



CUT the CRAP

2

BEING COMFORTABLE IN YOUR OWN SKIN
AND FINDING YOUR OWN PATH

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CUT THE CRAP (2)

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AND FINDING YOUR OWN PATH

A tête-à-tête between a father and daughter
who is now almost an adult !

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BEFORE YOU DIVE INTO THE BOOK... PLEASE READ THIS FIRST...

This book is done slightly differently.

Prologue :

This is my little 'intro' to how the book came about - and a little background.

Part 1 :

Understanding yourself : is my attempt to set the tone : and offer context to how Shaakya and I started working on some of the key challenges she was having.

Part 2 :

Deal with the sense of inadequacy : Part A of this section I wrote to give you an idea of the conversations Shaakya and I have had : and how one needs to take a cold hard look at one's self. All of the next sections are written by Shaakya, looking at the key areas SHE had challenges with : and how she dealt with it in her own inimitable way...

Part 3 :

Have a purpose - having a plan - and getting there, one step at a time : This chapter was written entirely by Shaakya. She will talk about how she took some of the conversations we had over time : and made her own plans. She will also chronicle some of the work she is currently undertaking...

Epilogue :

Is Shaakya's little 'conclusion' to the book

PROLOGUE

“You know what your biggest problem is ?” I asked, innocently enough : and I could sense the otherwise placid and rather easy going daughter of mine instantly cloud over and become the ‘hell hath no fury like a woman scorned’ female I have often been warned about...

“What ?” came the almost instant reply : locked, loaded and ready to respond with ‘decisive and deadly force’ at the accuser...

Unabated : and rather insensitively I prodded : and drew first blood...

“You are not comfortable in your own skin”

After a moment’s silence came the deluge and bombardment.

Years of working hard, silently, diligently and unflinchingly against all odds would have flashed in front of her : and she would have felt utterly and totally unappreciated and gutted. I know only too well how she (my daughter Shaakya) truly truly tries : but that was irrelevant to the point where I wanted her to see what the bottomline was. No matter how hard she protested otherwise, she wasn’t truly truly comfortable about who she really was : and unless she took that cold hard look at herself, and accepted her for who SHE was, there really was no growing beyond this. The rest was bullshit : and I always had a rather low tolerance of any form of it : specially with my kids.

So, after she had vented, I took her through the logic, and the reason : and to her credit, no matter how bitter the scathing criticisms I made, she took to heart what was said... And, as it is characteristic of her : came back a day or two later with a set of carefully thought through and beautifully structured notes : and sat

She was 10.

She is now 17...

Shaakya watched in earnest Fahad and I working on the No Nonsense Advice for Personal Branding book: and soon as he left, came to my 'den' and asked me 'can I write a book with you?' "No reason why not: but what about?" : infact, this was a thought I flirted with for some time... "But about what?" was my biggest problem...

"Can't you remember what you told me all those years ago? About being comfortable in my own skin? I honestly think it's something that I really took to heart: and think it'll be really awesome to put some frameworks around it isn't it?"

"Hell yes"

And there we were, one Wednesday morning, sitting down, putting a framework and penning away...

V

PART 1: UNDERSTAND YOURSELF UNAPOLOGETICALLY !

A fathers attempt to drum some sense and get the basics right...

I. Understanding your personality

“Shaakya is really quiet, isn’t she? She is very shy also!” Roons (my wife) was clearly worried...

“So” was generally my noncommittal retort to her worries about Shaakya. It genuinely didn’t bother me if Shaakya was shy or not: what mattered was whether she WAS OK BEING shy or not... A distinction that Roons didn’t necessarily draw: nor appreciate.

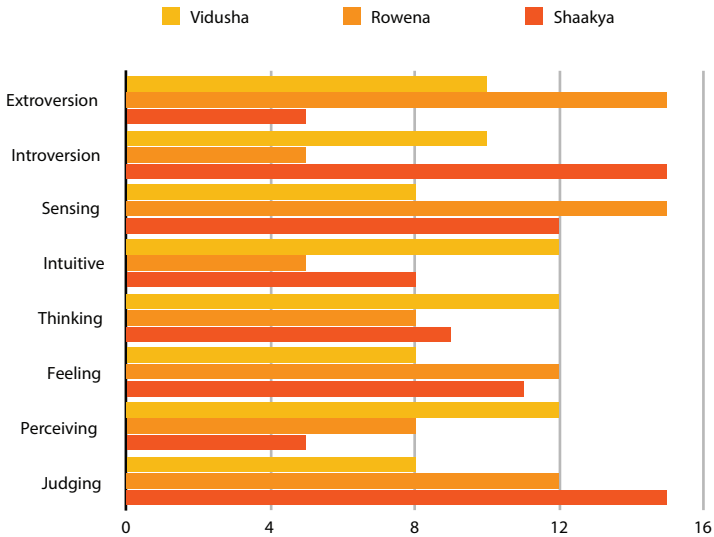
After being ‘overruled’ by executive jurisdiction, which my wife happily abuses, here I was having a ‘chat’ with Shaakya: and, as is often the case, realizing that Roons had a point that I often overlooked. What I ‘missed’ was that she thought being who she was, was not good enough or worse still ‘wrong.’ This is a common issue. We seem to have a stereotypical ‘type’ that is considered ‘good’ and all other ‘types’ are generally considered ‘bad’.

So, here’s the first thing to understand: understand who you really are... Have no illusions. You are, who you are. Acknowledge it. Accept it. NO ONE is ALL GOOD or ALL BAD. Each ‘type’ has their own strengths and preferences - and weaknesses and limitations. It is a FUNDAMENTAL mistake to think that we all need to be a certain ‘way’ to be successful. Some of us try all our lives to be like someone else - or a different ‘type’: and waste a lifetime trying to go against who we fundamentally are!

Do a personality test (here’s a link for a basic one if you are interested): I got Shaakya to do one : and also, got Roons to do one : so that Roons understands WHY she feels the way she does about Shaakya. This made a HUGE difference...

Understanding your personality determinants is CRITICAL into understanding how YOU see the world : and also, how others will invariably see you.

Here's how our results came out :



If you don't know what the different terms mean : here is a quick explanation :

PERSONALITY TYPES KEY

E	Extroverts are energized by people, enjoy a variety of tasks, a quick pace, and are good at multitasking.	S	Sensors are realistic people who like to focus on the facts and details, and apply common sense and past experience to come up with practical solutions to problems.
I	Introverts often like working alone or in small groups, prefer a more deliberate pace, and like to focus on one task at a time.	N	Intuitives prefer to focus on possibilities and the big picture, easily see patterns, value innovation, and seek creative solutions to problems.
T	Thinkers tend to make decisions using logical analysis, objectively weigh pros and cons, and value honesty, consistency, and fairness.	J	Judgers tend to be organized and prepared, like to make and stick to plans, and are comfortable following most rules.
F	Feelers tend to be sensitive and cooperative, and decide based on their own personal values and how others will be affected by their actions.	P	Perceivers prefer to keep their options open, like to be able to act spontaneously, and like to be flexible with making plans.

SOURCE: "Do What You Are: Discover the Perfect Career for You Through the Secrets of Personality Type" by Paul D. Tieger, Barbara Barron, Kelly Tieger BUSINESS INSIDER

Personality has a lot to do with how we behave. Can you understand the nuances based on how our scores panned out? Here are a few things that became REALLY obvious after we did the test together:

- Shaakya was clearly introverted: and as compared to her mother, far far less sociable too. So, in her 'normal' state chances are she is going to prefer staying at home reading a book rather than going partying !
- Shaakya was the most 'judging' from all of us in the family: so, structure comes naturally to her - whilst I was far more 'let's figure this as we go along' type of person. However, given that my work almost always required fairly structured work, I could relate to her well - and augment her tool kit too. However, given that most her age will NOT be structured, organized and 'planned' chances are she will come across far 'older' than she actually is.
- Shaakya was not as intuitive as me: and both Rowena and Shaakya were far more 'sensors' than me. This meant (compounded by the fact that she was judging as well) that Shaakya was possibly going to focus on structure much more: and actually become quite incapable of 'unstructured' decisions - something I made a mental note to focus on - because much of life will throw curveballs at her - which she needs to be able to face as much as take structured, planned approaches to life and ambitions.

Doing the test together as a family gave an amazing understanding and appreciation for WHY each of us acted the way we do: and a clear appreciation that this was OUR way of 'perceiving the world'.

Whilst we were at it, we did a Jungian test as well: and this is what that revealed:

- **Vidusha** : Fiery Red
- **Shaakya** : Cool Blue
- **Roons** : Sunshine Yellow

We also started to understand how we will interact with each other: and understand the 'moods' that we will demonstrate. For sure, this is by no means an exact science: nor a definitive way of understanding each other: but it gave a damn good start.



So, the lesson we learnt was this: there was absolutely NOTHING WRONG with Shaakya. The characteristics she was showing was almost a text book illustration of her personality type. So, rather than trying to make her something she is not, and trying to get her to completely change herself, we started having conversations about what she wanted to be : and how her personality may need to work around her primary traits in order to get to where she needs to get to.

Here are a few examples:

- Rather than forcing her to 'go out and make friends' we started giving her opportunities to 'socialize' and understand how to be more 'sociable' rather than 'extroverted.'
- We started trying to expose her to hobbies and interests and clubs that would draw others with common interests. This gave her the opportunity to make friends - and also, have common ground to make friends on. ToastMasters was one society we got her involved in - given her love for public speaking.

