

# LIFE IS A JOURNEY

Life. We go through it every day yet we can never fully understand it. But then, do we really need to understand the flow of life and how it is all structured, knowing that such an ambitious effort is unachievable to begin with?

A lot of us try hard to understand life, at least the one we are in. During the course of discovery, a lot of times we end up being frustrated rather than finding an answer. This is mainly because life is forever changing, evolving day by day. We will never know what to expect tomorrow or the day after – the future is uncertain, that is for sure.

***People who allow their past to cloud their future  
are too blinded to see their own potential.***

Ross Simmonds, digital strategist, entrepreneur and public speaker

Life is colourful, no doubt about it. There are various types of people around us; we get to meet new ones, keep old ones, celebrate strangers and avoid enemies. There is always something happening at every moment, full of feelings and emotions that keeps us alive and kicking, regardless whether it is a positive or negative experience. Life continues to teach us and memories get registered in our minds as we go along – some we remember till death while some we forget the moment we turn around.

## **Life is like a Roller Coaster**

Life is like a roller coaster, it has its ups and downs but it is our choice whether we want to scream or enjoy the ride – whether we want to let life bring the worst out of us or enjoy each moment and make the best out of it. Either way, we still have to go through the experiences that awaits us.

***Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.***

Soren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher, theologian, poet

The up and down pattern of life is nature's way of keeping us balanced, stopping us from swaying to either extreme – moderation is the best approach. If we were to experience either end for too long – extremely happy or extremely stressed out for a long period of time, we are bound to react with extreme actions as well.

***Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.***

Dato' Paduka Wan Ibrahim Wan Soloh

It seems obvious that extreme negative feelings would cause breakdowns and eventually lead to depression. Worse still if a person starts taking the wrong routes out, resorting to acts of sin or even worse, committing suicide, an act clearly prohibited in Islam.

***Do not pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one.***

Bruce Lee

We may think that there shouldn't be any problem if we are extremely and continuously happy. Contradictory to that assumption, extreme happiness

is just as dangerous as extreme negativity; the true test for a person is actually during good times.

As things seem to be going so well, we start becoming complacent and because we are so used to having good things happening to us, our behaviour and attitude towards others may change. We start finding it hard to understand the hardships faced by others. If such mindset or behaviour is not managed well, we will start becoming judgmental and eventually start being disengaged from people—ending up as a selfish and arrogant brat.

### **Life is like a Box of Chocolate**

Life is like a box chocolate, we never know what we are going to get – how often have we heard this popular phrase before. It originated from the 1994 blockbuster movie, Forest Gump.

***My mama always said,  
"Life was like a box of chocolates.  
You never know what you're gonna get."  
Forest Gump***

The key lesson from this phrase is just that – we will never know what to expect in life. The chocolates in the box can either be sweet, sour, plain or bitter. We will be only able to know the taste after taking a bite.

Similarly in life, we will go through different experiences depending on the path we choose. However, we can never be entirely sure whether the path we choose is going to be the right one.

***Life is an open book full of blank pages, you write the story as you go.  
Unknown***

Coming back to our earlier example, when picking a chocolate, we usually pick the one that appeals and attracts us the most. In other words, we make our choice based on its physical looks – its shape, colour or size. However, the taste is something that can never be determined upfront, we would only know how it tastes like when we start chewing it. The most attractive looking chocolate might taste the worst while the most delicious one might be the ugliest looking.

Life experiences behave the same way as well. The most attractive looking path might not have the best ending while the worst might be the road to happiness – we would never know until and unless we go through it.

***Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.***

John W. Gardener, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under  
President Lyndon Johnson

### **I Want to Ride My Bicycle**

On a very random day, a university friend of mine once told me that life is similar to riding a bicycle. This particular friend of mine had always been philosophical but most of the time, he is never sure what he is talking about. But for some weird reason, I could still remember this particular phrase until today, a phrase he had uttered some time back in year 2000.

***Life is like riding a bicycle.***

***To keep your balance, you must keep on moving.***

Albert Einstein

The basic concept behind the analogy as he briefly explained to me – “there are times you ride your bicycle fast and there are times you are forced to

ride it slow". He left it at that. Intrigued by the simple yet powerful analogy, I pondered further and expanded my interpretation on it.

It is easier to keep on riding when we know the roads. After a while, we get familiar with our way around and by no time, the roads are at the tip of our fingers. We would know when to cycle a little harder, be wary of places where there would be a lot of traffic or when to use short cuts.

However, when we are riding somewhere new, we tend to be more cautious and careful as we don't know what lies ahead of us. Most of the time, we are unsure if we are on the right road and whether it actually leads us to our destination. Nevertheless, we still need to move on for us to not to remain stagnant.

Riding a bicycle does not go at a constant pace. For instance, more effort is required when riding uphill, we would have to cycle real hard to reach the top. A steep hill is surely challenging, some of us would just decide to push the bicycle to the top out of sheer tiredness. But in life, regardless of how challenging it can be, we still need to move forward, because if not, we will end up nowhere. Referring back to our example, we would remain static at the bottom of the hill. I'm pretty sure this is not where we want to be.

