

## THE OUTLIERS' SECRET – THE CORE TRAITS

Outliers – high achievers and successful people; who doesn't envy them?

Instead of being envious, let's be inspired. Among the easiest way to be inspired is to take a peek at the lives of successful individuals.

A lot of us spent time reading or watching documentaries on various types of successful people – millionaires, leading businessmen, world leaders, inventors, top athletes, celebrities, motivators, academicians, and so many others. We can find numerous biographies written on these great personalities. As we learn more about their lives, we become more amazed by their success and the journey they went through to achieve it.

How did we get interested in them in the first place?

Their success, of course. Without it, they are just ordinary people, but because of it, they are elevated to the stature of being extraordinary. For the things they have achieved and the hard work they have put in to achieve it, they deserve to be categorised as one.

So, how did all these great individuals became so successful?

If we were to search the web or bookstores to find the answers to this rather popular question, we will be able to find various formulas, theories and recipes explaining the reasons behind their success. Most of them are true and backed by strong researches.

However, it was the formula taught by my mentor that really got registered and embedded in me – a formula which I have held on tight to this very day.

### **Secrets of Successful People**

As mentioned, it was the learning I acquired during the early days of my career that molded the foundation of my life principles (at least in terms of career) – principles that I adopt and practise (or try hard to) most in life.

Among the earliest and most important lessons taught to me was the secret to become successful in life, taught by none other than my mentor.

After successfully brainwashing me with the concept of having a purpose in life, he imparted the next life-changing lesson – the two core traits commonly found in successful people. If we were to build and practise both traits religiously and consistently, with God's permission, we will bring ourselves closer to tasting success.

Yes, it was shortlisted to just two main traits, making it easy for me to remember.

I am not saying that these are the only two traits in a successful individual; they are the two core ones that stand out the most. If we were to really study and analyse the life of successful individuals, particularly the ones who are able to sustain their success, we will easily find these two traits in them. It is when they start lacking either one that we will notice the start of their downfall.

So what are the two traits that are so critical to successful individuals?

**Continuous learning** and **discipline** – core traits religiously practised day in, day out by successful individuals.

Surprised by the simplicity of the secret?

Usually the greatest things in life are simple. It is when we start to complicate things that they become difficult. But then again, it is the simple things we find difficult to practise and sustain – an odd circumstance but sadly true.

***Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.***

Leonardo da Vinci, Italian polymath

### **Lifelong Learning**

I am pretty sure that once we start pondering on the answer, it will make a lot sense that continuous learning (also known as lifelong learning) is the backbone of any successful individual.

Knowledge has always been the top priority in any civilizations, cultures, religions, societies, families and individuals. Since young, we are instilled and constantly reminded on the importance of acquiring knowledge in order for us to build a better future for ourselves.

It is through knowledge that we are able to improve ourselves, learning about the limitless matters in life and being able to perform things we never thought we could do. Knowledge equips us with the ability to differentiate between right or wrong, good or bad. Knowledge also provides us with an edge, enabling us to differentiate between good and great, placing us at the top.

Obviously, it is through knowledge that we attain success.

***Anas reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "He who goes forth in search of knowledge is considered as struggling in the Cause of Allah until he returns."***

At-Tirmidhi

The span of knowledge is so wide and never ending, divided into different branches covering various matters in life, making it impossible for anyone to cover everything. Such vast knowledge is only known to Allah as all of it originated from Him.

***And if whatever trees upon the earth were pens and the sea [was ink], replenished thereafter by seven [more] seas, the words of Allah would not be exhausted. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.***

Luqman 31: 27

Knowledge is evolving and dynamic, discovered and created as the world ages with time. Who would have thought that computers will be invented and would play a major role in the world? It was only in the 1990s that the internet significantly changed how we access information and do things. There are numerous other examples, which are too many to mention.

Ultimately, it is through knowledge that we create new knowledge. It cannot get more important than that.

Hence, it only makes sense for us to continuously seek knowledge, putting us on a journey of lifelong learning to continuously improve ourselves.

***The medicine for anti-aging is lifelong learning.***

Robin Sharma

### **Seeking Knowledge in Islam**

Knowledge has been given the utmost priority in Islam from the very beginning. It is so important that it was even emphasised in the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

***Recite. In the name of thy Lord who created man from a clot. Recite. And thy Lord is the Most Generous Who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not.***

Al-'Alaq 96: 1-5

The first verse emphasises on the act of reciting or reading, which is a fundamental action in seeking knowledge. Reading is synonymous to education or learning. In other words, reading represents the act of seeking knowledge itself. It is through reading we are able to acquire the knowledge needed for us to appreciate and reflect on the beautiful world we are living in.

The fourth verse then highlights the usage of a pen, which represents the act of writing, another important component of knowledge. Writing enables us to record and translate information into meaningful knowledge that allows us to pass it down through generations, disseminating and transmitting it for the consumption of mankind.

The last verse directly touches on knowledge itself, reminding us on how little we know and the need for us to learn as much knowledge of the world as permitted by Allah. The call for seeking knowledge is essential for us to reflect on the greatness of our Creator. We are called to discover the world and its richness so that we appreciate Allah's creations and take lessons from it.

***Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts.***

Al-Haj 22: 46

Living without proper knowledge is extremely dangerous as the world is full of temptations and evilness that could easily sway us away from the right

path. Basically, knowledge was what brought mankind out of the dark ages, saving us from ignorance and our own wrongdoings.

***Abu Hurairah said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying: 'This world is cursed and what is in it is cursed, except the remembrance of Allah (dhikr) and anything that pleases Allah, or one who has knowledge or who acquires knowledge.'***

Narrated by Ibn Majah. Graded Hasan

Our journey to finding the straight path back to Allah is made possible through knowledge. As we become more knowledgeable, we become amazed by His greatness and are automatically drawn closer to Him.

***And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colors'. Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.***

Fatir 35: 28

The act of seeking knowledge is highly praised in Islam as mentioned by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in many occasions.

***It was narrated that Zirr bin Hubaish said: "I went to Safwan bin 'Assal Al-Muradi and he said: 'What brought you here?' I said: 'I am seeking knowledge.' He said: 'I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: "There is no one who goes out of his house in order to seek knowledge, but the angels lower their wings in approval of his action.'"***

Narrated by Ibn Majah. Graded Hasan

Knowledge is the base for us to be rewarded by Allah; with it we are safe and without it, we are lost – we tend to perform actions that will likely result in us sinning, bringing us further away from the truth. Knowledge is critical in ensuring that we make sound and right decisions in life.

***It was narrated that Abu Kabshah Al-Anmari said: “The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: ‘The likeness of this nation is that of four people:***

***A man to whom Allah gives wealth and knowledge, so he acts according to his knowledge with regard to his wealth, spending it as it should be spent;***

***And a man to whom Allah gives knowledge, but he does not give him wealth, so he says: “If I had been given (wealth) like this one, I would have done what (the first man) did.”***

***The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: ‘They will be equal in reward.’***

***And a man to whom Allah gives wealth but does not give knowledge, so he squanders his wealth and spends it in inappropriate ways;***

***and a man to whom Allah gives neither knowledge nor wealth, and he says: “If I had (wealth) like this one, I would do what (the third man) did.”***

***The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: ‘They are equal in their burden (of sin).’”***

Ibn Majah

Not only seeking knowledge is given a special place in Islam but the act of disseminating or teaching it receives the same attention and recognition. Spreading knowledge is essential in building a civilized and developed society especially in matters involving morality and ethics.

***Ibn Mas`ud narrated: I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, "Envy is permitted only in two cases: A man whom Allah gives wealth, and he disposes of it rightfully, and a man to whom Allah gives knowledge which he applies and teaches it"***

Narrated by Bukhari & Muslim

In actual fact, it goes beyond that; we are generously rewarded for any good deeds performed by our students based on the knowledge we have cascaded to them.

***Sahl bin Mu'adh bin Anas narrated from his father that: The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Whoever teaches some knowledge will have the reward of the one who acts upon it, without that detracting from the doer's reward in the slightest."***

Narrated by Ibn Majah. Graded Hasan

The rewards do not even stop when the teacher leaves the world. As long as the knowledge is put to good use by future generations, the teacher continues to reap its rewards. The boundaries are limitless; the teacher would still be rewarded for the good deeds of their students' students whenever they practice the knowledge taught to them. It goes beyond numerous levels, generations after generations, and yet the teacher is still rewarded. This is the true power of knowledge.

***When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three: recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son who prays for him (for the deceased).***

Muslim

The status of a knowledgeable person is elevated in Islam consistent with the law of nature which also behaves in a similar manner. We can easily notice how knowledgeable people are admired and referred to by people. We do not need to go far to notice this fact – who do we often refer to when faced with problems?

As a child, we refer to our parents as they are our main source of knowledge. During university years, we reach out to our lecturers or tutors to seek clarification and guidance. At work, we look up to our bosses or supervisors for directions and instructions. It is only logical that such high status is given to learned people by Islam.



***Abu ad-Darda' reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "He who follows a path in quest of knowledge, Allah will make the path of Jannah easy to him. The angels lower their wings over the seeker of knowledge, being pleased with what he does. The inhabitants of the heavens and the earth and even the fish in the depth of the oceans seek forgiveness for him. The superiority of the learned man over the devout worshipper is like that of the full moon to the rest of the stars (i.e., in brightness). The learned are the heirs of the Prophets who bequeath neither dinar nor dirham but only that of knowledge; and he who acquires it, has in fact acquired an abundant portion."***

Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi

For this reason we are encouraged to always be among knowledgeable people so that we can easily learn and take lessons from them. We had previously touched on how birds of the same feather flock together. Hopefully by frequently being among knowledgeable people, we are able to acquire as much knowledge from them and also at the same time adopt their approaches, habits, behaviours and passion towards knowledge.