We also started getting her to do things that were not generally her 'comfort zones': just to expose her to the 'other side of things.' We got her to do sports - even though she was absolutely hopeless at it. We got her to do drama - though she was hugely conscious of herself. We got her going for camps and adventure trips (which she genuinely loved - but harbored fears at first). The idea was this - widen her levels of exposure - and introduce her to varying personalities and characters - thereby enabling her to be far more empathetic and also, understand how to deal with different types of people WHILST ACKNOWLEDGING her own innate characteristics and limitations.

This was a huge relief to Shaakya - knowing that there was 'nothing wrong' - and that whatever TYPE you belonged to was just as fine - was something that took a huge burden off her.

So, if you, like her, are thinking there is something WRONG WITH YOU - stop immediately. Do the personality test, understand your personality - and then, if possible, the personality of those closest to you: and understand how the interactions will take place. Chances are, most of the interpersonal conflicts you have with others around you are down to personality clashes than anything else. KNOWING this helps you be kinder to yourself, and of course, kinder to others around you as well

II. Understanding YOUR strengths, weakness and comparative advantages and disadvantages

"Appachchi : I have been selected for the debate team !" Shaakya was ecstatic.

"I will be just like you"

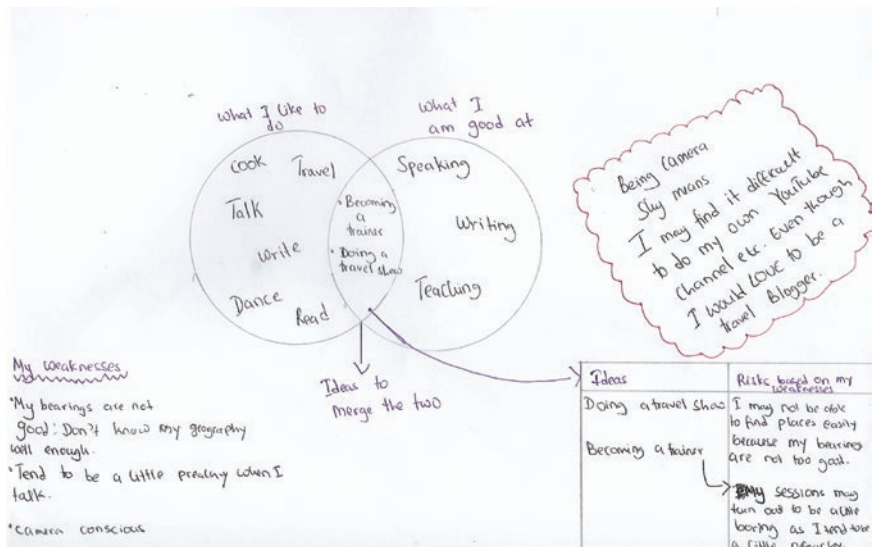
I was gutted.

It is always a bad idea when someone - specially your kids - want to 'be just like you': specially when their skill sets are quite different to yours. Shaakya was a fantastic speaker - but a hopeless rebutter: so, debating was not exactly what she ought to have done.

However, both Roons and I decided to let her pursue her newfound passion - and watched in sheer agony Shaakya losing debate after debate. It finally dawned on her that this wasn't exactly her strong suit: and she gave it up eventually (as I gave up basketball !)

As she came of age, I got her to do a personal SWOT: but I did it slightly differently... I not only got her to do what she was 'good at', I also got her to focus on what she 'liked' as well - and got her to draw inferences from both - and see if you can couple it.

Here's a quick illustration of what she did initially:



Now, whatever format you use: here are the fundamentals:

- Keep things broad: don't narrow it down at first. For example: what I like should not be expressed as 'chemistry': rather 'studying': not 'thrillers' but 'reading'
- What you are good at needs to be bone honest. Figure out what YOU are good at - compared to others. For example: generally listens better than most I know: or ability to sing really well (rather than sing relatively ok)
- Your weaknesses also need to be bone honest. These are fundamentally what you really are not good at that can become an impediment towards your purpose/goals. For example, Shaakya's inability to understand basic math was a serious impediment for her studies. Her general lack of ability to 'be controversial' may well stop her from standing up when she needs to etc.
- Do your best to match what you are good at, and what you are passionate about in order to come up with ideas that can help you bring out the best in you. This ensures you are doing something that you can - and like at the same time: a winning combo.

"What if I am not good at anything?" I remember Shaakya asking me one day. This is one of those questions that I get a lot when I speak at career guidance programs as well. I told Shaakya the same thing I tell everyone else :

"ALL of us are good at SOMETHING"

The key is this: to understand that we may not necessarily be good at something as compared to others - and there will ALWAYS be others who are WAY BETTER than us in the very area we have a strength in : but it doesn't mean we are NOT GOOD AT IT. So, start there. Figure out what you are good at. We may not be BRILLIANT at it - yet - but being good enough is a start... Ask friends. Ask family. Ask siblings. Sit down and figure this piece out - it is CRITICAL for your future

Once you have done this for yourself, you really do have a rather good rough idea of the kind of things you should and must pursue for yourself. NEVER get bogged down with it too much – always have avenues open - but this will certainly give you a good North Point.

III. Understanding how you are perceived by others

“Why don’t I seem to have too many friends?” Shaakya asked me pensively one day...

“Because you are an Archchi Pochchi’ I quipped - not jokingly – but rather seriously. This girl was actually sounding more and more like my mother - rather than a typical 16 year old!

“What do you mean?” she asked me earnestly: “I think I am really fun to be with!” she added indignantly!

“That’s the problem: only YOU think you are FUN!”

She cringed: and went to her brother.

“Jaith: I am FUN: aren’t I?” Shaakya asked - not as a question – but with a tone of voice that left no room for a negative answer...

Jaith however was never one to be intimidated by threats...

“You are BORING akki” came the answer - much to Shaakya’s dismay... “Even the movies you watch are boring!” Ouch!!!

Shaakya sulked for a while...

We let her be...

But later, once she had digested it all, we had a conversation about why it was important to face up to how other's saw you...

As much as understanding yourself and your core strengths and weaknesses, it is important for you to understand how OTHERS PERCEIVE YOU as well. This is an important aspect of you being absolutely comfortable with yourself: because this means that you will never be 'taken by surprise' by what others say/do.

Understanding what others perceive you as is NOT the same as you wanting to change to their whim and fancy. Remember that KNOWING how you are perceived gives you the ability to be aware: and as such, acknowledge it. How you want to work on this afterwards is a whole different conversation - which I will allow Shaakya to do in her own inimitable way. But this much is true: you really DO need to have no illusions about how you are actually perceived.

PART 2: DEAL WITH THE SENSE OF INADEQUACY

Father and daughter sync up and face up to Realities...

I. What you can, and cannot change : knowing the difference (and the price you pay when you don't understand the difference !)

"I really want to get the Math price Appachchi : I REALLY REALLY WANT TO" : Shaakya came to me one day : eager, wide eyed, and absolutely committed.

She got 37 for the previous term.

"Hmm" I said, not wanting to crush her spirit.

"Why ? You think I can't ?" she pursued...

"Nothing is impossible : but you getting the Math price is highly IMPROBABLE" I said : diplomatically : but such diplomacy was wasted on her...

"I will get better - watch and see"

"I know angel : you will get better : and that's all there should be : not getting the price" I tried to distinguish between effort and result : but she was too young to quite get it...

Shaakya spent far too much energy and time trying to get her Math marks up - and pursued it like a hawk pursuing a prey. She never gave up. She never let it go. I guess she didn't have a choice either : given that she will fail O/Ls if she failed Math. However, I did tell her a few times over that she was probably wiser if she devoted more time for her stronger subjects, and ensure she gets As for them rather than focusing on her weakest subjects.

However, she would not hear nothing of it : she did not want a SINGLE simple pass - and she ensured that this was the case. However, it DID cost her maybe 2 As she would have otherwise gotten : that's the price she had to pay. Thankfully, this is a lessons she learnt well after her O/L's.

One of the things I personally learnt early on in my life is that I can't change most things : and that there was nothing I could do with it. But there was a lot I COULD change too : and that if I focused on what I CAN do, rather than worrying my head about what I COULD NOT I will, in all certainty, become FAR more productive and effective in the long term.

This was ONE lesson I drummed into Shaakya over and over again - mercilessly. FOCUS : on what you CAN : and FORGET THE REST.

- You can't change your skin color : but you CAN be well groomed.
- You can't do much about your overlapping teeth : but you CAN get braces and correct them.
- You can't do much about the lack of proficiency in Math : but you CAN choose a ton of other topics for your higher studies !
- You can't do much about the winning competitions : but you CAN practice hard and get better at what you do every day...

Most of the time, we spend FAR TOO little time focusing on what we can do : and devoting time and energy towards it. Rather : we spend far too much time on what we really cannot do anything about : and thus loose valuable time and energy.

So, the first task I gave Shaakya was to ensure she understands, and come to terms with this reality : and also, to be able to rationalize the myriad of negativities and insecurities that generally seem to plague teens (and adults as well I guess)...

