reason for my family’s poverty was my father. He had come from China to Singapore in search of a better life but ended up working as a *coolie* at the docks. The meagre wage he earned was largely ‘taxed’ by triad gangs, spent on alcohol and lost at gambling.

As I was to discover many years later, after my father died when I was at first year university, he also had another family in China and he kept sending them money – to build houses! – even whilst his immediate family in Singapore struggled for survival.

It was also only after my father's death that I understood why, of all his children, he treated me the most badly, as if I was his jinx.

I was given the least pocket money, the least clothes, no toys and not even a pair of slippers. When I was seven years old, I had to sell my prized possession – a champion fighting spider that I had caught – in order to buy myself a pair of slippers.

The one thing I had plenty of was my father's canings. Whenever he came home drunk or after having lost money at gambling, he would cane his children mercilessly. At times, he would strip us naked and hang us by a ceiling hook before inflicting his cane with all his might, until his energy was spent and our skins had split.

Only my younger brother, The Little Emperor, whom my father loved dearly, was spared the cane. On one occasion, after listening to a lie from The Little Emperor, my father took a bunch of smouldering joss sticks and poked them into my face.

So not only was I abused by my father but I was sabotaged by my younger brother as well. How could I develop any interest in studies?

I write to share my extreme difficult circumstances not because I think they are special, but because they are commonplace.

In the 40 years since I went through those rough and tough times, Singapore has progressed to become a developed and affluent society. Yet a recent newspaper report revealed that there are still close to 120,000 families living in poverty – in some cases where the children had to drink tap water to fill their stomachs, like I used to do.

And 3 percent of Singapore children continue to drop out from school each year without completing secondary education. The percentage may be small, but they translate to huge numbers.

Yet this is in Singapore where the overall statistics are favourable. In other, lesser developed countries, the number of children who struggle with education – and with life – are much greater.

My story is not all gloomy, however. I managed to climb out of my poverty trap and overcome my ‘brainkructy’. I achieved excellence and success – in studies, career, entrepreneurship and other life’s challenges – in ways that I never imagined was possible.

Thus, I share my story in the hope that it might inspire at least some people to believe that they can succeed in life no matter what their present circumstances.

More importantly, I share the secret of my success – a life skills model called PRAISE that I developed from the study of strategy whilst in the navy. PRAISE provides the SUCCESS 6 Formulas:

- ❑ **Set the Prizedream.** This will initiate the process of change and lead you to discover a lifetime CHANGE formula.
- ❑ **Use internal Rules.** When you are guided by your own internal rules, you learn to think out of the box. This gives you a lifetime CREATIVITY formula.
- ❑ **Conduct Analysis.** Examine the factors that are for or against you and identify the higher cause that drives you. This is your lifetime PASSION formula.
- ❑ **Cultivate Invincibility.** Acquire the virtues that lead to invincibility. These give you a lifetime FULFILMENT formula.
- ❑ **Execute the Strategy.** Learn from your failures. Turn setbacks into opportunities and weaknesses into strengths. This ongoing process equips you with a lifetime LEARNING formula.

- ❑ **Sustain Excellence.** Achieve it not once or twice, but over and over again in a cycle of success unlimited. Acquire a lifetime EXCELLENCE formula. And...

Success shall be yours, without limits.

Scholars' Secrets

This book is a companion to another book titled *Scholars' Secrets*, which caters more specifically to those seeking to achieve excellence and success in academic pursuits and the life beyond.

Scholars' Secrets has a summary of this book, a discussion of study and examination techniques as well as sharings of experiences by scholars and top students from some of the world's best universities.

The book closes with *Famous failures*, a chapter featuring people who succeeded in life despite having little or no formal education.

Even though this book and *Scholars' Secrets* focus on success in studies, the wider focus has to be on success in life. PRAISE imparts life skills that will help you achieve this wider success.

PRAISE books

For an in-depth study of PRAISE, I recommend my other book, *Rough Life Rich Life*. This is a reference book that discusses each of the concepts in detail, with illustrations from my personal life and the lives of other great achievers.

Another series of books looks at how the greatest men and women in history – I call them PRAISE Champions – all lived by principles

similar to those of the PRAISE model. They come from all cultural backgrounds and achieved extraordinary success in all areas of human endeavour – conquests and politics, science and inventions, the arts, humanitarian work, and so on.

The first book, *Benjamin Franklin – A bright spark!* has drawn high praises from academics, scholars and fans of Franklin, many of whom felt that the PRAISE model gave interesting and important new insights into the reasons for his greatness.

