



Finding
THE MAGICAL
REALM OF
HAPPINESS

JASON CAI

FINDING THE MAGICAL REALM OF HAPPINESS

MOTIVATIONAL BOOK ON FINDING HAPPINESS,
POSITIVITY AND INSPIRATION IN LIFE

BY JASON CAI

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

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

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

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

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

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

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

~ Belinda Yap

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

~ Lynn Tay

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

~Jeannie Huang

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

~ Celine Hapdia

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

~ Amanda Blum

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

~ Sebastian Ho

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

~ Mandy Law

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1

VOLUME 1: THE MIST OF NEGATIVITY

CHAPTER 1

TAMING THE ANGRY MONSTERSAURUS (ANGER MANAGEMENT)

5

CHAPTER 2

CATCHING THE GREEN-EYED ELF (ENVY)

30

CHAPTER 3

THE UNICORN RIDER (AT WORK)

46

CHAPTER 4

MINING THE GOBLIN'S GOLD (MONEY)

70

CHAPTER 5

FINDING THE HEALING FAIRY (DEATH, LOSS & SADNESS)

90

VOLUME 2: THE LIGHT OF POSITIVITY

CHAPTER 6

THE MAGICAL WAND (OF JOY & CONTENTMENT)

109

CHAPTER 7

INSPIRING GEMSTONES (OF POSITIVE ENERGY)

142

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

CHAPTER 9
PHOENIX'S FLAME (MARRIAGE)
203

CHAPTER 10
PEGASUS BOOK (OF PARENTING)
226

VOLUME 3: THE PINNACLE OF THE REALM

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

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

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

CHAPTER 14
ELIXIR OF IMMORTALITY (INSPIRATIONAL FALLEN HEROES)
367

BONUS CHAPTER: MOTIVATIONAL QUOTES
383

RESOURCES & CONTACT
390

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VOLUME 1

THE MIST OF NEGATIVITY

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

CHAPTER 1

TAMING THE ANGRY MONSTERSAURUS (ANGER MANAGEMENT)

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

[Author's Note]

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

Anger Is the Gun Firing in the Opposite Direction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Inflated Balloons We Carry With Us

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

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

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

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

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

Is It Worth Getting Angry?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Negative Thoughts Creep in to Burn Down Your Wooden House

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hate Generates More Anger

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

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

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

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

Holding Onto Pee

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

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

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

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

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

[Guest Post] Dealing With Provocation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trigger Awareness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dealing With Anger as a Reflex Action

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

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

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

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

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

A Box of Matchsticks

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

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

* The 4 Stages of Anger *

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

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

Stage 2: Matchstick is lighted (Ignition)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Less Anger, More Tolerance and More Empathy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Guest Post] Anger Management

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

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

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

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

Choosing Not to Get Angry About a No-show

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

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

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

Dealing With Angry People

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dealing With Insults

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

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

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

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

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

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

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

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

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

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

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

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

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

(TICK IF YOU AGREE)

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

DECLARATION:

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

CHAPTER 2

CATCHING THE GREEN-EYED ELF (ENVY)

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

[Author's Note]

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

When You Think You Do Not Have Enough

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comparison, Envy, Unhappiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Share the Glory, Hide the Pain

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

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

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

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

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

Envy Yourself

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

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

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

The Tale of Two Saba (Mackerel) Fish

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

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

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

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

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

Don't Envy Uniqueness; Celebrate It

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

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

Envy Turns Happiness Into Unhappiness

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

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

The Grass Is Always Greener on the Other Side

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

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

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

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

Envy the Glamour but Forget the Pain and Sacrifice

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

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

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

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

Comparison With People Who Are Worse Off

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

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

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

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

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

It Is Sometimes Not Easy to Not Envy Others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Rich, the Famous and the Beautiful

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

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

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

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

The Good in Every Stage of Life

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

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

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

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

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

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

WHAT ARE 3 THINGS YOU ALWAYS ENVY OTHERS FOR?