***It has come to Malik's knowledge that Luqman al-Hakim counselled his son saying, "My son! Sit with the learned men and keep close to them. Allah gives life to the hearts with the light of wisdom as Allah gives life to the dead earth with the abundant rain of the sky."***

Muwatta' Malik

### **Continuous Learning = Continuous Improvement**

In essence, continuous learning equates to continuous improvement. It does not take a genius to figure that out. The more we know about things, the more things we are able to do in life. The more we know about a particular thing, the better we will be at it.

Regardless of how we look at it, the end result is the same – we improve ourselves. Essentially, this is the fundamental importance of continuous learning

and how it fits in the equation of success. It is only if we continuously improve ourselves that we are able to attain success and more importantly, able to sustain it. We usually hear the phrase “it is easy to be number one (a champion), but it is more difficult to sustain it”. The same concept applies here.

Continuous learning enables us to keep up to date with the latest developments happening around us. Without constant improvement, we will surely lag behind. This is particularly true especially in today’s fast paced and ever changing world. For instance, how the rapid development of digital technology has significantly changed the business landscape globally – it literally changed how business works.

***Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty.  
Anyone who keeps learning stays young.***  
Henry Ford

If businesses fail to adapt to these changes, they will surely lose out to the competition. If they continue to remain stagnant, they might just end up failing tremendously and eventually getting thrown out of business.

***Stuff we used to think was nearly impossible happens all the time.  
That’s the history of technology.***  
Sam Altman, co-founder of Loopt and President of YCombinator

In today’s world, we are able to see large online shopping sites or even social media entrepreneurs recording “out of the mind” daily transactions (which we often refer to as “hits”) at their sites – banging on convenience and changing the way people shop. Failure of large players to embark into this space would eventually result in them losing significant market share.

We have also seen large organisations such as Kodak, which was once the leading provider of films for traditional cameras went bankrupt after failing to leverage on the digital photography technology, which oddly was actually invented by one of their engineers, Steve Sasson in 1975.

So, what went wrong?

Although Kodak was a pioneer in the technical aspects of digital imaging, it lacked the skills in areas such as lens-making and manufacturing that were critical in making efficient and reliable electronic devices in order for them to successfully commercialise products. Indirectly, it just goes to show their unfortunate lack of focus on continuously improving themselves, which can only happen through continuously learning.

Another great example was when the banking sector started to introduce internet banking services back in year 2000. In Malaysia, the first bank to introduce internet banking to the public was Maybank, which was launched sometime in June 2000. Although it took some time for consumers to be receptive towards it, it eventually became the most successful internet banking story in Malaysia, presently offering a full range of services online. In no time, other banks had to follow suit in order for them to stay competitive in the market. It continues to be one of the most dynamic areas of services as efforts are continuously put in to improve its services and usability to attract consumers' usage and preference.

These were all possible because of continuous learning – the internal desire of wanting to improve oneself through new knowledge.

Even in the days before high end technologies came into the picture, it was continuous learning that contributed to the success of individuals. If we were to study the life of the famous Imam Shafi'i, the father of *usul fiqh* (the principles behind the study of Islamic law) and founder of the Shafi'i *mazhab*

(school of thought). His entire life was dedicated to both acquiring and spreading knowledge. Even though he came from a poor family, it did not stop him from pursuing this path. His mother could not afford to buy him proper writing utensils hence he had to either memorise the lessons or wrote notes on old animal bones. Despite all these hardships, he could recite the Quran by heart at the age of seven and subsequently memorised the most popular book on Islamic law studies at that time – *Muwatta Malik* (written by Imam Malik, the founder of the Maliki school of thought and one of the most prominent Islamic scholars of all time) at the age of 10.

He then travelled to Madinah to study directly under Imam Malik. While he was there, he took the chance to study under other teachers as well including Imam Muhammad al-Shaybani, one of Imam Abu Hanifa's (the founder of the Hanafi school of thought) foremost students.

His journey did not stop there. Not long after the demise of his beloved teacher – Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i then travelled throughout the Arabian Peninsula to acquire knowledge as well as teach at various places. Among his most famous student was Imam Ahmad, the originator of the fourth school of thought, Hanbali. He finally resided in Egypt where he finally completed his work on *usul fiqh* and polished his legal opinions. Among the most famous incidents after moving to Egypt was when he changed his earlier opinion and ruling on a matter after obtaining a better understanding of it. This simply proves that he was continuously learning – a man who had always studied matters in depth, so as to reach the right solution and the right answers regarding any question put to him.

Today, his works have undeniably benefited the Islamic community at large, be it the followers of his school of thought or the general Muslim population. His success has survived generation after generation, a testament

of the sustainability of his work that was done based on sincere and divine intentions.

Another great scholar who lived a life of continuous learning is the great hadith scholar, Imam Bukhari. He is well known for his works of compiling authentic (*sahih*) hadiths and eventually produced the *Sahih Bukhari* hadith collection, which is widely used and accepted as a main reference on hadiths of all time.

