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The Difficulty with “Cognition” • Gilbert W.K. Lau

1) Preface

Some people refer to “cognition” as “awareness.” Cognition is something we engage in every day; it exists in our skin, our minds, and our hearts, and interacts with our consciousness every second. Perhaps it unconsciously controls our lives. But just how does “cognition” impact on our decisions in work, learning, and life? Many people, me included, rack our brains day and night, constantly looking for the best process of “cognition.” Everyone is obsessed with this process because different kinds of “cognition” lead us to different starting points, different developments, and, naturally, different results.

What is “cognition”? In psychology, “cognition” is a learning process that uses mental activities—conception, perception, judgment, and imagination—to understand things. This process may be conscious or unconscious and is influenced by different personal factors, such as beliefs, desires, motivations, education, family background, and parental guidance.

Aside from these, there are two other important factors that affect cognition:

First is our individual cultural background, which is more or less related to the different cultures we are exposed to. For example, we won’t serve chicken feet for dinner when we invite western guests; but on the other hand, it would also be difficult to ask a Chinese person who has never experienced western culture to eat a sandwich for lunch. From these two examples, we can see that everyone has different concepts of food that are due to differences in their social culture. In the previous article, the definition of “company culture” explained that values, beliefs, and behavior are the “genes” that create culture. Just as everyone has a different cultural background, so too are their processes of “cognition” different.

The second factor that affects cognition is our “self-defense mechanism”. This is a clever function we have developed to protect ourselves from external harm. For example, “repression,” “projection,” “rationalization,” “compensation,” etc., are terms that are clearly understood.

You might want to ask, “Mr. Lau, why do you spend that much time writing about reason?” In truth, I’m not a scholar; at most I am good at repeating other people’s opinions. To explain clearly, I’ll need to borrow the theory of four methods of learning from the University of Hong Kong’s famous economist Steven N. S. Cheung.

The first method of learning is found in genius scholars who discover groundbreaking, fundamental theories. Because they are fundamental, these theories are hard to understand, but their high academic value may create the foundation for a new school of thought. An example of this first method is seen in the black hole theory developed by the famous University of Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking.

The second method uses a fundamental theory to develop a more complete theory, i.e., using different methods to prove and develop these theories to make more people understand how much they contribute to a field of knowledge. One example of this is Master Yip Man, who developed and carried the Chinese martial art of Wing Chun to its height, becoming “The Grandmaster.”

Cheung’s third method is demonstrated by scholars engaged in comparing, analyzing, and evaluating already established theories. These academic accomplishments are relatively inferior compared to the previous two, yet much more common.

The fourth method of learning involves applying knowledge to business—that’s what I am doing. We have a general impression that academic theories are unapproachable and unfathomable, but from this explanation we can see that knowledge has different levels. Failure to recognize this is a common “cognitive” mistake—one that relates to the difficulty with “cognition.”

With our current advanced methods of communication, our ears and eyes are already overloaded with information; understanding right and wrong, good and bad, true and false has all become much harder. Discrepancies in human behavior are more pronounced, and it is impossible to determine anything solely from appearance. In this article I hope to clearly explain some interesting, profound theories about the workings of “cognition” and to gain useful ideas from multiple perspectives.

2) “Cognition” decides fate

“Cognition” is a process founded on a pattern, where we select, absorb, process, and digest new understanding. A “cognitive foundation” is created through interaction with the world around us. It consists of concepts plus knowledge, and entails a constant process of learning. When this pattern is formed, it is difficult to alter. As the sayings go: “The child is father to the man” and “You cannot make a crab walk straight.”

The following example demonstrates what a “cognitive foundation” is:

After dinner, a mother and daughter were washing dishes together while the father and son were in the living room watching TV. Suddenly, a loud crash came from the kitchen followed by silence. The father said, “That was probably your mother breaking a plate!” The son asked, “How do you know?” and the father replied, “Your mother didn’t yell at your sister.” This shows that the father has an inherent understanding of the mother that comes from his “cognitive foundation.”

In reality, parents are everything to children when they are young. In addition to food and a home, all information, social values, morals, religious beliefs, and family values come from the child’s parents. School and friends only account for a small portion of the child’s development, while parents are the key to shaping a child with positive “cognition.” The parents’ world views definitely decide the form of their child’s future “cognition” and whether a child loses at the starting line is largely decided by whether the parents have a good “cognitive” process? So, this process not only controls you, it also affects your children. How can you tell? As one example, a father’s perseverance decides a child’s perseverance; if you give up easily, your child won’t continue on. Just think, would your children persist when they see you give up easily when facing problems? You are your child’s role model, and they will face social interactions, problems, and academic studies with the attitude they have learned from their parents. After a while this pattern becomes their “cognitive” process. These concepts stay with children their entire lives. Similarly, most co-workers learn a standard of values from their boss; just as “a crooked stick will have a crooked shadow,” we need to remind ourselves to be a good role model for our workers.