***The fears we don't face become our limits.***

Robin Sharma

At certain times, riding a bicycle does not even need much effort. People tend to ease up when riding in easier conditions. When riding downhill, we usually don't even need to cycle, we could just lift our feet off the paddle and still reach the bottom. Yet even at easy times such as this, we still need to be careful. Going too fast might cause us to end up in an accident; fast cars, people

crossing the road – there are just so many things that may cause us to fall and injure ourselves.

One thing good about riding a bicycle, we don't really end up as losers. Even if we come last in a race, we still gain something good. The simplest benefit is that we are that bit healthier from the exercise. We also get to enjoy the ride, enjoying familiar and unfamiliar sceneries, appreciating old friends and making new ones.

This is similar to life, we never know what lies ahead of us. There will always be times when we have to give it a bit more effort. Anything could happen along the way; there will always be easy and happy moments, also difficult and sad ones. Yet in any condition, we still need to move forward. We can't just stay put at a single point in life and not make progress – that's life. So while we're at it, we might as well enjoy the journey.

***Life isn't a matter of milestones, but of moments.***

Rose Kennedy, American philanthropist and socialite

## **Life is Simple**

Life is fundamentally simple. It is our surroundings, circumstances, desires and mindset that complicate things. Basically speaking, it is us who make life complicated.

***Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.***

Confucius, Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher

Things that should be simple turns out to be complicated because of our own mindset and the decisions we make. More often than not, we tend to overanalyse things and impose unnecessary (and sometimes impossible)

conditions and requirements on ourselves. We then invariably end up combining things that are meant to be kept separate and confuse ourselves.

***The best ideas are simple, valuable and inevitable.***

Hustle and Grind

We often hear about how difficult it is to obtain certain approvals due to the bureaucracies and protocols of the approval process. I have personally seen a project paper that requires 10 people's signatures (true story!) even though most of them do not have an interest (or sometimes literally uninterested) in the matter to be approved.

In the end, we are lucky if half of them actually read the whole paper. There is a high probability that the final approver would just sign off the paper after sighting other people's signatures without even understanding the contents.

The process of obtaining the signatures of all these people itself is tedious to start with, taking days, sometimes even weeks. The matter at hand, no matter how urgent, gets delayed and unresolved. Worse still if the matter involves the lives of other people – the wellbeing of a person resides with a bunch of people who are just sitting and waiting for their turn to put their autograph on a piece of paper. Although such practice is defended under the name of governance, how complicated and tedious should a process be?

Another classic example, especially in the Malay community, would be getting married. In Islam, the process is rather simple and straightforward – we have the bride, the groom, the trustee, two witnesses, dowry for the wife (which can even be a verse from the Quran), the *ijab* (offer) and *qabul* (acceptance). Once everything is in order and executed, the two are legally married.

However, because of customs and traditions, which are sometimes obsessive and to the extent unreasonable, getting married becomes a complicated and difficult process. Besides the high dowry imposed on the groom, there are so many other unnecessary rituals before and after marriage that are expected to be performed. This is despite the fact that none of the rituals actually relates to the objective of marriage. It just makes things difficult for two people sincerely wanting to start a family.

A lot of times, what is required from us is to go back to basics. It involves us spending a bit of little time to analyse a matter with some degree of common sense. Sadly however, this is a capability that many fail to see and find difficult to master these days.

***Abu Umamah bin Tha'labah reported: The Companions of Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) mentioned the life of the world before him. He (ﷺ) said, "Do you not hear? Do you not hear? Simplicity (in life) is part of Faith, simplicity is part of Faith."***

Abu Dawud

## **Responding to Life**

When things start to get complicated in our lives, this is when most of us get terribly frustrated. At this point, it is our choice to make it or break it; our reaction towards life defines our true self. It is not what happened in life that molds us, it is how we react to it that does. Many times we confuse the two together.

***Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% of how you respond to it.***

Lou Holtz



For example, when something does not turn out the way we want or when a bad incident happens, perhaps a failure in a relationship or an accident. If we were to think about it a bit more, it is not the incident that define or change us but it is how we decide to live after going through it that does.

There is always a reason behind everything that happens. No matter how bad or painful it may be, there would surely be something that we can learn. A lot of times it is through negative experiences that we learn and grow ourselves, this is the law of nature in action.

***Life is like a camera. Focus on what is important.  
Capture good times. Develop from negatives.  
And if something isn't perfect, take one more shot.***  
Unknown

In Islam, we believe in the concept of *qada* and *qadar* – fate and destiny. We give our best at something but in the end, what is meant to happen shall happen. However, it does not mean that we should just let things happen and not do anything about it; we still have to make choices, put in our efforts and react accordingly and appropriately.

Depending on how much effort we actually put in, it will either increase our chance of success or at least, decrease the probability of us ending up in a bad situation.