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

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

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

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

[FOCUS ON WHAT YOU HAVE]

WHAT ARE 3 THINGS THAT OTHERS WOULD ENVY YOU FOR?

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

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

CHAPTER 3

THE UNICORN RIDER (AT WORK)

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

[Author's Note]

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

Tomorrow Will Be a Better Day

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

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

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

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

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

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

I share this to illustrate a few points.

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

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

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

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

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

Overwhelmed by Work in the Festive Season

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

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

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

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

Dancing With the Lions Trilogy (Episode 1):

Invitation to the Lion's Den

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dancing With the Lions Trilogy (Episode 2):

En Route to the Lion's Den

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dancing With the Lions Trilogy (Final Episode):

Entering the Lion's Den

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dealing With a Difficult Colleague (Part 1)

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

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

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

Dealing With a Difficult Colleague (Part 2)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appreciation From a Higher Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

Early Morning Meetings

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

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

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

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

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

Work Together, Do Not Fight Each Other

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NS Woes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finding the Right Motivation for Work

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

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

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

Be Careful About What You Wish For

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

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

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

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

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

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

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

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

WHAT ARE 3 ACHIEVEMENTS YOU HAVE MADE IN YOUR WORK?

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

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

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

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

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

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

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

5) _____

6) _____

HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOUR OFFICE A HAPPIER ENVIRONMENT?

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

2) PASTE MOTIVATIONAL QUOTES ON MY CUBICLE WALL.

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

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

5) _____

CHAPTER 4

MINING THE GOBLIN'S GOLD (MONEY)

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

[Author's Note]

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

The True Meaning of Fortune and Prosperity

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

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

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

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

Not Winning the Lottery May Not Be Such a Bad Thing

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

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

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

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

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

Money Cannot Buy Health and Time

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

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

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

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

What Money Can't Buy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Are You Investing In?

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

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

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

World's Tastiest Ramen

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

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

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

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

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

Salary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pay as a Yardstick for Happiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Money and Greed

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

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

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

Getting Richer But Unhappier

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Relationship Between Money and Happiness

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

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

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

The Vicious Cycle of Pursuing More Money

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

[Vicious Cycle]

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

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

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

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

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

Enjoying the Freebies in an Expensive Country

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Guest Post] Money, Family and Happiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

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

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

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

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

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

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

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

(CIRCLE WHERE APPROPRIATE)

YES/NO

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

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

CHAPTER 5

FINDING THE HEALING FAIRY (DEATH, LOSS & SADNESS)

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

[Author's Note]

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

Death and Life

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

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

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

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

Question 1:

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

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

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

Question 2:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Is Scarier Than Death?

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

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

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

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

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

Coping With Sadness

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

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

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

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

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

Excessive Worrying About Losing Something Precious

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

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

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

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

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

Miscarriage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What You Did Not Lose

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

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

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

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

Surviving a Catastrophe

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Guest Post] The Letter to a Vilomah

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

"Dear Mummy,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POST-CHAPTER EXERCISE

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

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

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

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

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

5) _____

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

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

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

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

4) _____

RESOURCES

Facebook Profile:

<https://www.facebook.com/projectARK2013>

Jason Cai's Motivational Writings

<https://www.facebook.com/jasoncaimotivationalwritings>

Project Act of Random Kindness (P.A.R.K.)

<https://www.facebook.com/projectactofrandomkindnesssg>

P.A.R.K. \$2 Project (P2P)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1437902803105381>

The Encouragements for Little Fighters (ELF) Project

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Elf-Project-162446774429787>

The Alternate Transport Advisory & Singapore Magnificent Rescue Team
(TATA SMRT)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1428899323871165>

What Makes Us Happy In Singapore?

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1553301294943067>

Coffee & Tea Chat! Climate and Sustainability

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/483427181762132>

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