As our children grow up, their talents and interests help them develop, but parents have an unavoidable responsibility to offer their children opinions and advice throughout their whole lives. Why? Because children are like flourishing flowers; they need constant care and pruning.

As a parent, if you ignore that, you are not fulfilling your responsibility. In general, often parents only pay attention to their child's upbringing and ignore their education, which is most important. These parents think they know nothing about education, let alone how to correctly teach their children. Moreover, they may not be well educated themselves, so they push this responsibility onto school teachers. As a result, children do not listen to their parents once they grow up and can make their own decisions, and students learn more from their teachers who have more authority. Parents tell teachers, "I really don't know how to teach this kid," but they are simply avoiding their responsibility. Parents harm their children with this "cluelessness" and "carelessness". They take great care in picking a cram school teacher so their kids can quickly learn what they need, but in reality, it's so the parents can reduce the time they spend teaching their children.

3) Winning at the starting line, losing at the finish line

I stress that the best time to develop a child's field of vision and sense of modesty is when they are toddlers; otherwise, they will start later than others. Why? Our field of vision is how our "cognition" travels toward reason. If children lack vision, they will not be able to understand complicated things and it will be easy for them to draw the wrong conclusions. Without these open horizons, they won't have long-term life goals. If parents only show them a small world, children will always believe that the world is that small, like "viewing the sky from the bottom of a well". Never use your limited personal mentality to restrict a child's potential.

How to expand a child's field of vision:

1. Parents should try to establish healthy interactions with their children and introduce them to different kinds of people, things, histories, societies, and success stories to expand their universe.
2. Encourage children to be ambitious, set life goals, and see far into the future. Then, even if they cannot truly reach their goals, they will lead rich lives.
3. Give children experiences rather than just telling them the answer directly. Lead children to open themselves to new ways of thinking, push themselves to find the answers, learn from mistakes, and experience that letting go is the true meaning of love.
4. Constantly analyze the successes and failures that children experience. By managing to grasp the underlying causes of failure, based on the determination that a "gentleman never makes

the same mistake twice”, success will always be with you.

Many studies prove that the earlier children interact with things, the more inspired they are by their potential, and in the days ahead, they have a better chance for glorious achievements. For example, the child genius composer Wolfgang Mozart, the golf champion Tiger Woods, and the investment guru Warren Buffett can all be seen to confirm this view. Similarly, humility allows us to relate to our neighbors with understanding and tolerance, and a low emotional quotient (EQ) leads to children who do not know how to manage relationships, and have a hard time interacting with people. In today's enterprises, co-workers are required to have team spirit. No matter how big your talent, if you do not have a "wide circle of good friends", your playing space will be relatively small.

People who succeed through hard work become humble because everyone who struggles faces snags, setbacks, and failures of all kinds. These difficulties make us reflect and grow to become more humble and more accepting.

Some people say, “Those with fish are petty and unfriendly because sharing with others reduces their own portion. However, those who know how to fish are not petty and are willing to share because they know they can always catch more fish.” Today’s society is prosperous, yet children have become self-centered and selfish; perhaps it’s because they “have fish”, but don’t “know how to fish”.

Parents with good “cognitive” ideas are able to nurture intelligent and brave children who will study positively, accept different challenges, and be self-confident, accepting of other people, and willing to share. Children today do not lack substance, but rather lack the determination to achieve goals, reach dreams, and work hard—things learned most practically and effectively from a parent’s example.

The Himalayas is the world’s highest mountain range, and at 7,756 meters above sea level, Mt. Everest is considered the tallest peak. Many adventurers have died attempting to climb it. The range is shaped like a sickle that separates



China and India and blocks in the humid air from the Indian Ocean, giving the southern slopes in India and Nepal plenty of rainfall and lush greenery. In contrast, the northern slopes in Tibet are barren and dry with little flora. These two lands are a perfect picture of night and day; no amount of manpower can change this natural

order. But our lives and our futures are the complete opposite; we can control everything with our own powers. When we have problems, we can find a way to solve them; we should not blame others or say it was predestined. Everything will work out with positive thinking, as well as “modesty and self-restraint, receptivity and open-mindedness, support from others, and willingness to seize opportunities”. Measuring a person’s success does not depend on their talents, skills, or family but on their “attitude” toward other people.