Your body and how you look

Don't we girls love to dress up and look pretty! I most certainly do. I would love to walk in to a room and for all the boys to go 'man she's hot!' Body image is something I struggled with (like many I guess...) I was not thin (back then) : I was on the chubby side and I was dark : I mean REALLY dark (and got darker still every time I swam !) My cousin on the other hand was thin, slim and glam. I remember going to get a dress stitched for a wedding and the tailor measuring my waist size and laughing out loud : because I was twice the size of my cousin. Imagine my plight !

The need to look beautiful was made very clear early on.

There was another occasion where in the van an Akki, who no doubt was way prettier than I was told me

"hey you know you look like a boy!"

I found nothing more hurtful and offending.

"A boy!" "Really!"

The words echoed inside my brain - but never came out of my mouth. I was dejected. Gutted. Heartbroken.

I was never the conventional beauty queen. I had rather thick eye brows, a 'lucky' (what Ammi calls it) squint, thin bushy hair : and to top it all off, I wore specs. I didn't like the way I looked.

I longed to be fair, to have slim legs and have perfect eye brows and that total beauty queen face with a sharp nose instead of a pudgy one. We all want to be pretty : and that too, the conventional sort of pretty.

The truth is we are all pretty in our own way. I may have a complexion that someone else is dying to have. We are all beautiful. It is only when you feel pretty that you do become pretty. I was conscious of my weight and my waist size : and I wouldn't eat chocolate and sweets simply because I wanted to look 'thin'.

I realized, rather early on, that beauty standards are overrated and worse still, unrealistic and unhealthy ! I learnt the difference between 'thin' and 'healthy and fit' : I also learnt the difference between 'beautiful in the conventional way' and 'beautiful in our own unique way.'

No one need starve themselves to have a so called flat stomach : what they need to do is to be 'sensible' about what you eat : and exercise. The important thing is not to have a tiny waist (which your body structure may make impossible) but to be fit (which will give you a toned waist : though not 'tiny'). The idea is not to be so thin : and not being able to do 10 pushups without panting like a dog on a hot sunny day! Rather : the idea is to be health, fit, and well kept : which will make you proud of yourself.

Depriving myself of food worked in terms of getting thin : but I soon realized it was utterly unhealthy : and it wasn't sustainable either. It didn't make me fitter either. So, rather than starving myself and not having the pleasure of a chocolate and an ice cream when I felt like it, I started having a well thought through diet plan - and committed to exercising almost daily. I am not a size zero - and I think I never will be either : and thankfully NEITHER DO I WANT TO BE ANYMORE. I think, I am finally ok being fit, healthy, strong, and 'in shape' the best I could.

We all want to look pretty and for that how much do we forgo ? We forego our style to fit the trend : we forego our health because we want to look good : we punish ourselves to look good in someone else's eyes ! What a shame ha ?

I believe that beauty lies in being authentic. I don't like most of the things trending in "fashion." Short shorts : I mean extremely short shorts : are something I would feel utterly uncomfortable in. I would be totally comfortable in a pair of jeans a t shirt and my jacket : or a smart dress. These types of clothes scream Shaakya! But they are certainly NOT trendy (as Ammi keeps constantly reminding me : and Appachchi keeps laughing over !) To me the trend is what you set. If your style is shorts and t shirts : then : go for it! If it is old fashioned 90s bell bottoms : then STILL go for it (I like those clothes too just that I have never got a chance to wear them yet !). So find your style of dressing. What makes you feel pretty and comfortable ?

Find your style don't let the style define you !

The instant you become comfortable in your style and own it, so will the others. It is because we show that we are uncomfortable in our own style that we get bullied about the way we dress. Whereas if we 'own' the look, no one can really say anything. Owning the look that comes from being confident. Amma tells me that sometimes what is most attractive in a person is not how they look, or the clothes they wear, but the confidence they carry themselves with. Appachchi often tells me with a twinkle in his eye, "I may not be the most handsome man on earth but I certainly feel like it every time I look at myself in the mirror" (and Ammi can't help giving one of her 'Oh REALLY' looks !)

Hold yourself and carry yourself feeling beautiful about yourself : there's no reason you can't. The key is to find YOUR reason to feel beautiful...

Nick Vujicic in his book Stand Tall (Nick vujicic has no limbs) says that people told him he has beautiful eyes and he focused on that and started learning to feel good about himself. Today he's an extremely successful speaker, traveling the world, giving speeches !

If a man with no arms and no legs has the capacity to feel good about the way he looks then what was I complaining about ? This perspective made all the difference in the world to me... Be fit and healthy because it is important for you and don't worry about your waist size or how thin your legs look : they don't really matter. Now this doesn't mean that you don't need to take the time and energy to look good. Dressing well (that too in your own style) and wearing makeup is not wrong ! But remember : make up shouldn't be worn to conceal your face but to accentuate it ! Being comfortable in your own skin most of the time starts with loving the way you look. It starts with being happy about who you are : through and through!

Intelligence and good grades

I was very slow (well actually, hopelessly slow) when it came to grasping concepts and understanding the basic things that most kids my age did with ease. When it came to O/Levels I was so weak in math that I went for three extra classes : one for basics, one for papers and another just to cover the syllabus !

Years ago, the nursery teacher told amma "she doesn't know the alphabet : she's the last to learn in".

Then came grade 3, I couldn't understand why 3 came before 2 : I just couldn't understand patterns : worst yet I took over 3 months to learn simple additions and subtractions !

I struggled right through my schooling : and though I did try my best : getting good grades for subjects like Math and Science was just not possible for me (sadly Science was one of my favourite subjects : and it truly truly truly broke my heart when I couldn't EVER get an A for it !)

It was only when I came to grade 11 that was when Appachchi let the cat of the bag.

You stopped growing at 7-8 months he said, Ammi watching over with a rather pensive look on her face...

'Okay' I said, not seeing how that was relevant.

'As a result' Appachchi continued, 'you have certain cognitive disabilities.'

Yup it's a lot to process but what's surprising is that I wasn't surprised ! In fact it just made things so much clearer ! I knew I was 'slow' when it came to studies all the while : but I didn't know WHY. This in a way provided some solace : at least now, genetics were to blame.

I was gut wrenched and tired of being dumb : and in a way, knowing I was 'born dumb' was both a blessing and a curse. A blessing, because it wasn't MY fault : a curse : because there was nothing I could really DO about it !

But after scoring 74% in my recent statistics paper I learnt that no one is 'not intelligent' : we all are intelligent in our own way : what makes us who we are (as Randy Pauche says) is in how we 'deal with the cards we are dealt.'

I asked Appachchi as to why he didn't put me into the 'special unit' (which Methodist College had) and he says it's because he never wanted me to settle for anything less than what I truly wanted : no matter how difficult it was ! He said that I had to know that my limitations were not and shouldn't EVER stop me from doing what I wanted to do : NOR make it to being an excuse. He also explained that in 'real life' there was no 'special unit' : and that I will have to 'deal with' life irrespective of what my limitations were. He told me, in his usual 'no nonsense' way, that 'you are better off failing now, and learning from it, rather than failing in life !'

So the first step I would say to getting good grades is to never limit yourself emotionally and mentally (in your attitude) even if you are limited in certain ways.

The second step would be to learn how YOU learn best !

There are four styles of learning : (here's my Psychology studies coming in useful !) auditory, visual, reading and kinesthetic. I personally learnt best by writing and listening. I learnt worst by reading : so, learning from a text book all by myself was really not for me (Appachchi on the other hand, learnt best this way : and did most of his higher education by simply reading text books and almost never going for lectures !) The three teachers I went to for my O/L Math all helped me learn the way I learn best. They catered to my learning style. My teachers would do things step by step, draw formulas and teach me how and why what happened, happened. They would also teach me the most obvious of steps because what was obvious to most, most of the time was not obvious to me ! Miss Yoganadapillay, my teacher in School was a rock. She never spoke 'down' to me : nor EVER become negative about my marks. She was my constant 'cheering squad' : and ALWAYS ALWAYS told my parents 'Shaakya can get an A - don't worry' I know that this was far from reality : but hearing her say so genuinely felt good ! The three others, though they looked at different aspects, each in their own right, taught me the way I WANTED to be taught : which made all the difference in the world ! The four teachers I had working with me were the reason I passed O/L Math : if not I really think I would have failed.

When you surround yourself with any task to perform, ENSURE they work with you in the way YOU work best : and even for a 'dumbass kid' like me, learning becomes amazingly easier.

Physical prowess and being the sports star.

I loved to be the jock : and try as I might I just wasn't good at anything !

Not basketball : not high jump : not long jump (like my grandma) : not athletics : nor netball ! Absolutely nothing !!!

To be good in sports you needed to be graceful, flexible and nimble : I was Godzilla !

I guess this too was something that I inherited ! (my Appachchi often laughs at himself : reciting stories of how he could never jump high enough nor run fast enough in basketball - and ribs Amma about how she runs !)

Even my obvious height advantage came to nought because I just couldn't shoot straight !

To be the 'jock' is undoubtedly cool !

Oh how I wished I was just that... Cool... You know people who are sporty have this 'swag' : and I had no swag either !

Some of us are built to be sporty others not so much I guess : but the point is : THAT'S OK !!

Despite being horrible at sports, during the sports meet, I took part in everything !

I did the put shot to the discus : from the 100 meters to the 800 meters (nearly died doing that !) : you name it I did it ! (Truth be told, this is mostly because the house had no 'volunteer' participants I happened to be the only one who would agree to participate).