In short, there are incidents that are fated to happen, no matter how hard we try to avoid it – a fact we can never change. We just need to accept, face reality and deal with it. There is no point fighting things that are meant to happen, what is more important is how we manage ourselves and survive through the experience.

***Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes.  
Don't resist them – that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality.  
Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.***

Lao Tzu, philosopher and poet of ancient China

Sometimes the best approach is to let nature take its course. At the same time, we should accept that there are things that are within our control – our responses. Our responses will determine how we live and move forward in life – how we make the best out of life and subsequently achieve happiness.

***The most important thing is to enjoy your life – to be happy  
– It's all that matters.***

Audrey Hepburn, British actress and humanitarian

The road to happiness starts with us – like everything else, the first and most important component of living a great life is our mindset. Adopting the right mindset enables us to assess a matter critically and make the right choices in life.

***Very little is needed to make a happy life;  
it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.***

Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor

Responding and reacting to life is an art on its own. Basically it boils down to the choices we make in life and how we look at it.

***I wake up every morning believing today is going to be better than  
yesterday.***

Will Smith, actor

Every day when we wake up in the morning, we have two choices: to either be positive or negative, to treat life with love or to treat it with hate – you choose.

***I have found that if you love life, life will love you back.***

Arthur Rubinstein, Polish American classical pianist

This is the why when things go wrong, there is no one else to blame except ourselves; we would have contributed to it some way or another. The sooner we are able to accept this painful fact, the faster we are able to get back on track.

***Life isn't about finding yourself.***

***Life is about creating yourself.***

George Bernard Shaw, Nobel Prize-winning Irish playwright

And because of this, responding to life equals to creating ourselves.

We always hear of people taking a step back to do some soul searching with the intention of finding themselves. Their efforts are usually in vain, they come back just as lost as before, if not worst.

The ones who do come back and actually make it are not the ones who found themselves, but are the ones who decided to do something about their lives and take action.

They decided to reinvent themselves instead of letting things pass by.

They decided to be positive and strive to give their best.

They decided to take control of their lives.

In short, they decided to respond to life.

## **The Road is Always Bumpy. Always.**

Life is never smooth sailing, even when we know where we are heading and what we want to achieve. There are always challenges standing between us and success.

Each of us has our share of challenges, one way or another. It may be related to family, finances, studies, career, relationships or maybe a combination of all – a holistic life challenge.

Although it may sound contradictory, the challenges are there for a reason – the road to success and happiness is full of challenges, a paradox we face every day.

***Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe", and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.***

Al-Ankabut 29: 2

One may ask why life has to behave such a way. There are many possible answers to this perplexing question but among my personal favorites is this: challenges build character.

When we are able to endure and overcome challenges, we come out a stronger and better person. Due to the hardships and efforts we put in to deal with challenges, we start to appreciate life more, including the smaller things in life we had taken for granted before.

***Life is 10% what you make it, and 90% how you take it.***

Irving Berlin, composer and lyricist

Nevertheless, challenges in life are never easy to handle. Depending on the magnitude of the challenge, there bound to be times we will feel down and

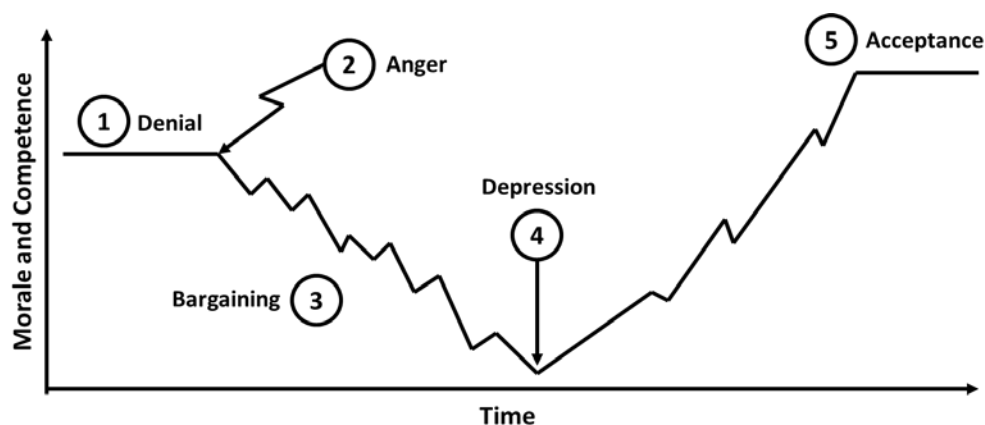
demotivated, we find difficulties in coping with the pressures that come with the challenges.

This is a normal human trait, everybody goes through a similar experience. The difference is the magnitude of the challenge and how we decide to manage it.

***The pain you feel today is the strength you feel tomorrow.  
For every challenge encountered, there is opportunity for growth.***  
Unknown

### The Kübler-Ross Model

The best way to manage challenges is to first understand the stages we will go through when we are faced with such challenges. I was introduced to a model developed by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist and pioneer in near death studies. The model, which discusses her theory on the five stages of grief, was introduced in her groundbreaking book, *On Death and Dying* published in 1969.