Imam Bukhari travelled between continents to further his knowledge on hadiths – from his birthplace in Bukhara, Uzbekistan to Nishapur, Northern Iran and then to the Balkh, Afghanistan. He eventually ended up in Makkah and Madinah. After spending some six years in the Hijaz, he then began to travel in search of every authentic hadith he could get his hands on – Egypt, Syria twice, Basrah four times and then to Kufah and Baghdad multiple times, as well as Wasit, Marw, other parts of Khurasan, and other well-known centres of learning at that time.

He collected over 300,000 reports, of which 100,000 met his conditions of an authentic hadith. He had obtained them from over a thousand scholars of hadiths.

He was so strict in his criteria of placing an authentic hadith that if he found even one weakness in the narrator of the hadith, he would reject it. He would ensure that the narrators were trustworthy and would not fabricate, or change the wording of any hadith. If he discovered that a narrator in a chain openly sinned or was not considered trustworthy, the hadith will be immediately discarded, unless a stronger chain for it existed. This was how strict he was in determining the authenticity of a hadith.

I remembered the story shared by one of my lecturers during one of the *shariah* classes in 2014. As was told during the class, Imam Bukhari had travelled

hundreds of miles by horse to collect a hadith from a particular person. Mind you, traveling such a distance during those times would take weeks or even months. However, when he reached the person's house, he saw that the man was trying to call to a donkey that he owned. The donkey did not want to come to the man. In efforts of luring the donkey to him, the man tricked the donkey by pretending to have food under his clothes. After witnessing this incident, Imam Bukhari immediately got back on his horse and left without accepting a single hadith from the man.

This was the extent of his lifelong learning journey, an effort almost impossible for us to emulate.

These are just two examples of Islamic scholars put forward to illustrate the importance of continuous learning, which contributed significantly to the success of these great individuals.

In actual fact, if we were study the lives of all the other Islamic great scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad and Imam Muslim to name a few, they would all display the same trait – continuous learning, a core behavior compulsory in successful individuals.

### **Barriers of Lifelong Learning**

What stops many of us from getting on the journey of lifelong learning? The answer is simple – arrogance and ego; our two worst enemies.

***Just because you are CEO, don't think you have landed. You must continually increase your learning, the way you think, and the way you approach the organization. I've never forgotten that.***

Indra Nooyi, Chief Executive Officer PepsiCo

The moment we think we know enough, we have met our doom. It literally stops our development and marks the start of the end to our success. No matter how high up we are in terms of position or how big of a success we have achieved, the moment we stop learning, we stop growing.

Even Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) felt restless during the period in which revelations had temporarily stopped; reminding him and others that he had no control over them. Regardless of this, he had longed for it, worrying that it had ceased completely. This simply illustrates how he was also living a life of continuous learning.

How can we, regular human beings think otherwise?

To begin with, it is not difficult for us to realise that we know so little considering the wide range of knowledge around us, which is by default impossible for us to cover. So what makes us think that we are already intelligent enough?

Do realise that no matter what, there will always be people who knows more than us, even about things we thought we are already an expert in. The world is so huge and dynamic that things develop day by day, at different places, times and paces making it impossible for us to keep up with all the different developments that are happening simultaneously.

Such arrogance and ego – thinking that we already know enough just represents the true character of a person, which usually becomes the main reason for a person's downfall.

***Ego = 1/Knowledge.***

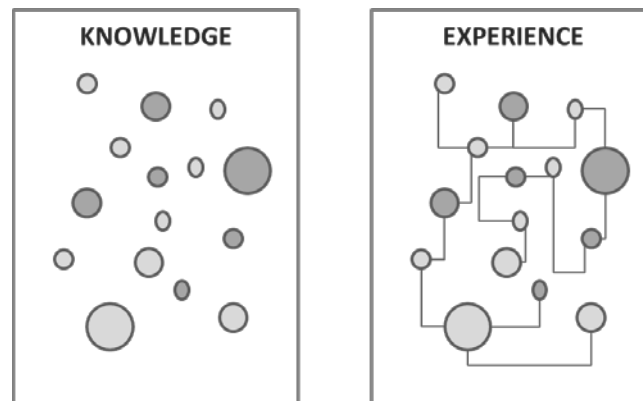
***More knowledge lesser the ego, lesser the knowledge more the ego.***

Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist and genius

## Knowledge into Action

Action without knowledge gets us into trouble; knowledge without action gets us nowhere – it takes both to make it work.

Among our biggest mistakes in life is acquiring knowledge but not doing anything about it. Beneficial knowledge acquired is meant to be practised and not to be kept as a collection. The actions taken on the knowledge we have gained contribute to our life experiences. If not, it remains as unbeneficial information lying around in our minds. A diagram I stumbled upon in social media beautifully illustrates this fact.



***Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else.***  
Leonardo da Vinci

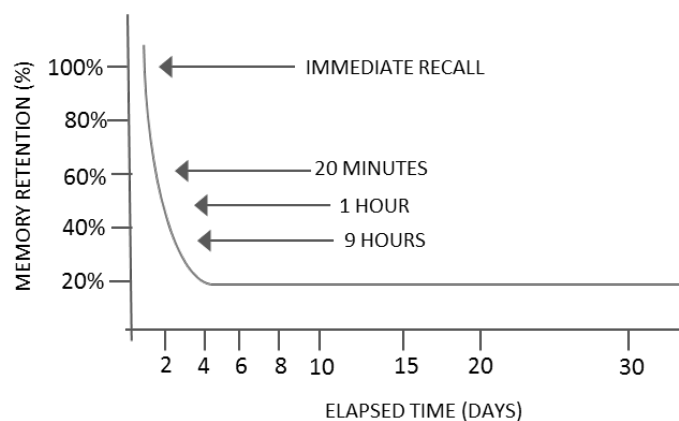
It is important that we take the necessary steps to ensure that the knowledge we have acquired makes sense and contributes to our own improvements. The pre-condition of success is to take action and the guarantee of it is taking actions that are supported by the relevant knowledge. In conclusion, knowledge is a compulsory ingredient for success.



## Human Learning Capabilities – We are Forgetful Beings

Herman Ebbinghaus, a German psychologist performed the first systematic study on learning and memory, and took himself as the test subject. He analysed the results mathematically to observe whether the memory follows any verifiable patterns. The results of his experiment showed that:

- Meaningful things are remembered for about ten times longer than random, meaningless things.
- Materials that are studied beyond mastery (over-learned) are remembered longer.
- Repeated learning sessions over a longer interval of time improves memory retention of any subject.
- Items towards the beginning and the end of a series are most easily remembered.
- Items forgotten can be relearned faster than new ones learned for the first time.
- Forgetting is most rapid in the first nine hours – very rapid in the first hour followed by slower loss, after nine hours, approximately 60 percent is forgotten. After 24 hours, two-thirds of anything memorised is forgotten.



## **Different Types of Learning**

Based on my own personal experience of continuous learning, I have managed to group the different types of learning into three categories:

### **1. Learning new things – acquiring hard knowledge**

The first category is basically the traditional way of learning; we acquire new knowledge in life. Basically, these are knowledge acquired through reading, attending classes, research, mentoring, coaching and various other conventional learning methods.

What we look for are academic, technical and know-how knowledge, which is fundamental for us to do things. It can be anything to everything, depending on our needs or interests. This is the kind of knowledge that prepares us for bigger things in life, providing us with the necessary bullets to improve ourselves.

### **2. Learning existing things – practice to perfect**

The second category is learning more about the ones we already know and finding ways to improve the things we do.

Although there are times that it is coupled with acquiring new knowledge, it also involves continuous discovery on how to do a particular thing better. It allows us to practise on a particular subject matter of interest, which subsequently brings us closer to perfectness – in other words, bringing us closer to success.

### **3. Learning from mistakes – hard lessons**

Last but not least is the most painful type of learning, learning from mistakes – the hard lessons in life.

***Life is like photography. You need the negatives to develop.***

Unknown

Despite it being painful, it is one of the most effective ways of learning and improving ourselves. The trick is straightforward – we have to learn from the mistakes and try to avoid repeating the same mistakes again. We should also try our best to find ways to correct it.

***Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.***

Henry Ford

The adoption of this approach and mindset by successful people had resulted in great benefits to mankind. Among the greatest example is the production of the commercial light bulb by Thomas Edison.

***You can't worry about the mistakes because you're going to make a lot of them. You've got to be thinking about your next move.***

Ben Horowitz, businessman, investor, blogger, and author

In producing the first commercial light bulb, Thomas Edison failed numerous times but never gave up. When asked about it, he answered:

***"I have not failed 10,000 times. I have not failed once. I have succeeded in proving that those 10,000 ways will not work. When I have eliminated the ways that will not work, I will find the way that will work."***

***Defeat is not the worst of failures. Not to have tried is the true failure.***

George E. Woodbury, poet, critic, and teacher

## **Different Learning Styles**

Generally, there are three styles of learning – visual, auditory or kinesthetic. Everybody learns through all three styles but there is usually a dominant learning style that we are most comfortable with.

Visual learners primarily learn from observing and seeing things. Auditory learners, on the other hand, primarily learn by listening and speaking. Kinesthetic learners learn through hands-on experience – they learn better by actually doing the thing and through feelings.

Knowing our dominant learning style would enable us to increase our knowledge absorption and improve our learning capabilities. I was taught a simple method to identify the dominant learning style of a person by my mentor many years back.

If we were to ask a spontaneous question to a person about something in the past, for instance – who was your childhood best friend or what was your happiest moment as a child or any other question that would force a person to recall the past – we can immediately identify a person's dominant learning style by observing which way his or her eyes roll while they try to figure out the answer.

If the eyeballs were to look up, they are probably visual learners. The act of looking up is perceived to be an effort to try and recall images from the brain.

If the eyes were to roll sideways, they are probably auditory learners. The act of rolling to eyes sideways represents the effort of a person trying to recall their memory from what they have heard before.

If the eyes were to look down, they are probably kinesthetic learners. The act of rolling their eyes down is an attempt to try and recall the feeling they used to feel during the past event.