I played basketball for over a year and then stopped because in every tournament I was on the bench ! But what I found is that participating in sports (despite how horrible I was) increased my stamina tremendously and made me a lot less lazy : and it also taught me discipline ! No matter how tiring my day may have been, because I was constantly exercising, I was able to get through my day with the same level of energy and not feel as tired like I used to. Of course, the diet too was important ! I'm not saying salads and green smoothies was the norm : but normal Sri Lankan food with sweets eaten in moderation helped me peak my levels of energy : which I found tremendously useful for everything else I did...

So despite how you might be performing in your chosen sports : I honestly think you should continue doing a sport (or sports !). It will help you keep fit, become stronger, and also, help you develop resilience and mental fortitude too ! You may not be the idolized jock who never misses a shot but you will certainly be as YOUR BEST self.

Finding a sport that you truly enjoy helps as well. I absolutely love swimming as opposed to any other sport (It's the only thing I can seem to do gracefully). When you enjoy what to do you want to keep doing it - and that always always helps.

Whilst building physical prowess, partaking in sports I believe also helps you develop the mindset of a winner. I did not like the amount of physical exertion we were put through for basketball : mostly because I just couldn't do it all ! I was not build in that way : I had zero muscle : and zero stamina : but, there I was running full speed ahead (and collapsing ever so often !) doing 10 squats (and having to apply Vintagino daily !)

In fact just two weeks after getting the Vice Captaincy badge there was so much of work to do and I ran around so much that I fainted - THREE TIMES OVER !

Clearly sports was not my thing !

Our coaches would not cut us any slack ! So there really was no choice : either you did it right the first time around or you did it till you got it. This taught me that for anything absolutely anything you either do it right or don't do it at all and you also keep doing it till you get it right. It doesn't matter how long you take you just keep doing it till you get it.

This 'attitude' is what truly defines us. Truly makes us better. Truly enables us to circumvent our limitations. To truly find our potential.

Qualitative research was something I found difficult : and I couldn't 'get it' even after asking my lecturer to explain each their twice over. My initial thought was to simply leave it be. But you are not going to get anything without having have at least tried - right ?

So I went through the chapter twice, then thrice and reread the slides prepared by our lecturer and then made my short notes. And sure enough, not only did I 'get it' : I was actually able to teach a few others areas they found difficult (was rather chuffed I must admit !)

The other thing learnt was to keep moving when the going gets tough. In basketball no matter how good the opponent is you keep moving trying to get the ball : and so it was for me with life as well. You keep going till you get it. I couldn't barely swim 50m : but there was this one time when there was no one to swim the 100m for the house meet ! I was called in : as I was about the only person who could swim that was there ! I was petrified but once I dived in, the only thought going through my head was "Just keep swimming" and that's exactly what I did : I just kept swimming. I came last of course : but I didn't stop in the middle : I saw it through.

Sports needn't be done with the sole intention of of winning championships or podium positions : but I think it will help you in ensuring you are tougher mentally, physically, make you much more resilient : and most of all, it will help you develop the mindset of a winner.

Social Skills and overcoming awkwardness.

I love listening to 90s music : Rick Astely, Abba, Earth, Wind and Fire : I absolutely love their tracks ! This is what I listen to when I study : when I work out : when I just lie in bed...

Most of the others in school listened to BTS !

When you are different it is only natural to feel awkward. I felt so out of place that where ever I went I carried a book and buried my face in it.

No one wants to be, or feel awkward.

Especially not around their crush!

I had a HUGE crush on a boy in our drama class, and try as I might nothing worked. I neither got his attention nor his interest !

At practices, when everyone was sitting and and chit chatting, I sat and made short notes! Naturally he was going to think I was awkward. My cousin on the other hand grabbed his attention instantly they just clicked and were pretty close : but I, well I just sat and did what anyone who had a crush would do. Crush from a far ! I remember one day we all started dancing in class and I'm trying my very best to grab my crushes attention and strike up a conversation - I know - yes - while dancing ! (See what I mean by telling you I'm weird) and he didn't even see me !

Instead he saw my cousin dancing and there he was dancing with her !

I'm just like what!! How come!! Yo dude I'm right here!!.

Nope he didn't see me.

Well there goes my crush!

Bottom line was I didn't want to be socially awkward. So I began to purposefully put my self 'out there'. I went for every possible competition and event and this time I left the books at home. I didn't carry a story book nor did I take my short notes so : I left it all behind : lest I take the easy way out and bury my face in them all over again ! I was pretty much forced to socialize and at first it wasn't easy at all ! I couldn't get two words out of my mouth !

So I thought of good ways to start a conversations : and I found the best way to do so is by finding common ground.

So I would go :

"Hey! I'm Shaakya : I love watching movies : what about you ?"

Now I realize the movies and TV series I watch (as my brother wisely pointed out) weren't movies or TV series most watched. Most my age have not watched the 1980s series of MacGyver nor did they like Sherlock or Doctor Who ! So I checked up on other movies and TV series and slowly started a conversation this time with movies that everyone knows.

Having pre prepared phrases helped.

The ones I found extremely helpful are

"Hi! I'm Shaakya! What's your name?"

"Which school do you go to?"

"That's a lovely pair of shoes! Where did you get it from?" Or
"Hey! I'm Shaakya I think you know my cousin Liyara : she goes for Archery practices with you !

And there you go you strike up a conversation even before you know it! These are basic simple phrases : but boy don't they work.

Now back to drama (no, not the crush - but drama itself !) My sole aim in going for drama classes and practices was to learn of to socialize. To do that I started finding common ground with everybody and before I knew it there was a group of us who clicked - just like that, and we would hang out almost all the time. I also managed to start a conversation with my crush : and I found common ground with him too!

Now common ground doesn't work all the time I was talking to this boy in our oratory class and I just couldn't find common ground with him - he was plainly from a completely different planet to mine - and in this kind of instance leave common ground and talk about general topics... Like the weather for example (you see how hard I try !)

The trick to not being socially awkward also begins with accepting the fact that you're socially awkward. If you don't, you will keep doing what you're doing and the eventually not get anywhere. Knowing that you are helps you become acutely aware of the mistakes you make when in company, and thereby enables you to rectify those mistakes. Once you accept your flaws you can correct them.

Apapchchi has told me many times that I tend to come across as a boring stuck up. I didn't like the way he put it across and was very angry with him : in my head I was cool and very sociable ! But in reality, when I reflected on the way I act (the constant philosophical conversations, the inability to simply chill and always talking about heavy subjects as opposed to light hearted conversations) I think he was right : I DID come across as boring. Although, I was reluctant to accept this fact it was true : and once I did accept it I found ways to work around it and come across as sociable.

The point is that one doesn't have to really try 'hard' to create lasting friendships. Friends will come. You will find people who are like you and who click almost instantly.

I have a few good friends with whom I just click : our little quirks (which others consider quirks) amongst us aren't quirks : they are 'normal.' I also think to be sociable you need to be 'ok' with the diversity.

I realized that I was comfortable to socialize with those who were like me : anyone else I wasn't really interested. My French class consists of a group of girls who are very giddy and whose conversations are about how fat and thin they look and boys : things I generally roll my eyes over !

One particular girl kept asking me a series of (in my mind, idiotic) questions :

Why do you wear those ear rings? Don't you shop online? Why do you oil your hair? Are you a lesbian ? (WTF ??)

These conversations and questions irritated me endlessly. "What kind of a creature was this ?" I thought to myself, becoming what Appachchi kept calling me - an 'intellectual SNOB' I was being judgmental for sure ! More so, I was as 'bitchy' as what I accused others of being.

Once I put my judgements of her behind I realized she was not so bad after all. Strangely enough, there was a lot of common ground - which truly surprised me. We now have a good old con chat : and meet up ever so often too. Is she one of my 'bosom buddies' - well no - but, she IS a friend...

We are all too quick to judge instead we should be open to the limitless possibilities of friendship.

Achievements and how to go about them.

Achievements and how to go about them is something I constantly question : and the truth is I don't think there is a set way of achieving them. However, I do think there are a few fundamentals...

The first and the most important of all, is ATTITUDE. During my early years, I had what Appachchi called a 'defeatist attitude.' My over riding attitude to life in general was that everything was 'hard' and 'difficult' and often 'impossible'. When I learnt that I had a learning difficulty my confidence went down completely. I kept failing and failing and rather than using that failure as a reinforcement towards success I viewed it as an occasion from which I couldn't move forward. I remember telling my Ammi everyone is moving forward and I'm stagnant. Failing does not mean your life is at a pause : it does not mean that you are stagnant ! It is so only if you look at it that way.

"You have to make your failures a stepping stone to success" : now THAT was a fantastic attitude to have ! To be brave is hard : and I'm still trying to be brave : but great things were never achieved by not being brave and having a winner's attitude.

As my second semester started I was adamant to change : and change right royally... I wanted to make sure that this year I had the ability to break down my walls of insecurity and have the chance to finally unleash my true potential : which could only be done if I had change in mindset. So, when I started this year, despite the number of assignments I had to write and no matter how difficult studying abnormal psychology maybe, I would ensure I did not get overwhelmed and stressed ! I would face it, and all other situations, with utmost confidence, with no doubt in my mind, and if I fail, I will do so with grace (explained a little bit more in the next chapter !) Attitude is certainly key.