The Kübler-Ross Model by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

The five stages as mentioned in the model are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and lastly, acceptance. There were (and still are) many critics to her model as it was never properly quantified scientifically – it was a theory that she came up with based on the numerous interviews she had conducted with dying patients. The argument set forth by her critics was that each interview gave different results and much of the feedback was unique to that particular person, which made it difficult to quantify and summarise.

Nevertheless, her model created awareness on the importance of understanding and attending to the emotional needs of those who are dying – an area that was generally ignored by medical practitioners before this. The model also provided guidance to psychiatrists and counselors to help soothe and calm people who are facing traumas or losses. The model acts a tool to help frame and identify our feelings so that we are better equipped to cope with life and losses.

Although the model was meant to provide a better understanding about grief, a lot of motivators and change management gurus use it as a tool to help manage change and life challenges.

Honestly, I have never actually read the book written by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. I had learned this model from my mentor (again) and also his wife, who happens to run a boutique training consultancy outfit. I therefore can't say for sure that the version related to me is the exact same model in her book.

In the version related to me, the steps are slightly different; it focuses on how a person goes through a situation or cycle in life. The theme does not focus on the stages of grief instead it focuses on life. Perhaps both my mentor and his wife had learned this version from another teacher or perhaps they had actually gone through the trouble of summarising Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's works; I

never actually asked. What was more important is the practicality of the model and how it helped managed frustrations and challenges in life – at least in mine.

If I recall correctly, the model was shared with me some time in 2004 during one of the after-office tea session I had with my mentor and colleagues. I can still remember the diagram, the “curve” being drawn on a piece of tissue while my mentor briefly ran through the principles behind the model.

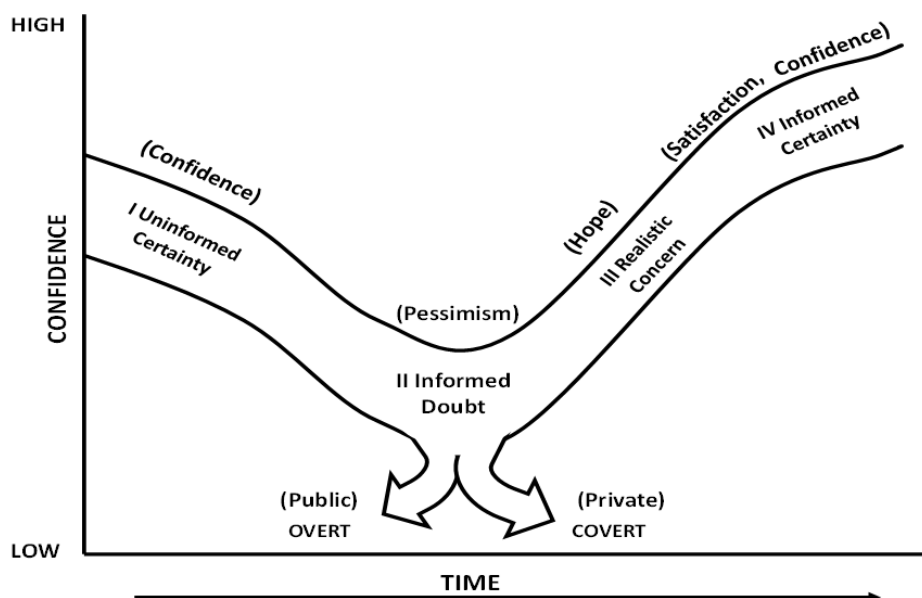
We actually used this model as an anchor lesson for team building programmes that we conducted for our teams at the different organisations we were with.

My mentor’s wife also uses it in her team building, vision alignment and change management training modules. A few close brothers and I used to be freelance assistant trainers who helped facilitate outdoor activities for her programmes.

We had a specific experiential activity that beautifully and accurately explains the model – a relatively simple jungle tracking activity held at night, which had a few elements of surprise built in it. We would conduct a debriefing session the very next morning, recalling and explaining the rationales and lessons behind each experience and stage of the jungle tracking activity while relating it to the model. I found the activity and approach to be very effective in highlighting the lessons. After conducting the activity and listening to the debriefing so many times, I had unconsciously memorised the debriefing “script”. After a few years, I was already conducting the debriefing sessions for some of the programmes – this is how much the model was inculcated in me.

While IT literacy at work was still relatively new, I was considered a master at Microsoft office products (considering people around me falls into the category of IT beginners). I was asked to redraw the version of the model that we were using into a PowerPoint slide format so that it could be used for our

training programmes. It came out as per the following diagram, which I have been using to explain the principles of the model to anyone interested ever since.



Our Version of the Kübler-Ross model

The model has two axes, the x-axis representing time and y-axis representing confidence. The “U” curve represents the cycle a person goes through in almost everything in life, be it something new or routine. A few basic principles of the model are as follows:

### 1. Everybody goes through the cycle; it’s nature’s law.

No matter how confident or optimistic we think we are, we will still go through each stage of the cycle. The only difference is how fast we go through it and come back up. Some people take longer than others, while some pass through like lightning. This is where attitude and behaviour plays a key role – confidence and optimism determines our drive to get back up.

***Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.***  
Confucius



## 2. There are no shortcuts; you got to go through it!

We may think we can cut short the process to success. However, we know for a fact that nothing goes smoothly. There will always be challenges in whatever we do.

Even the prophets go through such cycle. Looking at the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), it is no secret that he went through so many challenges in spreading the religion of Islam. We heard and read about how badly he was treated when he tried to spread the message of Islam to the people of Taif, just after the demise of his beloved uncle Abu Talib. They had not only refused to hear what he had to say, but threw stones at him while he was leaving the city peacefully. He was pelted at with so many stones that blood was flowing down both his legs. After being chased for a few miles, he took shelter at a tree and supplicated to Allah.

***Abdullah ibn Ja'far reported: When Abu Talib passed away, the Prophet (ﷺ), left for At-Ta'if walking on foot in order to call them to Islam. They rejected him harshly and turned him away, so he took shelter in the shade of a tree and he prayed two cycles of prayer.***

***Then he said, "O Allah, I complain to you of my weakness, my lack of resources and my lowliness before man. O Most Merciful, You are the Lord of the weak and You are my Lord. To whom will you relinquish my fate? To one who will abuse me or to an enemy given power over me? If You are not angry with me, then I do not care what happened to me. I only care for Your favor. I seek refuge in the light of Your face by which all darkness is illuminated and the affairs of this world and the Hereafter are ordered. I wish to please You until You are fully pleased. There is no power or might except in You."***

Graded Hasan by As-Suyuti

Allah then sent Jibril to him together with the angels of the mountains with the choice to punish the people of Taif if he wishes to. Instead, however,

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) requested that there would rise from the descendants of the people of Taif who would become devoted Muslims.

***Aishah reported: I asked the Prophet (ﷺ) "Have you ever experienced a day harder than the day of the battle of Uhud?" He replied, "Indeed, I experienced them (dangers) at the hands of your people (i.e., the disbelievers from amongst the Quraish tribe). The hardest treatment I met from them was on the Day of 'Aqabah when I went to Ibn 'Abd Yalil bin 'Abd Kulal (who was one of the chiefs of Ta'if) with the purpose of inviting him to Islam, but he made no response (to my call).***

***So I departed with deep distress. I did not recover until I arrived at Qarn ath-Tha'alib. There, I raised my head and saw a cloud which had cast its shadow on me. I saw in it Jibril who called me and said: 'Indeed, Allah, the Exalted, heard what your people said to you and the response they made to you. And He has sent you the angel in charge of the mountains to order him to do to them what you wish.'***

***Then the angel of the mountains called me, greeted me and said: 'O Muhammad, Allah listened to what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and my God has sent me to you so that you may give me your orders. (I will carry out your orders). If you wish I will bring together the two mountains that stand opposite to each other at the extremities of Makkah to crush them in between.'"***

***But Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "I rather hope that Allah will raise from among their descendants people as will worship Allah the One, and will not ascribe partners to Him (in worship).***

Bukhari and Muslim

The story shows that even the most beloved person by Allah goes through challenges in his journey to success, what more us normal human beings. For us to go from point x (the start) to point y (success), we have to go through the cycle first and face the challenges that awaits us – there are no shortcuts.

### **3. It is a cycle, literally. Even when we have reached the top, we will fall back down.**

The wave-like cycle does not end when we reach the top. As time goes by, we would eventually start going back down the slope. An example that most of us could relate to is our relationship with people, be it our spouses, parents, siblings or close friends. It is normal for us to argue, fight and sulk with each other. When this happens, it would surely affect (most of the time temporarily) the relationship we have with them.

After a while, we will somehow mend the relationship and return back to normal. But we will never know when we will get into an argument again. This cycle continues for the rest of our lives.

## **Different Stages of the Curve**

Whenever we start embarking on something, especially something new, there will always be a starting point. Let us refer to this point as Stage 1. There are four stages altogether in the Kübler-Ross model, in which we will have the chance to experience each one of them. To illustrate the stages, we will be using two examples that many of us could relate to: starting a new job and entering married life.

### **1. Stage One: Uninformed Certainty**

We are usually all excited and confident whenever we start a new job, wanting to perform well and give our best. This is normal human behaviour as nobody in their right mind wants to fail. The dominant feeling is confidence – we believe that we can do well. At the same time, it is at this stage that we don't know much about the job: the technicality of the job, the processes,

the team, office politics. These are things that we would need to learn over time.

As we go along and find out more about the various components of the job, we will surely encounter things that we are so not fond of. There might be things that we are not confident of doing, team members we seem to be rubbing the wrong way or terrible bosses. Our morale will then start to spiral downwards, and we will start to lose our confidence and feel demotivated. The more we know, the worse we feel.