Roy Goodman, Curator for Printed Materials at the American Philosophical Society (which Franklin founded in 1743) and President of The Friends of Franklin, Inc, wrote in his Foreword:

“As America and the rest of the world celebrate the 300th birth anniversary of Franklin, there will be many books, conferences, exhibitions... However, there may not be a tribute as valuable as Benjamin Franklin: A bright spark!”

Ralph Archbold, member of a US Federal Commission appointed by President George W. Bush and Congress to oversee the celebrations of Benjamin Franklin’s 300th birthday, wrote:

“I have never found a book as important as this... Every person should read it and, for the sake of their future, every parent should make sure their children read it.”

Soulprints

We may never become as great as some of these PRAISE Champions. Yet all of us can leave our imprints by making a difference to the lives of the people we encounter. When we touch people’s lives in a deep and profound way, we leave imprints on their soul.

These may be called ‘soulprints’. My mother, despite being an uneducated, illiterate woman, left me many soulprints through her love, sacrifices and wisdom. In the same way, all of us can leave soulprints in the lives of the people we touch.

You may read more of my life story *Soulprints I – BreakThrough*. This covered my difficult childhood, growing up in extreme poverty and being badly abused by my father, to the time I left school. This was the period I broke free from my cycle of despair.

This book is thus also an extension of *Soulprints I*, for it covers my experiences at university and during post-graduate studies, as well as my corporate career and entrepreneurship.

Red marks to flying colours is therefore not a book in isolation. It forms part of a larger collection of books that will help you unlock your potential and overcome the difficulties and challenges of life in order to achieve excellence and success.

Congratulations for having this book in your hand. Your process of transformation has begun. In school, as well as in life, may you pass with flying colours!

GEORGE TAN

17 November 2006

Lifetime EXCELLENCE formula

Action

Success

Habit

Character

Perseverance

*Excellence leads to success...
and greater success.*





Sustain Excellence

Success – and failure – begins in the mind.

The great modern artist, Pablo Picasso, said: “*He can who thinks he can, he can’t who thinks he can’t.*”

Henry Ford, the first to apply assembly-line manufacturing to produce affordable automobiles, put it this way: “*Think you can, think you can’t, either way you’ll be right.*”

In other words, if you think that you will succeed, you will; if you think that you will fail, you also will.

What are the chances of success if you set out to do something you have never done before? The answer may surprise you. According to research by psychoanalyst Karen Horney, people who embark on new tasks succeed 95 percent of the time!

The trouble is, most people don’t even try. Then they develop a sense of failure and hence, a feeling of low self-esteem. In reality, they had not failed because they had not made any attempt in the first place. How can you fail at something that you did not do? Failure not only begins in the mind, but stays there!

If you believe you can succeed at something, and you work towards it, your chances of success are very high!

A lot has been said and written about the power of the mind. With mind-power, you are supposed to be able to lose weight, quit smoking, recover from cancer, climb mountains, grow your business, attract the opposite sex and do all sorts of fantastic things.

Almost everyone who has accomplished a great feat – climbing Mount Everest, crossing the Sahara Desert, reaching the North or South Pole – attributes it to mind-power or will-power. Physical strength alone was not sufficient to see them through.

Athletes now have mental coaches because they realise that having the right frame of mind is as crucial to winning a competition as having the body in peak condition.

Power of positive thinking

Normal Vincent Peale (1898-1993) was a church minister whose 1952 book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 186 consecutive weeks. It sold over 20 million copies.

Peale grew up with a strong inferiority complex and was, in his own words, 'shy to the extreme'. He was so lacking in confidence that his college professor one day said to him:

“How long are you going to be like this – a scared rabbit afraid of establishing its own voice? You better change the way you think about yourself. You better do it now before it’s too late!”

Peale later found a book by William James, a 19th century psychologist and he was struck by this statement: *“The greatest discovery of this generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.”*

Peale went on to make himself confident by acting confident, and talking about it.

Peale owes the success of *The Power of Positive Thinking* to the perseverance of his wife. He had received so many rejection slips from publishers that he threw the manuscript into the waste paper basket and forbade his wife from removing it. The next day, his wife took the entire waste paper basket to another publisher, who finally accepted the book!

Pygmalion Effect

In some instances, such as in teacher-student or boss-employee relationships, even how other people think of you can affect your performance. If they believe you will do well, chances are you will. And if they believe you will do badly, chances are you also will.

This is called the *Pygmalion Effect*, named after the book, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, by Prof Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. In a 1968 study, the Harvard researchers made a group of students sit for an IQ test and then told teachers that 20 percent of the students showed great potential for intellectual development.