Another indication on a learning style, which is even simpler, is to look at whether a person is the eldest, the second or the third child in a family. Usually, the eldest child would be a visual learner. The logic behind it is because the first child is usually given the most attention by the parents. This scenario provides the child an opportunity to observe the parents' actions with intense focus. As they are given the most attention, parents usually teach the child by literally showing them things; "this is a tree" or "this is a car". This is how an eldest child develops his visual as his primary learning style.

A second child on the other hand is usually auditory. We often hear the term "second child syndrome" – the second child usually receives less attention from the parents compared to their older sibling. As the parents now have to teach both the eldest and the second child, the parents need to divide their attention and will resort to talking and telling more instead of showing. Because the eldest have experienced things such going to school or riding the bicycle first, the parents will unintentionally spend a bit more time with the older child to teach the new things.

Without choice, the second child is put in a situation where he would need to observe the things that are happening around him. Even though the child wants to get involved, the child might not be able to participate or needs to wait for his turn because of being younger. While waiting, the child is indirectly forced to listen to the conversations, which unconsciously becomes a learning avenue for the child. Such experiences will therefore result in auditory being formed as the second child's primary method of learning.

Finally, the third child is usually kinesthetic – they primarily learn through feelings. Just imagine, the second child is already receiving less attention, what more the third. His or her siblings would have grown much older than the third child and as the siblings grow older, they would be scolded or reprimanded more

by the parents. Here comes the emotional drama, often happening in front of the third child.

Observing these events, the third child would become more sensitive as they develop emotional feelings as an effect from the events happening around them. They are usually comforted through touch – hugging and cuddling to calm them down. This makes them comfortable with touching things, which is how they start to develop kinesthetic as a primary learning style.

For people who are the fourth child and above, we would usually need to resort to the earlier method of asking a question about their past to identify their style.

To be honest, I am not sure how accurate these methods are. On the surface, it does sound logical enough to at least give an indication on the learning styles of people. At the end of day, what is more important is for us to identify our own learning method so that we can optimise and improve our learning capabilities to the maximum.

### **Lifelong Learning – a Journey**

Continuous learning is ongoing; there is no end to it. No matter how old you are or how high up or successful you are, it is a process that we cannot avoid in our journey to success. The onus is on us to do it as it is proven to be the core of success.

***Without self-discipline, success is impossible, period.***  
Lou Holtz, American football player, coach, and analyst

## Discipline – The Coat of Arms of Success

If we were to open any motivational or self-thought books on achieving success, it is very likely that we will find discipline as one, if not the main, driver of success.

***Discipline is the soul of an army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success to the weak, and esteem to all.***

George Washington, 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. President

Discipline – abiding to something in a habitual or controlled way, takes a lot effort to do. It is a holistic practice, which makes it difficult to master. We might be disciplined in a particular matter but fail to do the same in another. For example, we might be disciplined when it comes to the completion of work but undisciplined when it comes to attending meetings – we are always fashionably late. Although both situations involve the subject of time, it does not mean that we can be disciplined in both.

This is the biggest challenge when it comes to discipline – it is hard to be disciplined at being disciplined, if you get what I mean.

***The one quality which sets one man apart from another, the key which lifts one aspiration while others are caught up in the mire of mediocrity, is not talent, formal education nor intellectual brightness – it is self-discipline.***

***With self-discipline, most anything is possible.***

***Without it, even the simplest goal can seem like the impossible dream.***

Theodore Roosevelt, 26<sup>th</sup> U.S. President

If we are able to be disciplined in a wider range of things, the higher the chances are for us to achieve success.

## **My Love-Hate Relationship with Discipline**

Discipline is actually one of the hardest things for me considering my rebellious nature, a problem I had since young. It has been my biggest weakness for many years and till date, I still try hard to improve it.

I can still remember the day I was scolded by my boss for coming in late to the office, some time back in 2005 during my days as an executive personal assistant to the CEO.

“What’s your problem?!?” he shouted while standing at his office door, catching me off guard and leaving me speechless at the spur of the moment – I will never forget that day. Coming from a man who consistently clocks in early every day, I was in no position to defend myself. Discipline was one of his main mantra – especially when it comes to time.

***By time, indeed, mankind is in loss.***

Al-Asr 103: 1 - 2

Nevertheless, realising and admitting that self-discipline as a weakness of mine, I continued to find ways to improve myself in the various aspects of life, slowly picking up the pace to cover as much areas as possible. Starting from the delivery of work to replying emails, reading a page of Quran a day, exercising for a specific allocated time each day – all these built over time, which eventually translates into a habit.

***Everyone is creative. Everyone is talented. Few are disciplined.***

Brendon Buchard, motivational author

I also had the unexpected catalyst from my sickness and “revert” experience that in some odd way, helped improved my discipline. Remember



the story of my path in reverting? It involved a lot of consistency in performing certain actions, mainly acts of worship. Over time, through discipline, these actions became a habit and because of that, I eventually recovered.

But at the same time, I had always been disciplined when it comes to the delivery of work – it was one of my strengths that formed my credibility. I had always ensured that I submit what was required from me on time and in most cases, earlier than expected.

***Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.***

Jim Rohn, entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker

## Islam and Discipline

Islam is a religion of discipline. The regulation of man's conduct within one system of life is one of the most important reasons of success and stability. This is what Islam brings to mankind.

Allah has ordered Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to be disciplined based on Islam and taught us not to transgress – not to go beyond the boundaries set.

***So remain on a right course as you have been commanded, [you] and those who have turned back with you [to Allah], and do not transgress. Indeed, He is Seeing of what you do.***

Hud 11: 112

Ibn Abbas said: "There was no verse in the Quran harder on the Prophet (ﷺ) than this verse." For this reason, when the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Your hair is getting gray early", he replied: "Surah Hud and its sisters made my hair gray."

***Abu Ishaq narrated from Ikrimah, from Ibn Abbas who said: "Abu Bakar said: 'O Messenger of Allah! You have become grey-haired.' He said: 'I have gone grey-haired from (Surah) Hud, Al-Waqi`ah, Al-Mursalat and `Ammi Yatasa'alun and Idhash-Shamsu Kuwwirat.'"***

At-Tirmidhi

This is because *istiqamah*, the fundamental principle of discipline is indeed difficult to attain.

***Sufyan bin 'Abdullah reported: I said, "O Messenger of Allah, tell me something of Islam which I will not ask anyone else about it." He (ﷺ) said, "Say, 'I believe in Allah' and then be steadfast".***

Muslim

This is the extent of which discipline is emphasised in Islam. Indirectly, the structure of acts of worship also trains us to be disciplined. We are required to pray five times a day to be performed at specific timings – *Subuh* in the morning, *Zohor* at noon, *Asr* in late afternoon, *Maghrib* between day and night, and lastly *Isyak* at night.

***....Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times.***

An-Nisa 4: 103

These prayers are compulsory upon us for the rest of our lives – just by performing them we are trained to be disciplined.

If we were to further analyse other types of acts of worship, for instance the act of congregation prayers, the Imam will stand in the front while the people would stand in rows behind him. The people will perform a prayer action only after the Imam had performed it. This continues until the end of the prayer.

Similarly the same applies to other acts of worship such as fasting in the month of Ramadhan where we are trained to fast for specific period of time with a clear start and end points in a day. There are numerous other examples that we can elaborate to illustrate this fact.

In Islam, discipline is applied to all aspects of in life – social, political, economy, and worship. It forms a fundamental part of a Muslim's life.

### **Discipline and the Road to Success**

Success requires hard work; anyone who says otherwise had never tasted true success. Hard work is only sustainable with discipline. This is the truth.

***Success isn't measured by money or power or social rank.***

***Success is measured by your discipline and inner peace.***

Mike Ditka, American football player, coach, and television commentator

The best example to illustrate this obvious fact is to look at the lives of successful sportsmen. Let us take Tiger Woods for instance, the golf legend who was the youngest man and the first African American to win the U.S. Masters. He is considered to be one, if not the most successful golfer who ever lived. What was the secret of his success?

Discipline and hard work.

He has a daily training routine from morning to evening; two hours on the driving range and on-course swing work in the morning, followed by 30 minutes to an hour of putting practice. By around noon, he would have played nine holes. In the afternoon, another 3 to 4 hours of on-course work focusing on the swing and short game.

The afternoon session sometimes includes another nine holes. This was his routine even after becoming the number one golfer in the world. This is how discipline creates and sustains the success of a person.

Similarly, if we were to look at football legends or any other sportsmen for that matter, all of them has a strict practice routine that they strictly hold on to, regardless of how good they already are.

***The consummate leader cultivates the Moral Law, and strictly adheres to method and discipline; thus it is in his power to control success.***

Sun Tzu, Chinese military general, strategist, and philosopher

Discipline also trains the heart to control itself, to be composed and not give in to temptations. This allows us to be in control of ourselves, enabling us to avoid any evil that could pull us away from the straight path and success.

***No evil propensity of the human heart is so powerful that it may not be subdued by discipline.***

Seneca, Roman philosopher

Why is this important? The less distracted we are, the closer we are to success. Anything evil would only pull us away from our purpose.

Among the incidents that we could learn from the lack of discipline and giving into temptations is the defeat of the Muslim army at the Battle of *Uhud*. They had suffered defeat at the hands of an army that they had already forced to retreat. It happened when a group of about fifty archers, who were given strict instructions by the Prophet (ﷺ) to stand guard at a small strategic foothill of Mount *Uhud* left the spot they were supposed to be guarding. They were told to not leave their positions regardless of any circumstances. Prophet (ﷺ) had told them, "If you see us being killed, do not come to our aid and if you see us

taking booty, do not take part." When the archers saw the defeat of the disbelievers, they thought there was no way those disbelievers could make a comeback. Some of them left their position to take part in the search of booty.

The enemies took this opportunity to strike back, which almost got Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) killed. However, due to Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) heroic efforts as well as the sacrifices made by his most loyal followers, he managed to survive the near death experience.

However, Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) beloved uncle, Hamza, (May Allah be pleased with him) nicknamed the Lion of Allah, was killed in the battle. Sadly, his body was brutally mutilated as an act of revenge by Hind binti Ubah, whose father Hamza had killed in the Battle of *Badr*. Following his death, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) then gave him the title "Chief of the Martyrs" for the sacrifices he had made in defending the religion of Islam during the challenging early years of Islam.

This was a hard lesson that the early faithful followers had to learn, which was never again repeated.

### **From Habits to Greatness**

I recently stumbled upon a great article about how 12 high achievers used the power routine (which is basically discipline) to achieve greatness. It is so inspiring to see how discipline had contributed to their success. I have picked three of the well-known ones for our consumption.

**Steve Jobs,** : He asked himself the same question every day, "If  
**Founder of Apple** today was the last day of my life would I want to do what I'm about to do today?" When the answer was

“no” for too many days in a row he knew he had to change something. This question kept him focused on what really mattered.

**Warren Buffet, Most Successful Investor of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century** : Warren Buffet had a simple discipline, which he continued to do every day of his life – he spent 80% of his day reading. In an interview on CNBC, he mentioned that he reads at least 3 annual reports or company prospectuses (a couple of hundred pages each) every day. To him, this is how a person gets smarter.

**Benjamin Franklin, Founding Fathers of United States** : His morning routine stretched from 5am to 7am, which started with one question: “What good shall I do today?”

Having set his agenda for the day by 7am, he would work from 8 to 11am, and then again from 2pm to 5pm. At the end of the day he would ask himself “What good have I done today?” His routine had a singular focus – doing the most ‘good’ each day. In the evenings he would revisit the day’s events to see if he had achieved his goals from the morning. He would ask himself how much ‘good’ he had done during the day.

## It Takes Two to Tango

The secret of outliers consists of two components – continuous learning and discipline, and most importantly, it requires both to make it work. If we slack in either one, our road to success will slow down and it even may bring us failure – something that we surely do not want to happen.

The two traits are apparent in any successful individual. All the names I have given as examples had displayed these two traits. A final example of a great individual who displayed both traits significantly is Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih, the great Ottoman Empire Sultan and nicknamed “The Conqueror”.

For eight centuries, the conquest of Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) was a dream for the Muslim commanders. It was considered as the most secured place because it had the strongest fortress in the world at that time. Ever since the era of the revered companion, Mu`aawiyah Ibn Abu Sufyaan, there had been many attempts to conquer it, but none had succeeded. At last, it was Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih who successfully conquered the capital of the Byzantine Empire at the age of 21 years old.

Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih was a man with great knowledge. He memorised the Quran, learnt the Prophetic (ﷺ) hadiths, Islamic jurisprudence, mathematics, astronomy and the skills required for war. He also joined his father, Sultan Murad II, the seventh Ottoman Sultan in battles and conquest for practical war training. He was also well versed in the languages of Arabic, Persian, Latin and Greek.

His father appointed him as a ruler of a small emirate so that he could receive practical training on administering state affairs under the supervision of some of the top scholars of that time. This matter influenced the character of the young prince and tinted his personality with Islamic morals and manners.

Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih was known as a good poet and a regular reader. He enjoyed the company of scholars and even made some of them ministers so that they could regularly advise him. It was clear that he was a man who practised continuous learning.

He was also clearly a man of discipline. Stories were told that before Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih and his army left for the conquest of Constantinople, he had first gathered all of his army to choose a leader amongst them to lead the battle. Just before the congregational prayers, which was led by him, he asked all of them to stand before him and asked the following four questions:

1. “Who amongst you since puberty had never left obligatory prayers?”

All his men continued to stand up.

2. “Who amongst you since puberty had never left congregational prayers?”

Half of his army sat down.

3. “Who amongst you since puberty had never left the *rawatib* prayers?”

A large portion of the remaining men sat down, only leaving his best soldiers.

4. Lastly he asked, “Who amongst you since puberty had never left the night (*tahajjud*) prayers?”

At this point, everyone who had remained standing sat down leaving Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih the only remaining person standing.

He had never left such a difficult prayer since he reached puberty, which can only be achieved through discipline and dedication. Besides his love for Allah and Islam, he was equipped with two bullets – knowledge and discipline.



During his tenure as the supreme leader of the Ottoman Empire, he expanded the empire to new lands across Europe and Asia. Besides the great expansion, he had also managed to establish more than 300 mosques, 192 of which were in Istanbul alone. He also built 57 schools due to his passion in spreading knowledge.

This was the great success achieved by the legendary Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih. However, the westernised version of his story is in a different tone altogether as he was largely hated for his aggressive conquest of the Europe continent. Nevertheless, the facts of his success are undeniable.

### **Beauty of the Outliers' Secret – Anyone Can Do It!**

The best thing about these two core traits is that it is learnable, and doable. It is not exclusive to certain groups of people; you are not born with it by default. Anyone can acquire it – we can train ourselves to be good at it. It is just a matter of us wanting to do it.

***Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change.***

Jim Rohn