

By Dr Victor S.L. Tan

In writing the 500-page book *Lessons of Success*, I interviewed many successful people and noted one common characteristic in all of them — self-discipline.

Self-discipline is the ability to get oneself to take action irrespective of one's emotional state. Self-discipline is very important because our success and happiness are determined by the amount of self-discipline we have. When it comes to success, there is no substitute for self-discipline. Intelligence, knowledge and skills alone are not enough.

The good news is that self-discipline can be inculcated. It is like a muscle, the more one trains it, the stronger it gets.

SET A GOAL

In a 1979 study conducted by a batch of Harvard MBA programme students, it was found that only three per cent of the graduate students had clear written goals, 13 per cent had goals but not written down, and 84 per cent did not have any goals. The results of a follow-up study 10 years later on the same group were stunning. The three per cent who had written goals earned on average 10 times as much as the other 97 per cent of the class combined.

To set a goal, simply first find out what makes you happy and gives meaning to your life. See yourself what you want to be and where you are — one year, five years or 10 years from now. Then write down your short-term and long-term goals to enable you to achieve this by using the S.M.A.R.T. criteria. Set goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

STAY FOCUSED

In this age of distractions, building discipline must involve staying focus on what you are doing. It is all too easy to want to read a Whatsapp chat, an email or a Facebook notification that just came in.

Staying focus is about self-control when facing

a computer expert, while serving nine years in prison after being accused of spying for the United States used his time to visualise success in playing mental chess with then world champion Garry Kasparov. Astoundingly, in 1996, he beat Kasparov.

As a way to strengthen his belief and self-discipline, Jim Carrey in the 1990s wrote a cheque of US\$10million (RM40 million) to himself. In 1994, he achieved that goal through his role in the movie, *Dumb and Dumber*.

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Celebrating the "small successes" in the journey of achievement is a good way of reinforcing one's motivation to continue to accomplish "bigger success" to come. Celebrate what you have achieved but to prevent the sense of complacency from setting in, raise the bar a little higher each time you clear it. If you delay your celebration till you achieve your goal, your motivation will start to decay. Don't wait till you reach your desired destination to celebrate, but celebrate each step you take towards reaching your goal. Success is indeed a journey and not a destination. As a writer, I celebrate with my family each time I completed a chapter of a book. This has provided me the motivation and the self-discipline to write 10 books to date.

DEVELOP A PASSION

There is a better way to sustain one's discipline in whatever what does. It is not about working hard. It is about developing an interest and finding the passion in what one is doing. In fact, passion can be developed. Once we get to learn more about what we do and become better at it, we would begin to love our work more. When we love what we do, self-discipline is easier. As I have a passion to write, waking up each day at 5am each day while it requires self-discipline, I find it not as hard compared to someone who does not share the same passion as me. The great American dancer, Martha Graham, said it well: "Great dancers are not great because of their technique, they are great because of their passion". And all of us can better in self-discipline in whatever we do; all that is needed is finding the passion in the work that we do.

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SELF DISCIPLINE -

distractions and putting complete attention on what you are doing. The best way to avoid temptation is to remove its source — your handphone, ipad, ipod or any other distractions. The secret of success lies in the code word "F.O.C.U.S.", which when uncoded, reads: Focus One Course Until Successful.

To focus is to concentrate on one thing until the goal is accomplished. Just like focusing the sun's energy through a magnifying glass on a piece of paper can start a fire; focusing on one thing intently with intensity can fire up one's performance and achievement.

VISUALISE SUCCESS

Successful people know the importance of visualising themselves succeeding to achieve their goals. Holding a mental picture of what success would be like and imagining how it feels is a powerful mental discipline to motivate oneself to achieve the goal one has set. Nathan Sharansky,

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