The next most important thing is to work smart and hard (Appachchi cringes : as he hates the term 'work smart' - and often tells me this is wholly BS - and there is nothing called working smart. But hey : I think there IS !!). They work together. For the longest time I only knew how to work hard. I had no idea how to work smart. Neither did I think it was important for me : working hard was good enough. Yes its good : and important : but not good enough. Working smart is all about priorities and direction. So for instance when studying you can use the Pomodoro Technique : were you study for a set time period and take a break. It is ineffective to study for 15 hours at a stretch. Of course, there are days where we have to work till late and put in the continuous long hours : and that's fine : but as a practice it isn't. The human brain is like a machine it needs a break and there is only so much you can process. As such, planning on a daily basis by either utilizing a to do list or a journal will proved to be extremely helpful to me. When I plan I do so by giving myself a set time period for each subject. I make sure that if it is two hours, that I allocate time for short notes also within those 2 hours.

It's easier said than done I know - but practice makes perfect ! Over time, I got really good at making sure my time is compartmentalized.

I also find that for me that I am most productive when I get a goodnights' sleep. So I make sure I sleep early enough and get up at a decent hour as well. Working smart is difficult but it is important. As is working hard. Working hard is doing what you must even when you feel like you can't/or don't like what you are doing. When studying for O/Levels I worked hard and as a result although I didn't obtain the marks I so desired I can say that I did what I should and could have. I truly gave it my all. When I think back at it now I think had I worked smart as well where I devoted time to the other subjects that I was good at I may have received better results Working smart is also knowing what you are good at and focusing on that rather than worrying over the things that you are not good at. I know we wished we were good at a lot of things and it is sad when we aren't. But learnt that such 'wishful thinking' wasn't going to get me anywhere.

The third thing that I believe is important is self motivation. One must be motivated and driven (and honestly, getting someone else to motivate you is like Ammi trying to convince Appachchi to quit smoking !) If there is no motivation, there is no hard work, neither will there be any joy. Whereas if one is constantly excited and motivated about the future and the limitless possibilities the world has to offer, one need not be 'pushed' to work ! Why? Because YOU will push YOURSELF. To be self motivated you need to constantly reflect on your goals and keep visualizing yourself being successful. Movies help too ! I can give you a whole list ! Some of the movies I think that are absolutely awe inspiring are Rocky Balboa, Queen of Katwe, The Kings Speech, When the Game Stands Tall and Coach Carter (there's a lot more : let me know and I can happily send a list a mile long !)

So achievements are yours to define yours to create and yours to pursue.

Dealing with the outcast mentality.

When you're not like the 'rest', you're considered weird, and being weird generally means that you're an outcast. 90's music. Sherlock. Doctor Who. Supernatural. Agatha Christie, Michael Morpugo, Dan Brown I loved all of this I love adventure and mystery. By the time we were 16 the books and TV series almost most girls watched were romantic, (The Fault in our Stars, Me Before You etc.) I for one just couldn't I would either fall asleep or get utterly bored : and this isn't normal for a 17 year old is something I was often told! To make matters worse, I loved the 'old' English style of writing and speaking : where the perfectly lyrical, beautifully written language, often in iambic Pentameter is almost spoken like a song. To me it was so beautiful that I began to speak that way.

"Have a pleasant day good Sir !"

"Might I borrow your pencil please."

:Oh dear me that is horrible. What on earth shall we do."

If you think I'm exaggerating I assure I am not ! My mother chided my father all the time "it's all your fault" she often complained "she's reading all YOUR books !"

Invariably I got ignored by most and the fact that I was an outcast dawned on me. How I went about this was to completely change myself. I would listen to KPOP and strike up a conversation about it because that was what most people listened to. I would change and try to have a bit of a "swag." I would also try and read things that others read...

Try as I might it didn't work and it didn't work because it wasn't me. Kpop, swag, Sweet Valley High : that was not me in any way. What I learnt is that it is ok to be an outcast : it really is : but for that you need to be ok with it first. I wasn't ok with who I was at first : but as time I went by I realized that there was precious little I could do to change myself fundamentally. Ammi and Appachchi often told me 'don't change to please others.' It took me a while : but I did eventually learn that I had to own myself : outcast or not.

The mindset of an outcast is filled with anxiety and always on the constant outlook for approval. The only person's approval you need to be you is yourself and one else's. When we moved to Kandy, walking into Lectures, Classes and Clubs, the thought constantly occupying my mind was "Will they like me ?"

I should keep quiet and not express my point of view : as I know they will judge me. After a while, I learnt to just be myself : and just like in school : be comfortable being an outcaste - but NOT FEELING LIKE ONE.

So... how do you overcome the outcaste mentality. First it is to accept the fact that you are an outcast. We may often not want to believe that we are no outcaste : but the bottom line is if you are an outcast you will know it : unmistakably so...

So get rid of the thought of wanting to be anyone else be just happy and proud of the way you are. This, only you can do for yourself ! I found that the instant I let myself be me with who I was I was able to attract people in my own right. I have found that it is the energy you give others that others find 'attractive' and 'appealing'. IF you give people the vibe that you're uncomfortable, sad and all in all, an outcaste : then, chances are they most likely treat you like one as well. People react to you the way you react to your self. Ofcourse, there will always be those who are just downright nasty : and poke fun of you no matter what you believed about yourself : that's fine : let the be. As much as the nasty ones : you are bound to find like minded people who will be willing to accept you for who you are. However, you must first accept yourself : fully.

The next step is to be confident ! This comes the moment you accept your self ! When you accept your self for all of who you are, no one can really mess with your confidence. I find the best way to do this is to give myself a cold hard look in mirror and with absolute conviction to say 'man you're awesome!' (Don't believe me : try it : though it sounds such a simple thing to do : it really does work !)

Being outcaste doesn't mean not being sociable. You may not be 'like everyone else' but you can certainly be sociable (and for that I hope the tips in the previous chapter proved useful.) To be unique is to be different and I would think we should rather be our selves than be apart of the 'herd.' Being the outcaste doesn't also mean that you're better than everyone else or that you're the only 'normal one' and everyone else is weird. I used to think that it would be so much easier if everyone were like me -but would be no fun! Why should anyone want to fit in when they were meant to stand out (happily plagiarized from Dr Seaus) Some of us outcasts also have

the terrible habit of judging : it's probably because we know for certain that WE are *being judged*. When we stop judging others we find new friends. To 'click' as a group it is sometimes your differences that make all the difference - paradoxical yes - but true none the less. In my group of friends one is an aspiring actress who is filled with energy : my other friend is aspiring to be a doctor she loves reading and listening to rock music : one likes k dramas and k pop : I like things way different to all of them : but we still click : we still have a good time when we meet : and we are always there for each other. Even after moving to Kandy we call each other pretty much on a weekly basis. We discuss our day, and our week, have girly giggles, compare notes about each others 'to do lists' and of-course, boys... The outcaste is one who thinks they are always alone : I thought I was too : but then when my friends came along I knew I am not alone. We outcastes have selected, limited amount of friends : and that's ok that's no big deal. Ammi used to always say that you can be amongst a hundred and still feel lonely : so, its better to be with a few and feel loved. Sometimes, a few good friends is all we really need...

Standing up to bullies

I was bullied in school in my normative days. My low marks were reasons for the bullies to laugh and they got a cheap thrill out of knowing my marks. I remember being so ashamed of my marks that whenever they came next to me I would hide my book behind my back and refuse to tell my marks. The bullies would then grab the book from me look at my marks and laugh. No one sat next to me in class because I quote "Your weak : my mother doesn't want me to sit next to you because I will also become weak". "Modi" (nope - they were NOT referring to the Indian Prime Minister) was what I was called. It hurt. It was painful to walk day in day out having to go through them taunting me with their petty words. When I could take it no more I told Appachchi and Amma. This is when Appachchi and I started working together to get better at my marks. But, rather than getting better marks, I think my parents worked on my

confidence : and my other talents : enabling me to shine in my own right. It took me quite a while to really understand all this : but looking back at it all now, I think being 'bullied' was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It gave me a drive and a 'fire' that still burns bright !

I read a lot... One of the things that I read is that a bully bullies because you are reflection of who they want to be or its because they have a difficult time at home and therefore treat others like trash. Both of which are plausible explanations for bullying. It certainly doesn't make it right : but we are all human and come to think of it now, had I looked at it that way I may have gone out of my way to be nicer to the bullies and help them.

That being said, no one should bully you : so if you are getting bullied one thing you can do is to simply AGREE. Most often people say stand up for yourself give the bully a taste of their own medicine : but I find this practice to be ineffective and counterproductive most of the times : because it then escalates a situation. If someone says you're dumb : rather than trying to come with a witty repartee : you say

"well I think we established that already isn't it ? You get 70s I get 40s : there's nothing much to say now really. I truly am dumb compared to you !"

Bullies bully to gain the sheer pleasure of watching someone else fall apart. Do not give them that pleasure! Do not flinch not for single word or action that they perform.

My brother too was called dumb in school. He was rather angry but he handled the situation quite well - and completely differently to me. Remember : YOU need to figure out what works best for YOU. I was genuinely surprised an eight-year-old had such courage ! My brother was not dumb and he knew that he was smart : so he went up to the bully and said "Right you say I'm dumb..."