Another eye-opening story comes from the Cantonese film “The Drummer.” In the movie, the son of a gangster (played by Jaycee Chan) is forced to run away and hide in the mountains of Taiwan under the protection of his uncle because he has offended a powerful and renowned businessman who is seeking revenge. One day he hears the sound of drums coming from the mountains and when he follows it finds a group of monks. He impatiently demands to learn the drums with them, but the female lead (played by Liu Ruo-yu, the founder of the Utheatre drumming group) refuses to let him join, saying, “You have yet to develop your heart. Even if you are skilled, you will always just be a drummer. If you want you become a master, you must first cultivate your heart.” In other words, you have to have a good and positive attitude.

Also, our starting line in life, and the breadth of our vision have a large role in deciding whether or not our lives will be “mediocre”. Exactly how is “mediocrity” created? We can look at it from two perspectives. The first is through “knowledge”: when we lack knowledge, we adapt slower, become more reserved, and our problem solving skills are not ideal. However, there is a solution to this. There is plenty of information in today’s internet age, so if we want to find knowledge or answers, it is available at the tips of our fingers. The problem is whether we have the determination and willpower to find this knowledge ourselves. We can definitely say that “mediocrity” is not caused from a lack of knowledge; rather, the key is our “attitude” toward life.

4) Happy Indians, unhappy Chinese



Two completely different types of “cognition” will result in two mentalities. A 2011 survey asked, “If you had a second life, would you want to be born in the same country?” Over 90% of Indians responded that they would want to be Indian again in their second life, but less than half of Chinese people were willing to be Chinese again. This peculiar survey result is intriguing.

India has a large wealth gap. Also, there are numerous problems in the country with the sanitation system and insufficient food, clothing, housing, and transportation. Most foreign visitors are struck by this dreadful state of affairs, and tourists can talk for days about what a bad

condition India is in. Indians commonly move to the Middle East as their languages, skin color, and climate are similar. However, Middle Eastern people put a larger emphasis on relaxation than Indians, and there are many high-paying jobs waiting to be filled.

By coincidence, another happiness index survey pointed out that among more than 20,000 participants from 22 countries, only 9% of Chinese people said they were happy, while 37% of Indians and 46% of Americans were happy. This study shows us that even though Chinese people work hard to make their lives better, they are still unhappy. Why? You might answer that Americans are wealthier than Chinese people, which may be true, but then why do Indians, who are many times poorer than the Chinese, have a much higher happiness index? If you think further, you might notice that the average income of Chinese Americans is higher than the American average, so why are they no happier than the average American, or even than Mexicans or black people on welfare?

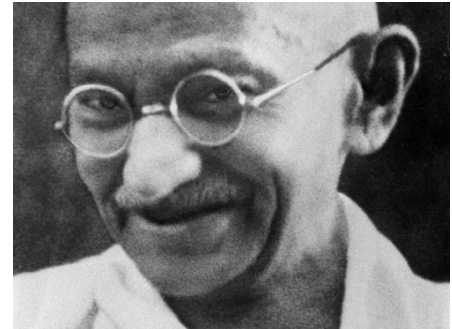
Does happiness depend on money? To some extent, yes. But even though Indians lack money and possessions, most are happy with their lives. Considering that happiness relies mostly on self-cognition, it's no wonder Indians are happier. India's complicated caste system is separated into many levels from the high Brahmins or Kshatriyas to the low Shudras and Outcastes, but regardless of wealth or class, Indians in general are happy and carefree.

Clearly, this kind of happiness does not come from an abundance of possessions, because there are innumerable problems in India related to poverty. Occasionally I come across a thought-provoking quote from Qian Zhongshu, "The sort of happiness that transforms suffering into enjoyment is a great victory of mind over matter..." Today, the mind focuses more on material desires, and I'm afraid it's impossible to turn this around. You might say, "You're such an idiot," but in reality, we spend a lot of money on food and drink. Yet no one is content in their heart. Is this is not a surreal portrayal of our society? Everyone has fallen into this endless cycle, chasing after things we can never obtain. Will everyone slowly begin to join the chase just for the sake of chasing and forget what happiness is, and forever live with plenty without appreciating it?