In reality, the students were chosen randomly. But because their teachers were led to believe that they were intellectually superior, these students significantly improved their scores when they sat for a second IQ test eight months later.

The effect works even with rats. In a 1971 experiment, Rosenthal told a group of students that he developed a new breed of super-intelligent 'maze-bright' rats that could run mazes quickly. He then gave 'maze-bright' rats to one group of students, and 'maze-dull' rats to another group.

As before, the rats were actually all normal rats selected randomly. However, the ‘maze-bright’ ran more quickly and more accurately in the maze than those labelled ‘maze-dull’.

The Pygmalion Effect has important implications. It means that the performance of students, workers and others depends not only on their abilities, but also on the way people in authority treats them.

Goethe, the German philosopher, said: “*Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be, and he will become as he can and should be.*”

In Search of Excellence

Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence*, came to the same conclusion when he investigated the practices and corporate cultures of successful American companies.

Peters notes that most companies set high targets for their employees and stretch these targets. It seems logical. However, companies that achieve excellence, such as Texas Instruments (TI), Tupperware and IBM, let their employees set their own objectives. Peters writes:

“We like to think of ourselves as winners... While IBM explicitly manages to ensure that 70 to 80 percent of its sales people meet quotas, another company works it so hard that only 40 percent of its sales force meets its quotas.

“With this approach, at least 60 percent of the sales people think of themselves as losers. They resent it and that leads to dysfunctional, unpredictable, frenetic behaviour. Label a man a loser and he starts acting like one.”

Likewise, parents often set high targets for their children by sending them for tuition classes as well classes in music, ballet, yoga, speech, drama, swimming, etc.

If the child copes well with these classes and enjoys them, the exposure they gain could be beneficial. But if the child has difficulty coping and ends up with mediocre performances, whether in studies or these extra classes, that child might feel like a failure.

Everyone needs confidence boosters. But children, especially, need to develop their confidence so that they learn to excel.

Self-talk

Our self-confidence is reinforced, on a daily basis, by the way to ‘talk’ to ourselves. We do this all the time. Most of us do it silently, in the mind, but some people do it aloud and are considered ‘mad’. Yet it is very natural to talk to ourselves.

What do you talk to yourself about?

Some people tell themselves, for example, that they are bad with numbers, or bad at finding directions, or bad at remembering faces.

This is their ‘self-talk’. For many people, the self-talk tends to be negative. For some, it gets really bad, like “*I can never succeed at anything*” or “*I always fail no matter how hard I try.*”

To achieve excellence and success, you must, first of all, be aware of your self-talk. And if you discover that you have a lot of negative self-talk, you need to change it. Start with small changes. Instead of saying “*I can never succeed*” change it to “*I can succeed if I set a lower target,*” or “*I can find someone to help me succeed*” ... and so on.

The two types of self talk can be two different ‘persons’ talking to you. Christians might call them angel and devil.

Here, we call them ‘champion’ and ‘robber’. The ‘champion’ is the one who encourages you and tells you that you can succeed if you persevere. The ‘robber’ is the one who discourages you and blocks your path to success.

Creativity

One of my friends shared this story about how she became a creative cook. Once, she met a man who boasted that his wife cooked different dishes every day. She was impressed. She thought the man’s wife must have been very creative.

Then one day, my friend decided that she would make a soup that she never made before. She went marketing, picked out whatever vegetables she fancied and made a soup. It turned out well.

Encouraged by her small success, she told herself: “*Everyday I shall cook a new dish.*” She changed her self-talk. Instead of telling herself that her friend’s wife was very creative (which implied that she wasn’t), she told herself that she could do it too.

Since that day, she had been cooking new dishes every day. It’s no big deal. She could do it. Anyone else can do it.

This is the power of the mind. It can turn you into a creative cook, an artist or anything else that you wish to become. Just do it. The artist Vincent van Gogh advised:

“If you hear a voice within you say ‘you cannot paint’, then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.”

And why not?

If some people can learn 12 languages, why can't you learn two or three? If some people can play five or six musical instruments, why can't you learn to play one? If some people can sing opera, why can't you sing a simple pop song?

If an 80-year-old can learn to use computers and the Internet, why are you 'too old to learn' when you are not yet 60?

One of my friends was surprised when her son came in first in class. Why should she be surprised? Somebody has to be first. So why not her son? Why does it have to be someone else?

You may want to ask the same questions about yourself. Somebody has to succeed and achieve excellence. Somebody has to be the best. Somebody has to be Number One.

Why does it have to be somebody else? Why not you?