Similarly, when we first get married, we see the world through rose-tinted glasses – we are after all marrying the girl or the man of our dreams. Everything seems wonderful. As you know, there is a long-running joke about how at the early stage of marriage, even our spouse's fart smells nice and fragrant, which is obviously ridiculous. But as we journey further into the marriage, we will come to learn and realise that there are a lot of things we never knew about our partner. For example, the face of our partner when we wake up in the morning is surely not the same as portrayed in the movies. Another sensitive matter that always because an issue is cooking – women are very sensitive when it comes to comments or criticisms about their cooking.

It is after marriage that both partners start to show their true colours, which of course includes bad habits that can come as a big surprise to each other. This is when our perception and feelings towards our partner slowly starts to change. The marriage may get rocky as we start to lose our confidence in our partner, not to mention the certain degree of irritation that we may feel, some even to the extent of feeling regret for getting married.

Certain negative habits or behaviours, such as mood swings or bad temper, may often than not cause tremendous stress in a marriage – ending

up in long drawn arguments, sometimes for days or even weeks. This is why we hear people say that surviving the first two years of marriage is very critical; this is the period where we *really* get to know each other. Researches have shown that a lot of failed marriages happen during this period mainly because the couples refuse to tolerate, accept and adapt to each other's behaviours.

## **2. Stage Two: Informed Doubt**

As our confidence and morale go down, over time we will eventually reach rock bottom, the point where we are flooded with pessimism.

Going back to the two scenarios – this is the point where we start to entertain thoughts of giving up. Flooded with negativity, we are bound to feel as if there is no way out (or up). We more or less have an idea of the situation we are facing. The next step is to decide on what we want to do from this point onwards, after carefully assessing the available information at hand.

What is more important is our reaction at this stage, either to react overtly or covertly. Some of us choose to react overtly at this low point in life, expressing our disappointment and anger publicly, while others react covertly, keeping it within ourselves and hurting inside. Carl Jung, founder of analytical psychology had popularised the concept of extrovert and introvert personality types, which is closely linked to both reactions – extrovert personalities usually react overtly while introvert personalities react covertly.

This is the determining point for us to survive a frustration, disappointment or low point in life. It is at this point that we need to make the decision on whether we want to bounce back or give up.

I can clearly remember how my mentor explained this important stage to me –

*“The difference between a successful and a not-so-successful person is how fast a person snaps out from this bottom point in life”*

– as he said this, he literally snapped his fingers. The longer we stay at the bottom, the further away we are from success.

***Rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.***

J. K. Rowlings, British novelist, author of Harry Potter series

At work, this is the stage where some of us decide to quit the job, at times even without securing another job.

While in marriages or relationships, this is the point where some people decide to part ways, a solution that, while permissible (*halal*), is least preferable in Islam.

### **3. Stage Three: Realistic Concern**

However, if we were to react to the matter positively and give it a little bit more time, in most cases we can actually make it work. The key to achieving this is to accept and tolerate the differences we have discovered, and find ways to adapt to it. Perfection is accepting imperfections in life – it requires a lot of give and take.

***Perfection is not attainable.***

***But if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.***

Vince Lombardi, American football player, coach, and executive

The differences we have identified will become real concerns, which we would naturally try to find a way for it to be addressed. We discover the hope to move on and continue to resolve the matters at hand. A solution is

identified for each of our concerns making it possible for us to move forward. Each step forward brings us closer to success.

In the example of a entering a new workplace, at this stage we should be able to identify the barriers that are stopping us from completing our work. Let us take an example of a difficult colleague, someone who we would end up quarreling with whenever we deal with him, no matter how many times we try to avoid it. At the same time, we need obtain a set of documents that only he has access to. We know upfront that the chances of us getting those documents directly from him are slim especially if we are thinking of confronting him head on.

However, there are alternative ways to go about getting what we need. Instead of meeting him face to face, perhaps it would be a better idea to communicate and request the documents via email while copying the relevant parties such as his superior. If such approach doesn't work, maybe we can then resort to asking our supervisor to personally ask for the documents on our behalf. Adapting and identifying alternative solutions provide us with the avenue to settle any arising issues and eventually achieve our goals in the end.

In a marriage, this is the point where tolerance plays an integral role in balancing the relationship. Fundamentally, a couple decides to tie the knot based on love, hence it only makes sense that we are willing to give and take to prove their love to one another.

For instance, after discovering that our partner is not a good cook, we can always opt to eat out instead. Alternatively, the wife could focus on practising to master her husband's favourite dish instead of aimlessly trying to cook a variety of dishes.

Another example, if our partner happens to be the type who sleeps early, we can choose to take the responsibility of taking care of our child at night should the child refuse to go to bed. Our partner could then perhaps drive the child to classes during the day while we catch up with our rest.

In marriage there will always be those difficult yet critical conversations that need to take place for us to thrash out our worries and concerns, honestly and thoroughly with our spouses, even if we dislike or feel shy bringing it up or talking about it. Never underestimate our partner, you'll be surprised of how understanding they can be.