One year, when I was in the New York JFK International Airport at the arrival gate area after I departed from the plane, I went to the men's restroom before picking up my luggage. I went to wash my hands only to find three Indian men using each of the three sinks. They had laid out their toothbrushes, toothpaste and razors, and were slowly cleaning up and chatting without a care in the world. The problem was quite a few people were behind them waiting impatiently. These men really wanted to teach us how to transform suffering into enjoyment, but is enjoyment

found in a restroom?

It's not that Indians do not seek material enjoyment. Wealthy Indian people, rich politicians, and celebrities still drive around in their Mercedes-Benz and Bentleys; but often the extravagance is quite hard for people to comprehend. Perhaps they have learned from the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and from their society's mainstream values that focus more on the mind than on material things. On public



occasions, most Indians wear simple clothing; anything too flashy is considered shameful. Their inner pleasure reflects a type of acceptance for difficult, helpless, terrible, or unconditional situations. They do not complain about not owning enough possessions; instead, they cheerfully accept and enjoy the things they have and do not sulk about what they do not have.

In fact everyone, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, Chinese or “foreign”, has the same chances of facing frustrating, disappointments, or unchangeable situations that they have no choice but to accept. Tibet, located on the northern side of the Himalayas is barren all year, yet Tibetans still gladly accept what nature gives them and do not complain at all. One day you will be tested, and how will you cope? Will you be angry, depressed, submissive and passive, or will you fight back with everything you've got to get justice? Anything is fine because it's your own choice. Mao Zedong once said, “The sky will rain and women will get married; what can you do?” But have you ever thought of transforming suffering into enjoyment, like Qian Zhongshu said and enjoying difficult times, enjoying failure, and enjoying another kind of life? Regardless of whether you like their lifestyle or not, Indians have shown me that happiness can be so simple.

5) Living in mistaken “cognition”

5.1) A silver tongue is a gift

We often run into some common “misconceptions” in everyday life. It is said that having a glib tongue must be something you're born with, like the eloquent and skilled debater Fang Tangjing from Stephen Chow's movie. Actually, adept orators usually enjoy reading and are accustomed to thinking about the different topics that they can talk passionately about, working hard so that they can express their opinions when the right time comes. In fact, they've done a lot of preparation in private. For example, in debating competitions, the audience watches only four debaters talking nonstop, while an interschool debating team usually has around thirty members. Before each debate, everyone works together to collect a large amount of information and then divide this into the “for” side and “against” side to create the arguments. The competitors

contemplate different topics, and refute the evidence, repeatedly practicing every detail, point, and the suitable words to hone their speeches. Only then can they eloquently make their arguments, apply a suitable strategy, and calmly defeat their opponent in just one hour. They win through information, constant practice, and timely application.

This goes to show that there are two sides to everything; if you do not clearly understand the general principles, it is easy to make “cognitive” mistakes.

5.2) Hong Kong is just a cupboard full of brand names

On the surface, Hong Kong is a brilliant international metropolis, but many things have changed over the past sixteen years since it was reunified with China.

Taiwan’s CommonWealth Magazine published an article titled “Why are Hong Kongers crazy about Taiwan?” which said that the number of Hong Kong people that travel to Taiwan grew from 200,000 before the transfer of sovereignty to 950,000 last year, and this year reached over 1 million people. Hong Kong tourists don’t all flock to Alishan like Chinese tourists, but also travel to the farms in Nantou and Hualien and stay at bed and breakfasts. One Hong Kong tourist said that the culture was very different from that in Hong Kong. “It seems like Taiwanese people don’t care just about earning money, but they really hope that visitors enjoy their stay here.” After reading this article, I felt that it was true that many Hong Kong people only make speculative investments. If most distinctive small stores close down due to high rent; how can the city develop a creative industry? Even some smaller international brands cannot grow in Hong Kong due to the rent prices and the small Hong Kong market. As a result, they prefer to open stores in Taipei, Bangkok, or Kuala Lumpur, leaving only a dozen famous international brands in Hong Kong. As our French co-worker Michael said, “Hong Kong has fallen; it has become a colony of brand names.” Is this to the good fortune of Hong Kong? If you look carefully, many “family stores” in Japan and Europe have specialized in just a single product for generations, such as ramen, leather accessories, wine or farm goods. These stores are proud of their traditions that have been passed on for generations, and that have unique folk characteristics.

To borrow the words of HTC’s founder, Cher Wang (daughter of the late entrepreneur Wang Yung-ching), “The reason my father and I have become respected entrepreneurs is because we create social values and not just wealth.” Does Hong Kong really have any unforgettable local stores? Hong Kong is known as a brilliant international metropolis, but in reality it’s just a tedious cupboard full of world-famous brands.