Let's find out... Let me ask you five questions... If you answer them correctly I agree with you : If you lose then you're the dumb one"

And... as you may have guessed, the bully lost and just like that no one dared to mess with my brother ever again. If things with a bully get out of hand, then it's time to draw the line and establish the fact that you are no pushover. I couldn't do this for myself : my answer was to keep away from the bullies. Although I kept away : the bullies didn't ! But when I was appointed as a junior prefect in school they DID stop. So sometimes it's important to subtly show them bullies that you ain't a pushover by ensuring you DO WELL.

Sometimes standing up to bullies can be done so with kindness. We went for a debating tournament and the opposition went out of their way to ridicule and bully us yet we simply kept quiet and debated with dignity, a sense of camaraderie, and decency . The judge called it out and told them they were being very mean. So sometimes you need to give the bully a taste of the medicine that they haven't tasted. Standing up to bullies also should be done with confidence. Bullies pick on weak people whereas if we show the bully that we are happy the way we are, and not leave room for them to find our weakness, then they just stop. The instant you become confident the bully will dare not touch you.

Getting junior prefect ship gave me the confidence to know that I was, in mine my own right, good enough. The moment I did that and felt that way, I was untouchable, and unstoppable - so to say. I wasn't bullied ever again. Even if they tried I wasn't going to let them get to me. I use to blame the bullies for making me feel the way I felt : but I was the only one who was responsible for the way I felt : no one else was ! If I were to take ownership for how I felt, and if I wanted to be better, then, I had to make an active effort to change : to make a difference.

You might not be able to do anything about being bullied but how you feel about being bullied is up to you.

PART 1: HAVE A PURPOSE - HAVING A PLAN - AND GETTING THERE, ONE STEP AT A TIME

A daughters attempt to find her own way...

Understand What You Want: What You REALLY Want

When people asked me what I wanted be I could never really answer that question.

I wanted to be and do a whole load of things. People around me generally had one dream :

"I want to be a doctor or an engineer" or ever so often the really ambitious claiming "I want to be the first Sri Lankan to walk in Space"

I on the other hand had dreams that seem to hop around : one day had a dream to become the head of Appachchi's company, then I wanted to snorkel all over the world ! I also wanted to write a book (guess that itch is sorted now !)

I never had one dream, and I wasn't too sure if that was entirely right. So I went Appachchi and sought his advice. I said "Appachchi should a person have a goal or goals" to which (he in his usual philosophical tone) answered "That's really up to you".

That really wasn't the answer I was looking for so I went to the library and got all the 'self help books' I could get my hands on and started reading : hoping to find something more concrete than the 'vague' answer Appachchi gave. The author of the book "The Winners Manual", Jim Tressel says, "to one success is driving a fancy car, to another it's running a business : the question is what is success to you? We are all in our infinite ways trying to be successful. But on whose terms is it that we try to be successful? Ours or the rest of the world?"

So, I concluded that Appachchi WAS right (maybe he DID read all the books in his library : I never believed that claim of his !) It does not matter if you have one goal or many goals, what matters is that they are authentic and that they were what your heart truly desires and not anyone else's...

How do we find what we want? What we REALLY want. Simple : you need to have a chat with yourself.

Firstly, ask yourself : what do I love doing? Secondly, what do I do REALLY well (to which Appachchi added what was the market willing to pay you for it) What was it that my heart truly desire? The only person I thought of was myself : no one else's opinion mattered. Once I thought about those two questions I realized that I had an innate love for public speaking. I loved talking in front of an audience. I loved sharing my opinion I just loved speaking. And so yes my dream would be to be competent orator but that is not the only dream : I have it is one of many and now I want to accomplish that dream for all the right reasons (I shall explain this a little later)

I found that once I defined success for myself I was happier and driven. Appachchi was a fantastic debater and I'll never forget going for a debating workshop and our trainer asking me "Are you Vidusha's daughter ?" Ever since then the first thought that runs through my mind is "oh my God ! am I as good as Appachchi ? Will I humiliate him?" Truth be told I was never forced to do debating : but I being who I was had to try anything and everything Appachchi did and failed to realize that I could never be him ! He is who he is : I am who I am : and identifying what you really want first comes from distinguishing who you are. It is only once you realize who you are that you can unlock your inner strength find out what you really want and also, equally importantly, what you are good at. Until then you will be living in someone else's shadow. Once I let go of what Appachchi was good at and thought about what I was good at I was able to achieve - way way much more than I ever realized.

My dreams and goals are now to be a successful public speaker, to be able to do what I can for the environment and to be able to travel extensively. These dreams are authentic. They are Shaakya's and no one else's.

So in order to identify what you really want : Firstly, ask yourself what you love doing, then ask what you are good at : and finally, ask whether there is a market for it : Don't forget to then define your own success. Finally know who you are, be who you are and that too unashamed.

Understanding WHY you want something is also important. Ask yourself the 5 why's like Appachchi asked me. Sometimes (actually till recently for me, most of the time) we want things for all the wrong reasons : and this generally means you lose sight of something truly wonderful about yourself in pursuing those goals. My initial dream to be the world's best speaker was questioned by Appachchi. He asked me why? Why do you want to be the world's best speaker? And my sad answer was that I wanted to be "recognized". Then Apapchchi asked why again ? Well because I have to 'prove to the world that I am great that I am the best!' Like this Appachchi asked me 5 whys and for each why my answer was filled with insecurities and the need to prove the rest wrong. They do say that "the greatest pleasure in life is doing what others say you can't do" (Appachchi has this hung on his wall !) True, but to prove anything to anyone is NOT the point : EACH of your successes needs to be to prove to YOURSELF that you are worth it : self worth is FAR MORE important than all the accolades you will ever amass ! Once you are good enough to yourself : what others think of you becomes irrelevant.

Annoying as it was, I am glad Appachchi asked me the WHY's repeatedly. I now ask this of any goal I set for myself : and ensure that I actually do things for all the RIGHT reasons.

Defining goals for yourself

Once you have understood the what, and the WHY get into the SPECIFICS.

Be specific as possible about your goals. When I created my new year resolutions for 2020, I showed it to Appachchi and Appachchi said BE SPECIFIC. You want to be fit? Great ! Be specific : and I wrote "I want to be able to jog one kilometer without panting." Appachchi smiled : and told me "I'll copy that for myself !"

If I were to take my goals, each major goal can be broken into subparts too. I want to be successful : I haven't got into the specifics of this yet : but I do know that to be successful in ANYTHING I had to have a few basics in place. One of those basics was that I wanted to be educated, and qualified. I put a timeline : I will complete my BA by the time I am 19 and complete a MA by the time I am 25. I wanted to be a brilliant speaker - and hopefully (Appachchi ALWAYS tells me 'Don't HOPE' - stake that claim - and GO FOR IT) one day become the Best Speaker at Toast Masters : but, towards that, I will work on ensuring I win a national oratory competition by the time I am 19 or 20, finally win an international competition by the time 25. In the same each goal is divided and written specifically - and then broken down into milestones and 'smaller goals'. This helps me work hard towards one small goal at a time : rather than feeling daunted by the magnitude of my undertaking.

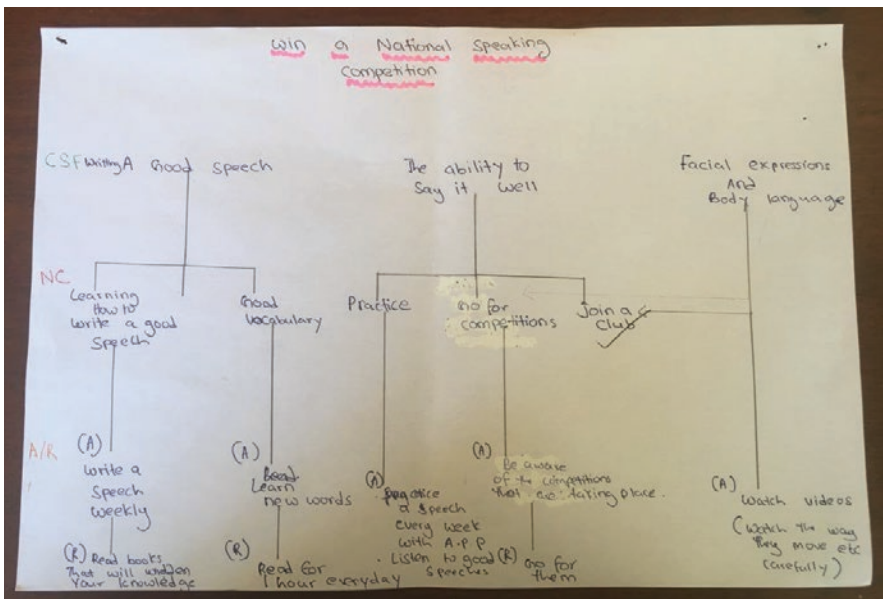
I used to have goals but I was never specific. I knew I wanted to be successful but how and why were questions I didn't answer : but once I found the answers the once blur picture was painted clearly. Try and refine your goals as you go along. Remember : our Goals DO change with time : and it is perfectly fine to change them : provided YOU understand YOU are the one who is changing it : and NOT circumstance or others' opinion !

Translating Goals into Actions

Once you have defined your goals the next step is to create an Action Plan. Appachchi taught me how to do a Goal Tree (which was introduced to Appachchi by Uncle Atheek Fareed).

