WHY HARD WORK IS STILL THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

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EVERYONE wants to be successful. Of course, your definition of success can and should be different – because success should mean something different to each of us – but still, we all want to succeed at whatever we choose to do. (Otherwise, why do it?)

But whenever I write about how success is often based on outworking other people – both in terms of effort and in terms of hours spent – I get indignant emails from readers.


Yeah, well, no way. You can’t have it both ways.

On the one hand, we celebrate people who have worked incredibly hard and achieved incredible success. They’re icons. Take successful entrepreneurs. Bill Gates evidently never slept, never changed clothes, never did anything but code and manoeuvre and strategise. In an industry filled with incredibly smart people – where smart was and is commonplace – he rose to the top by also working incredibly hard.

Mark Cuban didn’t take a vacation for seven years while he started his first company.

Eion Musk says, “You just have to put in 80- to 100-hour weeks every week. If other people are putting in 40-hour workweeks and you’re putting in 100-hour workweeks, then, even if you’re doing the same thing, you know that you will achieve in four months what it takes them a year to achieve.”

In fact, the common theme of almost every tale of entrepreneurial success is a person who worked countless 18- to 24-hour days. Replace the names and their stories sound almost identical. Even Tim Ferriss, the lord of the four-workweek manor, stays incredibly busy with all his projects. (Of course, to Tim it doesn’t feel like work.)

Or take successful people in other professions. Jeffrey Immelt, the chief executive of GE, worked 100-hour weeks for 24 years. In a company filled with incredibly driven people – where incredible drive is commonplace – he rose to the top by also working incredibly hard. Tim Cook of Apple still wants to be first in, last out.

Or take sports. Forget practice and conditioning and everything else. Peyton Manning probably spent more time just watching film than the rest of us spend at work. In a sport filled with incredibly talented athletes – where incredible athletic talent is commonplace – he’ll be in the hall of fame because he also worked incredibly hard.

Hard work has clearly paid off for all of them. Yet somehow people think hard work won’t work for them. Maybe that’s because of the whole “work smarter” thing? Successful people already work smarter. They don’t work mindlessly or inefficiently or ineffectively. Where success is concerned, working smarter is a given. Extremely successful people work smarter and they work harder.

Their effort is heroic, their payoff is often legendary, and we celebrate them for it.


You’re right. But you can’t control luck. You can’t always control timing. You can’t always control all those other factors.

What can you always control? How hard you work.

Again, everyone defines success differently, as well everyone should. Before you go virtual-postal and say your personal definition of success has everything to do with balance and personal relationships and nothing to do with mastering the business world, I’m totally with you.

But if you happen to define success by traditional measures like professional achievement and fortune and fame, hard work is the great equaliser.

You may not be smarter than everyone else. You may not be as talented. You may not have the same great connections, the same great environment, or the same great education.

If you’re on the downside of advantages, you may have none of those things. But you can always rely on your courage, your effort, and your perseverance. You can always substitute effort for skill and experience, secure in the knowledge that, over time, incredible effort will absolutely breed skill and experience.

You can always, always, always work harder than everyone else.

Want to be different? Hard work can be your immediate difference.

Make hard work your favourite words, whether at work or at home or in your marriage or whenever your definition of success takes you.

That way you’ll never have to look back and wonder what you might have accomplished if only you had tried harder.

As a CEO, part of your challenge is to be able to scale and continually grow your business. Many CEOs struggle to reinvent themselves at different phases of their leadership journey and this translates to an inability to grow their own businesses and organisations. CEOs also face significant challenges with little support or people to talk to about their struggles and pains.

In 2016, Leaderonomics, together with the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), pioneered the Leadership Dojo programme specifically designed for CEOs to learn from CEOs, senior CEO mentors and from global leaders who have succeeded in their respective journeys. If you are a CEO who is looking for a programme to help you grow in your leadership journey and enable your business to scale to the next level, do register your interest for the 2017 intake at goo.gl/EqnLp9

Leadership Dojo is an exclusive six-month accelerator programme designed to help SME CEOs improve their executive capabilities and grow their business through mentorship, executive coaching and networking. SME leaders will have safe space to share or gain business insights on business constraints and strategies, build network with local and global business leaders and acquire the right tools and framework to design their company culture among other things. Intake is currently in progress for the July-Dec batch. Contact Michael at 010-2079434 or mohamad@leaderonomics.com for enquiries and registration.