#### **4. Stage Four: Informed Certainty**

This is the last stage of the cycle, the point where we are aware and well informed about the situation we are in and its surroundings. We basically know what we can accept, what we need to adapt to and what needs to be changed. We are more in control of the situation and are able to do what we are required to given now we have gained more information and have clearer directions. Driven by these positive and optimistic feelings, our confidence starts to build up again. All of these improvements give birth to a fulfilling feeling of achievement – satisfaction.

At work, this is the moment we are able to complete our tasks and meet deadlines. Finally, we are able to get things done and perform well at what we do.

In marriage, this is the moment when we feel contented with our spouse. At the end of each day, we look forward to go home to our family. We are able to resolve any small arguments quickly and move back to being a normal couple. We now know the things that could and would trigger each



other's anger. Yes, at times we still cannot avoid hurting each other, but apologising and forgiving become much easier to do.

This is a brief explanation of the four stages. Through understanding these stages, we should be able to manage ourselves (especially our emotions) better at each stage. I personally find the Kübler-Ross model to be among the best self-motivation tool whenever I feel down. The ability to manage emotions during difficult times helps me bounce back quickly so that I can be back on track on my journey to success.

### **Bouncing Back Stronger**

I can still remember how this model helped me through some of the worst moments in my career. Among the unforgettable ones was when I did not receive my promotion although it was in a way announced to everyone a few months earlier. There were six of us who were given new and acting roles to spearhead key functions of the organisation. Our new roles were publicly announced to the other employees during one of the staff gatherings. Everyone had the same understanding that the six of us would eventually be taking over the role in full capacity, i.e. be promoted.

When the annual promotion cycle came, everyone got promoted except for me. The news came as a shock to me and for obvious reasons, I was utterly devastated. I did not understand what was happening considering the circumstances at that point in time – I knew I was performing well above expectations. I could not reconcile the reason I did not receive the promotion while others did.

What made it worse was that no one was upfront about it and kept me up to speed. I was disappointed especially with my mentor, whom I had trusted.

I would have thought that he would at least have the courtesy to inform me first so that it does not come as such a shock. I would have been able to hide my embarrassment. At that point, I felt betrayed and demotivated – my morale went down the drain there and then. I really felt like quitting but I had a family to take care of, so it wasn't as easy as that.

My mentor left for hajj/pilgrimage that year, I did not want to confront him before he completed it. I was literally dragging myself to the office every day for about two months. As I hit rock bottom, I suddenly recalled the model. I knew I had to decide on how I wanted to react to the situation.

I decided to confront my mentor once he came back. To give him heads up, I wrote him a long email expressing my disappointment so that he could read it the moment he stepped into his office.

When he came back to the office, we had a long chat about it. After debates and reasoning, he challenged me to come back strong. He did give me the reasons for his decision, which I wouldn't say I fully agree with. But then again it was his prerogative as the boss to decide as such.

Nevertheless, I accepted his challenge and came back with an undated resignation letter – if at any time along the way he thinks that I did not perform at work, he can fire me using such letter. As promised, I continued to give my best at work and the next year, I received the promotion I deserved.

There are a few points about this particular experience of mine that fits perfectly to the stages of the model.

1. **Stage One: Uninformed Certainty.** I was excited when I was entrusted with the expanded role and like everyone else, I understood it as a promotion. But it was tiring running it alone and there were times I felt like giving up.

2. **Stage Two: Informed Doubt.** I was shocked by the news that I was the only one among the six who did not receive the promotion. I decided to react overtly and confronted my boss about it.
3. **Stage Three: Realistic Concern.** My boss and I discussed the matter openly and expressed our expectations. We ironed the matter out and I decided to bounce back.
4. **Stage Four: Informed Certainty.** At this stage, I knew what I wanted, I didn't hold back and gave it my best. I came out from the whole episode stronger and more confident. In the end, I received what was due to me and finally, I got to taste satisfaction for the all the efforts I've put in.

### **It's the End that Counts**

We are beings who are judgmental – we always judge people by how they start in life. Everyone makes mistakes, sometimes in the early part of their life, sometimes later. But in either case, it does not mean that a person is doomed for failure forever.