6) Geniuses are overrated

In recent years, many scientists have studied innate ability and cranial nerves and they all agree that talented people, or geniuses, may be overrated by the public. Piles of research explain that talent for music, tennis, art or swimming is basically non-existent, or at least very rare. The American author, Geoff Colvin, explained this in his book titled *Talent Is Overrated*. He even used some famous geniuses to demonstrate his explanation.

6.1) Music history holds that Wolfgang Mozart wrote

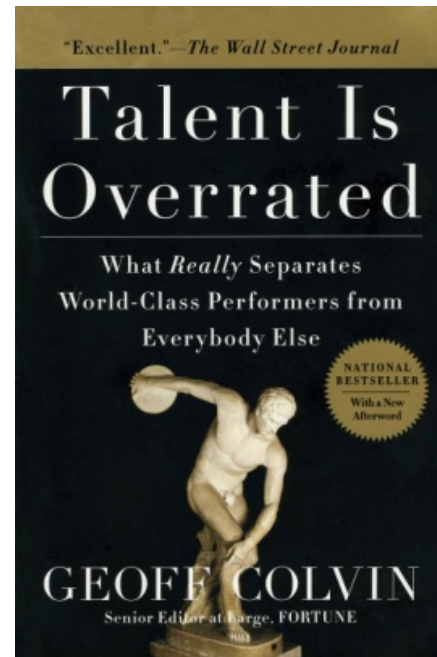


compositions when he was five, and that by the age of eight he was performing publically on the piano and violin. He left behind countless famous pieces before he died at the

age of 35. First though, let's take a look at his family background. Mozart's father, Leopold Mozart, was a well-known composer and concert performer. He was a very strict father. He arranged a rigorous lesson plan to bring out Mozart's talents at home. Leopold was adamant about music education for his children. In the beginning, before

Mozart's works were released to the public, Leopold would fix his son's compositions himself, so nearly all of Mozart's early works were written (in part) by his father. Mozart's true masterpiece, Piano Concerto No. 9, was written when he was 21—by that time, he had already been strictly trained for nearly eighteen years. It's easy to see from his countless manuscripts that Mozart made many drafts and revisions to his work. The genius described in these manuscripts, music history, and other literature is far from capable of creating a perfect composition on the first attempt. Also, researchers have developed a “precocity index” to study the learning performances of pianists. The general standard for “high precocity” was being able to perform in public at a concert after six years of training, and the index gave those who could perform after three years of training a score of 200%. Mozart only scored 130%. With improved modern training programs today, some contemporary concert performers score 300% to 500%, much higher than the score given to the “genius” known as Mozart. So Mozart was not really much better than average.

This may be an encouragement for “tiger moms” or “tiger parents,” but it's a nightmare for the parents who just daydream about their child someday becoming famous. It takes many years of



hard training to become a Mozart.

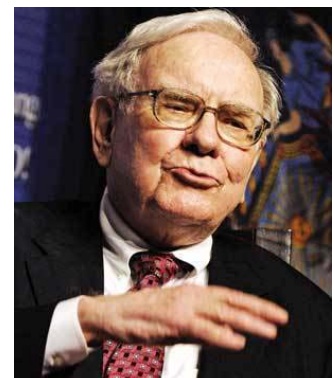
6.2) Tiger Woods's story is somewhat similar to Mozart's. Woods' father, Earl Woods, wrote in his book titled *Training a Tiger* that he was a professor of history, strategy, and war games at a military university in New York. He was on his senior high school and college baseball team in Kansas, and he loved teaching. But because of his work, he had a lot of free time which he used to focus on teaching Tiger. He left his teaching position at 44 and moved to southern California with his wife, and three children from his first marriage. As an energetic person, not long after he took up golf, and within a few years he reached a single digit handicap, proving his own exceptional golfing skills.



“I couldn't wait anymore; I wanted to teach my young son golf as early as possible. I was already prepared,” Earl Woods wrote in his book. He and Tiger's mother agreed to take on their only son's education as a full-time job to fully bring out his talents. Earl gave Tiger his first putter when he was only 7 months old. He often brought his son's highchair into the garage so that Tiger could watch him putt. Like watching a movie on repeat, Tiger constantly watched his father putt, leaving a lasting impression. Earl improved his grip and technique and began bringing the then two-year-old Tiger to the golf course. Tiger was fed a vast amount of golfing knowledge from a young age, and with his father's skilled training, the quick, perceptive, and studious Tiger was able to succeed and become famous early in life. He was a famous golfer in his neighborhood, and represented the United States in the Walker Cup when he was just 19, but unfortunately he didn't win a trophy. In reality, at the time, Tiger had already been rigorously trained by his father for seventeen years.