The goal is a logical way of breaking down a goal into activities and rituals. It follows three steps the first is to identify critical success factors (CSFs) which are essential to achieve the goals. Step two : underneath CSFs identify the Necessary Conditions (NCs) essential to ensure the CSFs are met. Step three underneath each NCs identify Rituals and Activities (an activity been something that you do once and forget about : and a ritual being something you do repetitively over a period of time).

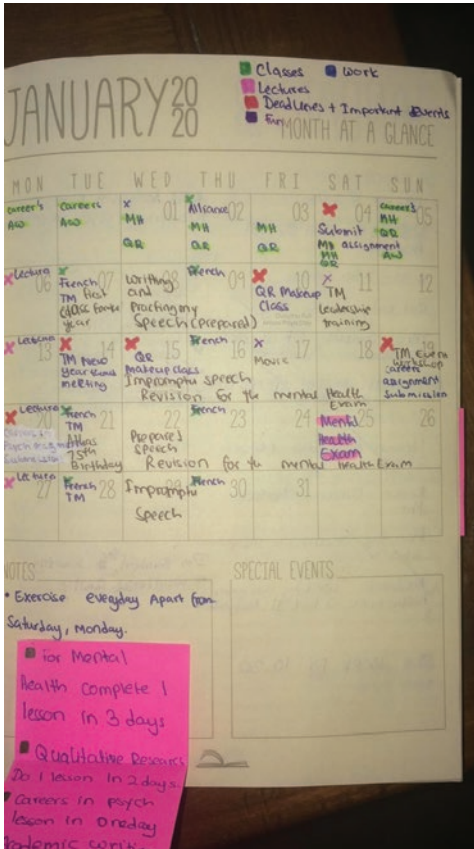
Let me give you an illustration of what one of my Goal Trees look like .



This was my first draft. Notice that I have identified many 'rituals' as 'activities': a common mistake. Things like practicing a speech, watching videos etc are actually RITUALS and need to be done CONSISTENTLY : something I missed - and therefore when I planned my calendar/month I never picked up on these and slotted them into my 'to do'. This is the biggest problem : that we don't actually look at the 'bigger picture stuff' on a daily basis... Take a look at my calendar : you will understand what I mean...

The other thing (and I think the only thing I was able to get right, throughout my schooling career) was planning. Structure was my middle name. I loved it and I would plan everything systematically. I had a note book where I made my plans a planner where I planned on a daily basis AND a calendar on top of all of it to 'visualise' my month ! (Weird or what ha ??). What is important however, is to ensure that your calendar not only has "normal to dos" but also your rituals and activities stemming from your long term goals. This way you ensure that you're working on your goals in a systematic regular basis.

Here's what my calendar looks like.



Notice that I have put all the things I need to do in the calendar : this i used to do from the time I was in grade 9. However, when I showed it to Appachchi, he pointed out that things like preparing speeches and practicing speeches were NOT in it : so, I added them. So, now I not only have my lectures, extra activities etc : but ALSO the rituals and activities from my GOAL TREE. ALWAYS translate a goal tree into a CALENDARIZED activity : otherwise they never get done REGULARLY.

Creating actions plans and planning is simple once you get into the groove of it. I used to always wonder if it REALLY made a difference when I used to see Amma and Appachchi make plans for their future plans : but now that I do it for myself on a regular basis, I DO see its benefits... You simply have to think of everything step by step : jot it down and write down how you're going to achieve all those dreams. Breaking them up and thinking through them logically and carefully, also enables you to understand EXACTLY HOW TO achieve the dreams you have. if you don't do this, it remains JUST A DREAM : not a dream you actively work towards. Planning helps keep you on track and not get stressed.

When given Vice-Captaincy we were given a multitude of tasks to perform. Sometimes in the rush of it all : I totally forgot to plan : in fact I did no planning. As a result, I was at times irresponsible and made horrendous mistakes I was also totally stressed. In fact I failed to plan when I needed it the most simply because I was overwhelmed with the work I had been bombarded with. The lesson learnt is that this is the very time that you need planning the most. So plan : no matter HOW busy you are !

Sticking to the plan and not getting side tracked.

The next important point is to stick to the plan! It is easy to get side tracked. How ? Getting side tracked is not only compromising on your studies and going partying but spending time worrying about failing, and futile thoughts which deviate you from your main purpose. I was so consumed with thoughts about how others perceived me that I made a conscious, unnecessary effort to be perceived as amazing : and spent so much of my time worrying ! There would be days nothing productive and worthwhile would get done. Why ? Because I was side tracked by futile thoughts and actions which didn't add up to the bigger picture.

Appachchi always tells me that we must always have our compass intact and not lose sight of the direction it points to. I for one often do lose sight of the bigger picture.

I was, and still am weird in many ways : and I am not ashamed to say so now, but I was. Because I knew this far too well I spent hours thinking about how I could be likable. I went from abandoning my taste of music to adopting a new taste of music simply because everyone was listening to BTS and crushing on them while I secretly sat crushing on a pop operatic group called Il Volo. Thinking is one thing : worrying quite another. I've come to understand that when you worry you really don't get anything done. Absolutely nothing. Apart from feeling sad, sorry and becoming miserable. If you want to change something go ahead change it but don't worry about it! What I failed to see once again was my North. Were any of these problems (as I used to consider them) being solved helping me achieve my main goals ? Nope ! Listening to Rick Astley and Westlife make any difference to listening to KPOP when it came to getting better marks ? Or winning a debate competition ? Or prepping for a Speaking Competition ? Nope... Nope... and Nope... What ACTUALLY mattered was that I was actively contributing on a daily basis to better myself : thereby, ensuring that I would be able to achieve my most ambitious dreams. These futile, negative thoughts did nothing to help me. They only slowed me down.

We also often get side tracked with what is comfortable. What is comfortable is not necessarily what needs to be done. Writing this book is a classic example! I didn't want to sit writing a book when I had assignments to write and short notes to make. I was comfortable with routine and being in my bubble which is being cooped up in my room just studying but : if I wanted to do more, if I want to be more, then, I would have to do what I had to do : not what I wanted nor what I was comfortable with. To truly achieve great things, I realized I had get comfortable being uncomfortable.

I find that the best way to never lose sight of your big picture is to draw plans and hang them up in your room or next to your bed. If you hang your plans (no pun intended) you will constantly keep referring to them, and therefore, be constantly reminded of your big picture. I find quotes to be extremely helpful as well. Every time, I get side tracked by negative thoughts I read my favorite quotes, and, the moment I do, I feel motivated and am able to get back on track. I also find that whenever I get side tracked if I play my favorite songs (and as Taylor Swift says) Shake it off (I'm not that old fashioned after all!) I instantly feel pumped up, and ready to work again. Exercise too I find, is a fantastic way to let go of all the stress, anxiety and negativity. Just vent on the tread mill : its far healthier than venting over a tub of ice cream ! I read a book titled "Power" by Rhonda Byrne : and it had a lasting impression on me. She spoke of the three steps : Imagine, Feel and Receive. I find that every time I visualize my goals : both short and long term, and visualize and truly feel as I have accomplished them, it not only gives me the confidence and reassurance to say that these goals are achievable but it also helps me know what my bigger dream is : and therefore not get side tracked. But these aren't the only methods to ensure you stay on track. There are plenty of ways. Once again, you do need to find ones that really work for you. What MATTERS is that you don't get sidetracked !

We also often get side tracked because of the lack of faith we have both in ourselves and our dreams. If we truly believe, then we won't doubt our abilities : we won't worry. These worrying thoughts are from where fear and negativity spring. The moment these thoughts are eradicated your true powers are unleashed and dreams become realities. The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their own dreams : so no matter how hard it may seem : always always believe.

During my O/L year I was failing maths I got 30s up until the second term of grade 11 : it was only in the last term that I scored a 50.

Even when I sat for the paper I truly didn't believe I would score well : and yes I didn't : I just got a C for Math (having worked so so hard for it !) I'm now doing an advanced diploma in Psychology : and our first semester itself had an introduction to Research Methods and Statistics ! I was on pins but this time I truly believed: and i decided to give it my all rather than cowering in fright over what was my nemesis subject. I sat for my exam having studied hard and with confidence in my ability to see it through. I truly believed I could get the mark I desired and for the first time in my life I scored a 74% for my maths related paper. So the girl who was told will have cognitive disabilities scored a 74% I am STILL weak in math but I don't think Math related subjects are ever going to cripple me in fear !

We also often get side tracked by doing too much. As a result of being bullied I made it my life's mission to ensure I got good marks : and having the pleasure of walking up to the bullies sticking my score sheet in their face and saying I did it : and "I'm better than all of you !" "I ain't as you so rudely called a "Modi" : I'm smart." In the process, I, in no uncertain terms was 'losing it' and would have 'completely burnt out' if not for the fact that I got dengue and was forced to take a break. I worked on a daily basis for more than 12 hours and got less than 7 hours of sleep. I would drink so much of tea to simply keep awake that now I just can't drink a cup of tea anymore. I burned out ! I couldn't sit and concentrate... I became tired very easily... The girl who could sit for 12 hours straight without losing focus now got side tracked within the hour. We sometimes are so hell bent on achieving our goals that we forget that doing too much, like doing too little, is dangerous. Do what you must, do extra but don't forget we are human : and all humans need to take a break ! There is only so much the body and mind can handle. I finally understood that age old saying 'All work and no play makes Jill a dull girl.'