***Stay focused.***

***Your start does not determine how you're going to finish.***

Herm Edwards, American football analyst

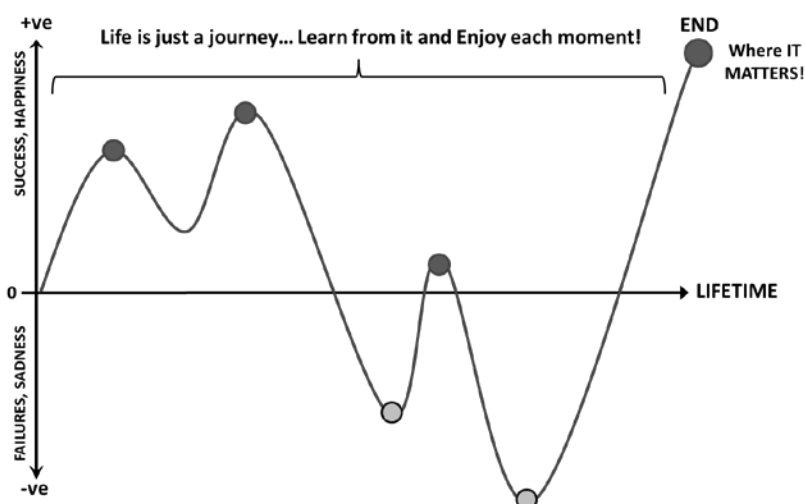
There is always that option for us to bounce back stronger. As long as we stay focused on our journey to become better, we will eventually achieve it. Challenges will always be there, we will need to find ways to overcome them. There is no such thing as starting too late. Never let anyone tell us that. It is only

too late when we are no longer breathing. We are the ones who determine how we want it to end.

***Though no one can go back and make a brand new start,  
anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.***

Carl Bard

As mentioned during the explanation on the Kübler-Ross model above, our life will forever go up and down.



There are times we are happy (such as when we achieve success but even then, it may be with different degrees of happiness) and there would definitely be times we will be sad. It is not how we started that is important, it is the end that matters. As long as we strive hard to achieve the best, have faith that we will eventually get there.

I will be honest and admit that academically, I am blessed with the ability to perform well even though I am not the most hardworking person. To balance this gift that Allah has blessed me with, I found that I am terrible at sports. There isn't a single sport that I can claim to be good at; I am either average or very bad at it.

But no matter how good we think we are at something, if we take things for granted and not put much effort to it, we will never excel. That was what happened to me during high school. Instead of concentrating on my studies, I spent most of time playing around.

Reality only hit me when the major examination, Malaysian Certificate of Education came around the corner, roughly two months before the actual exam. Within that time period, I had to catch up with two-years of syllabus for 9 subjects. I decided to lock myself up at home for one and half months to do just that. I camped in my parents' room away from any distractions and tried my best to do my revisions.

But by then it was too late. It was impossible to catch up with everything, so I had to let go of one subject – Additional Mathematics. I couldn't cram in it and I was never good with number anyway.

When the results actually came out, I was lucky enough to achieve 6 distinctions and 2 credits. I did flunk my Additional Mathematics as expected, which marred my examination transcript.

Although my results were out not that bad, considering I had only studied two months for it, it was a wakeup call for me. I always wanted to study abroad like my brother did but with my results that was not going to happen. There was no way I could secure a scholarship with just average results. I realised then I had just thrown away my dream.

Finally, I enrolled into a local private university taking a degree in Information Technology. I paid the tuition fees by applying for a student loan from the Foundation of the university, as I expected, my high school results were not good enough to secure a scholarship.

Realising my previous mistakes and how I threw away my dream because of my own doing, I was determined to make it in university. From day one, I

paced myself with regular and consistent revisions instead of last minute studying. I did this consistently throughout the four years I was there. My efforts bore fruit, I managed to achieve good results for each semester and found myself on the Dean's List regularly.

In the final year, I received a circular from the Foundation. It stated that if I managed to graduate with a CGPA of above 3.5, the loan would be converted to a scholarship and I would not have to pay back anything.

*Alhamdulillah*, the consistent efforts paid off – I graduated with a pointer above 3.5 and started work without having to worry about debts. This is to illustrate that a bad start does not necessarily mean a bad ending. We can always turn things around if we put our mind to it.

### **The Final Destination**

For Muslims, the end is certain – the hereafter. The final destination is what matters; everything we do and strive for in this world should be targeted at achieving success in the hereafter.

***O my people, this worldly life is only [temporary] enjoyment, and indeed, the Hereafter – that is the home of [permanent] settlement.***

Ghafir 40: 39

We are always reminded of how this world is just temporary and full of diversions that would sway us away from focusing on the final destination.

***Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children - like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and***

***forgiveness from Allah and approval. And the worldly life is only a deceiving enjoyment.***

Al-Hadid 57: 20

Our life in this world is a journey to the next one, where it is eternal and forever lasting – our final destination is to end up in paradise.

### **Enjoy the Journey – Have fun!**

Life is a journey; we have discussed in detail about how dynamic it can be. Most of the things that happen to us are not within our control but it did happen for a reason, whether we are able to see the wisdom behind it is a different question altogether.

Nevertheless, despite its ambiguous nature, it is for us to make the best out of our experiences and learn from it as much as possible.

***In the end, it's not the years in your life that count.  
It's the life in your years.***

Abraham Lincoln, 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. President

More importantly is for us to live our life to the fullest, enjoy each moment of it and appreciating the people we share our moments with because in the end, it is our memories that makes a difference in our lives, not how long we live. There is no point of us living a long life if we can't fill it with meaningful memories. So, don't hold back any longer, start filling our lives with beautiful moments and experiences till the day we die. Life is a journey anyway.

***We do not remember days, we remember moments.***  
Cesare Pavese, an Italian poet, novelist and literary critic