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Hopelessly Saddled

"You must write about Arthur."

"Arthur?" I asked, disbelievingly.

"Yes, Arthur!"

"But... He's so..."

"Lost?"

"Yes. He is such a lost soul. He is full of self-pity and arrogance. He is easily distracted, he daydreams and he is lazy. What's more, he is crippled by exaggerated fear. He said he had exam phobia!"

"Exactly. Doesn't he remind you of someone in his younger days?"

"Who? Me? You told me not to focus too much on the past!"

"But the past does hold useful lessons. Can you remember how your army and navy instructors conducted training?"

"Well, they would demonstrate how the exercise ought to be done. They would also perform a 'negative demonstration' — they purposely did it the wrong way to show how it should not be done."

"Exactly! Without darkness, would you know what is light? Without sorrow, would you know what is joy? Without being lost, would you appreciate how vital it is to have a map that shows you the way?"

Arthur had walked into my office without an appointment, just past 9 a.m. He greeted me with a bright red windbreaker, brighter red motorcycle helmet and a red-striped tie. He wore strong colours, but I found his personality weak. He was obviously talented, yet he lacked focus and direction in life.

"I see that you like red."

"I actually like black," Arthur asserted, as if he needed to prove me wrong. *"But red reinforces my safety when I ride my motorbike."*

And red gives a strong impression when I go for a job interview."

He passed me his name card, which showed that he was a financial advisor with an insurance company.

"I hope you are not asking me to buy insurance..."

"Selling insurance is only temporary. It gives me some pocket money. You see, I have a lot of potential that is dying to come out. Unfortunately, I have yet to find the right company that will recognise this and develop my potential to the fullest."

Arthur pushed his thick resume towards me. He had straight A's all the way in school, but then his grades slid and he did not qualify for the local universities. Arthur called this a "mystery".

After his National Service, Arthur pursued a four-year degree in mass communications at an American university. His father was a retired investment banker. His mother, a fine arts graduate, had stopped work to care for her children. The family was well-off.

"How did you perform at university?"

"Average, I would say. But I managed to get the degree."

Arthur clearly had talents. After his studies, he started a jazz band as well as a one-man company designing websites. He also excelled in golf and oil painting. However, his application for a US Green Card was turned down, so he returned to Singapore.

Thus began a series of job hops. He went through eight jobs in three years, but none drew out that huge hidden potential in him. Once, he quit his job after four days. As Arthur explained, *"the boss was terrible! He could not adapt to my working style at all."* I thought it odd that an employee should expect his boss to adapt to him.

Arthur felt he should be his own boss, as only he could draw out his own potential. He convinced his father to give him \$50,000 to start his own web design company. Soon after, his church pastor approached him to set up the church's website. The job later extended to setting up a music department and producing all the church's publications. After a year, Arthur

suddenly realised that he was grossly underpaid for his multiple talents.

Next, Arthur got interested in real estate. One of his schoolmates was earning big money in the business. Arthur believed he could do better. But he could not make himself take the examinations to qualify as a real estate agent. He had developed an exaggerated fear of examinations since his junior college days.

So Arthur began hopping from one head-hunting firm to another, hoping to find the right employer who could draw out his great potential to the fullest.

Saddle

Once I started writing about Arthur, I felt that I should not only write about him, but I should also write for him — for all the Arthurs who are still searching to unlock their hidden potential.

These are the people that I describe as being in the "SADDLE frame of mind". They are full of **Self-pity**. They are **Arrogant**, easily **Distracted**, always **Daydreaming** and **Lazy**. They also have so-called **Exaggerated fear**. They are afraid to

be tested, not just in school examinations, but in life itself. They are afraid to fail.

This fear of failure is not their fault, really. As children, they were not allowed to make mistakes. Their parents did not allow them to experiment with new things. Even when they exercised initiative or creativity, they were scolded for trying to be too smart. As a result, these children grow up afraid to take risks, afraid to do what is unconventional, afraid to fail.

When we are under SADDLE influences, we block our own paths to success. We may blame others for our failures, but the true culprit is the enemy within. SADDLE is the robber within that takes away our opportunities for excellence and success.

Like Arthur, I, too, grew up under SADDLE influences. I engaged in **Self-pity** whenever I thought about my childhood situation, and that gave me the excuse to do badly in my studies. I also behaved badly. I was a rough and tough "gangster" kid addicted to gambling and the 3 V's — vulgarism, vandalism and violence.

To the other children in the neighbourhood, I probably appeared **Arrogant**. In reality, I was feeling insecure and lousy inside.

Even as I tried to act grown up, all the little child in me wanted to do was play. I had many **Distractions**. Once, I was nearly killed because I was too distracted chasing a kite. I ran across the road without looking and, moments later, a lorry crashed into a stationary car at the exact spot where I was.

My classmates at least devoted some time to studies. I did not. I did not care if I got 22 marks for Mathematics, or 19 marks for English. In spite of this, I had **Daydreams** about entering one of the top secondary schools, but I did nothing to deserve a place.

I loved my mother. But I did very little for her when I was young. I did help her clean the school on Saturdays. But I was full of **Laziness** in my studies — the one area where my mother really wanted me to work hard and excel.

And I certainly had more than my fair share of **Exaggerated fears**. I was full of insecurities. I never had self-confidence until I topped my professional diploma when I was 26 years old. Subsequently, this new-found confidence led me to top my master's degree a year later.

Yet, I am not unique. Many others achieved success in life despite having a rough start. In

fact, many overcame far greater challenges and achieved greater successes. But because my story is not as fantastic, I believe it can be a source of inspiration to those who might find it hard to relate to the really great achievers like Microsoft founder Bill Gates or Hong Kong businessman Li Ka Shing.

It is not necessary to reach their level. However small your achievement, you can consider yourself successful if you are better off than what you used to be, and if you make your own unique contribution to your family, friends and society.

Inspiration

Two weeks before I met Arthur, on 13 December, I attended a segment of the Malaysia-Singapore Forum 2004. At the event, the Singapore Minister for Education, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, remarked that there had been many instances where children who did not do well academically were able to unlock their potential later in life and become very successful, especially in business.

His words struck me, as the cliché goes, like a bolt of lightning. They seeded my idea that

PRAISE can be the key to unlock the potential of so many people — thousands of people struggling with finances and with life itself.

I was lucky to have PRAISE as the key that unlocked my potential. Initially, I applied some of its principles subconsciously and achieved limited success. Only when I was in my mid-20s, however, did I recognise PRAISE as a complete life skills model that can be consciously applied in a systematic way.

That was the breakthrough that turned my rough life into a truly rich one — rich in every sense of the word. Being rich does not necessarily mean having lots of money. One can, and should, also be rich in terms of learning, experiences, joy, blessings, happiness....

You, too, can turn your life around.

First, you must become aware of the SADDLE influences in your life. Then, by learning and applying the PRAISE model, you can overpower that robber and begin the process of transformation.

Congratulations for having come thus far. Your PRAISE journey — towards success unlimited — has already begun.