Always stay on track : don't lose site of the bigger picture : and always remind yourself of what you want to do and who you want to be.

Knowing when to “give up” gracefully and when to make sacrifices.

One of the biggest decisions and life changing events for me was to move to Kandy from Colombo. If you're thinking I'm crazy : you are absolutely right ! But hey ! No one ever achieved anything by being ordinary !

My school Methodist College was simply fantastic! I was accepted for who I was and given every conceivable opportunity to better myself. My brother moved to Kandy on the 13th of December 2018 I moved in 2019 in April. I was voted in as the Vice-Captain of my house Restarick. I was ecstatic and for once supremely proud of myself. The three final months at College were nothing short of fantastic. I made new friends and old friendships were renewed. I was on cloud nine BUT I wanted to leave. I was never only set on being a prefect : I had a completely different future for me in my own mind and I couldn't wait for it to unravel.

Moving to Kandy gave me the opportunity to devote time to myself and my dreams which I wouldn't be able to do in school as I would be studying for A/Levels (not to say that doing an Advanced Diploma in Psychology is any easier!) Having lectures just 2 days a week gives me the rest of the week to devote time and energy to being able to pursue my multitude of dreams : from doing my own travel show, to learning to take on the management of High5 and Luminary, (Appachchi sternly tells me that I need to start right at the bottom and EARN THE RIGHT to lead his team - and that I will ONLY get the job if the rest of the TEAM votes me in !) to being the world's best speaker : and to even write this book ! I was fortunate to be given the luxury of time and a tranquil environment to do all this with a peace of mind. Call me old fashioned, but in my heart of hearts, I always wanted to retreat into the village. I find this type of environment to be extremely wholesome. A lot may not understand and may think it's a bad idea. For some, maybe to most, it is... But for me, this was the best decision ever !

I did 'sacrifice' my 'badge', possibly the best two years of my young adult life, but I strongly believe that opportunities are what you create : and whichever corner of the island I was in, be it in Kandy or Anuradhapura, I'd be damned if I didn't achieve what I wanted to. I made this sacrifice also because I love my brother dearly : and to me our relationship mattered more than anything else. Amma says he will probably grow up and be so busy that he will forget that he has a sister : more so the reason why I'm going to come and make sure that I'm a part of his life - now more than ever...

To leave, I shan't deny, wasn't easy. The last day I was in school I remember the 7 vice captains sitting in the cop room, crying... I usually feel very shy to cry in front of friends... But for once, I found myself unable to control my tears : and howling like a new born baby !

Don't give up is a common phrase : and I DO believe that for the most part, you must trudge along - and not give up simply because you are faced with obstacles... However, the difference there are times you need to take that call and give up. Give up when you must : but do so gracefully : and do so because of the bigger goal/ambition. When I gave up the badge, I didn't do so envying the person who would take over my position : nor feeling bad for myself. Nor should you linger on. Though I was voted as the vice-captain I was no longer the vice-captain. It wasn't right for me to poke my nose into what was happening in the committee : nor should I inquire about how the new vice-captain was carrying out her duties. The badge was now hers and not mine : and what she did with it was on her : and none of my concern. So when you give up, leave it : and as they would say : move on.

It isn't easy to move on as they say : I agree completely. So how DO you move on?

I don't think leaving the past in the past is to necessarily forget it : but rather to learn from the it.

Initially when I moved to Kandy I did feel rather sad and began to reminisce the past : but in order to move forward you need to be in the PRESENT and look into the future and leave the past be. So look to the future with the sheer joy of the opportunities the future will bring forth : and focus on the here and the now and ensuring that what you do today will make you a better person tomorrow. Revisit the past, reminisce it, feel nostalgic : yet do not wish the past were the present nor wish for it to be the future. When I started my course it was no joy ride what so ever. I found the semester absolutely grueling. I kept re visiting the past and wishing and yearning for it to be the present. It could never be the present. It was once I stopped and embraced the present that my assignments improved and marks increased. Life has a weird way of throwing things in your face and it isn't always pleasant, and in those times, reminiscing the past is not the answer ! Rather work around the problem and figure out ways to make the unpleasant situation better. When I couldn't manage my time I started going back to the basics of sticking to a time table and planning on a daily basis. I asked questions : in fact I asked plenty of questions : some, especially in the statistics class, were very silly ones : but these silly questions, for me, proved invaluable! I looked at my current situation and what I wanted for my future, and worked around it.

To be all of who you want to be, you need to shrug your shoulders, and let it go at times.

Seeing the dream through: And not being warped either way.

My dream whilst in school was to be the Vice-Captain of my house. I was fortunate to be selected : and voted in for that coveted position. I was also truly proud that our house came second from fourth position the last year (we had 6 houses).

However, I came to the shocking realization that I was becoming warped in my new position. This hit me hard on one occasion. Let me explain. We had to do the décor for the house corner and I was well... a perfectionist... I wanted things to look pretty and my group of grade 12s who were handling the décor went 'behind my back' and carried on with the décor even when we hadn't discussed the theme and come to a final conclusion on what to do. Simply put they took matters 'into their own hands'. I was, for once, LIVID... Whilst it is arguable that it was fair of me to be angry, what was NOT was my mentality and thought process. I wasn't upset that the group was not taking the others opinions and ideas into consideration BUT that they were "disobeying" ME. Yes, I was the vice-captain but who on earth was I to want to be respected in that 'all important' way ?. To begin with I was not even the Head Prefect for them to pay so much of respect ! I was just a Vice-Captain. When we accomplish our dreams and are given a powerful positions, though we may not realize it, we begin to take a rather high handed attitude. Its natural I guess : but it isn't right : and we must be guarded and very very aware of it. I think it's important, no matter how much we achieve, to remain rooted, and humble.

To do this is simple. Firstly, understand that we are not so important no matter what position we have : nor how accomplished we are. Secondly, remember we are all human : and that the accolades we have needn't demand respect nor to be idolized. You will be respected and idolized if you treat everyone as equal and not get cocky and arrogant simply because you'rr accomplished. No one really is going to like an arrogant person who thinks no end of themselves.

The same applies when we fail. My grandfather always very proudly tells me whenever I fail : that "failures are the pillars of success." Like Winston Churchill said "Success is not final and failure is not fatal." It is the 'WILL' to go on that matters. The mindset of a winner will be to look at how and why they failed : not get overtly sensitive about it. Failure is imminent for us all but it isn't fatal or final : it is a part and parcel of life and is inevitable. But I agree : as with all 'profound' things, it's easier said than done. I always loved speaking and took part in debates. I was never brilliant at it I never won best debater : and I felt so upset and like an abject failure. I spent so much of time feeling sorry and upset that I never looked at the root cause for my failure and attempt to correct it. As a result, with debating I never got anywhere. I often feel that it is hardest to brave : it's easy to be scared, sad and angry. But to be brave is so much harder : especially when you fail but hey! life is all about learning. And I think we learn most from our biggest failures. The more we learn from our mistakes the less we make them, thereby, making us more successful. The mistakes will repeat until the lesson is learnt.

So how do you get back up when you fail ? Watch a movie ! I find movies like Rocky Balboa, Eddie the Eagle extremely motivating ! What I learnt from all these motivational movies is that failing does NOT make you a FAILURE. What's also important is to have sheer confidence and will. Before anyone else, you must believe that you can and that you will. If you truly believe in it, you certainly WILL make it! Reading auto biographies, and books about being positive and successful proved to be extremely helpful as well. Like Confucius says "he who says he can and he who says he can't, are both usually right." So it's all up to you! You're the Master of your destiny and the Captain of your soul.

EPILOGUE

After all that is said and done...

The daughter muses...

I'm genuinely a far cry away from where I long to be : and I am still prone to think negatively, wallow in some self pity and completely fall apart because I didn't win. However, with time and practice the frequency at which these negative behavior, feelings and actions take place have reduced tremendously : which my parents keep telling me is far more important than anything else I have achieved. One of my favorite TV series as I had mentioned quite fondly is Doctor Who. He often says "I am and will always be the eternal optimist, the hoper of far flung hopes and the dreamer of the improbable dreams." I borrowed this from the good Doctor to be my life's mantra !

I constantly remind myself that there is a world out there waiting for me to explore, and countless, limitless possibilities : all I have to do is to tread the path and overcome the obstacles and never ever compromise on the dreams I have envisioned for myself.

I am, and always will be a 'work in progress' : and knowing this eases the innate desire in me to be 'perfect' : nor expect my life to be 'perfect.'

Maybe I will become all I wanted to be. Maybe I won't. What I refuse, however, is not be a better version of myself, every day. This much I AM in control of : and I will truly truly do my best to do just that...

I always wanted to write a book. I sincerely hope this book was, in some small measure, in some small way, helpful to you...

CUT the CRAP ②



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Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



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Shaakya is a full time student, reading for her Bachelors in Psychology. She completed her secondary education at Methodist College Colombo 3, where she was voted in as a House Vice Captain a member of the school committee. Shaakya has secured places in 3 national speaking competitions, and is a member of the Kandy ToastMasters Club. When not writing assignments and prepping for exams, Shaakya reads, writes poetry, cooks, swims and plays 'army' with her 10 year old brother.