Looking back, Tiger Woods said, “My golf skills rely on imitation. I've gotten this far because I've always looked up to my father.” Many reporters, friends, and news anchors have asked Tiger and his father, “What do you think is the most important key to success?” and they both say, “There are no shortcuts. It's all hard work and training.” Are you determined enough?

6.3) (Warren Buffett) Considered the world's most successful investor, Warren Buffet is much like other successful entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates, who knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life from a very early age and showed a passion for that activity.



Buffett is no exception—he enjoyed learning about business when he was young, and especially about investing, because he liked the feeling of earning money. When he was young, Buffett would read different newspaper articles every day, paying close attention to changes in businesses and new developments. He loved Cities Service companies and bought his first stock at age 11. At 15, Buffet and his friends pooled their money to buy a second-hand pinball machine and placed it in a hair salon for patrons to play while they waited. Business was good, and they bought a few more machines within a few months. Later, Buffett used the money he made from the pinball machines to buy a 40-hectare farm which he rented to farmers.

People say that Buffet was quite proficient at mental calculations. He graduated from senior high school at 16 and went on to earn a Master's degree at Columbia University in New York where he studied under Benjamin Graham, a famous British-born investor who immigrated to America with his parents and is known as “the Father of Value Investing” and “the Godfather of Wall Street.” Buffet even got a perfect A+ in this class, making him the first student Graham ever gave such a high grade. After completing his Master's, Buffett worked at Graham's investment company for two years voluntarily, without a salary, before moving back to Omaha and opening his own investment company. He was only 25 at the time. Buffett's love for money was nothing new given the bleak economy in the Midwestern United States at that time. His interest in stocks and investing had been nurtured by his stockbroker father and by his own enjoyment of graphs and charts, which he used for speculating on market trends. He slowly amassed his money-making knowledge from a young age. Perhaps Buffett's motivation was stronger than others due to his strong desire to progress, and this combined with his hard work, studies, investments, and interests into a powerful motivation to push himself towards success.

6.4) The genius equation

As we look back at the growth and education of these famous celebrities, it is easy to see some common features in their paths to success.

First, you must be interested in your future career and have the basic relevant skills—for Mozart this meant an adroit use of musical notes, for Tiger Woods practicing until it became second nature, and for Buffett a mathematical intuition and a love of reading and absorbing market information.

Second, a talented and capable teacher is necessary to nurture a child from a young age so that they can absorb information easier, are not afraid of failure, and there is no need to consider their reputation. Learning slowly from a young age decreases the time required to learn and improves the overall result.

Third, aside from training with a teacher, to succeed you have to practice alone and cannot be afraid of tedium or boredom. You have to make this goal a part of your life and always think about the keys to success and improving your skills.

Lastly, you need to be disciplined, have self-control, accept criticism from others, and be willing to work closely with your teacher. Only students who respect their teachers and their craft can be successful. Why? Who will want to teach you if you are arrogant and disobedient?

As an example, let's look at Zhu Zhigen, the Chinese coach for the Olympic swimmer Sun Yang who won the gold medal for the men's 1500 meter freestyle. During an interview with CCTV, he said, "Sun Yang is an extremely hardworking Olympic athlete. He listens and never has any complaints about my coaching. He does everything I ask him to do. I've never met such an obedient athlete in all my years as a coach." This point is crucial.

7) Man can conquer nature; everything depends on the individual

Saying that everyone else is beneath you and that you control everything is a little too arrogant and exaggerated, but to some extent it makes sense. In the past couple of decades, many scientists have proven through experiments that the brain can change one's achievements,



personality, or even treat emotional disorders. Dr. Alvaro Pascual-Leone, a professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School, performed an experiment with two groups of pianists: one group practiced on the piano for several hours every day, while the other group moved their fingers over imaginary keys while only thinking about the music. When Professor Leone used transcranial-magnetic stimulation (TMS) to test the subjects, the results showed no significant differences in the motor cortex of the brain between the two groups. This means that imagining playing the piano can produce the same effects as actually playing. Just thinking can change the organizational structure of the brain and some of its functions. He also

stated that imaginary training can help an actual performance. For example, whether you are swinging a golf club, passing a soccer ball, or swimming, just using your brain to practice can help with actual training.

An article printed on page 49 in the February 2007 issue of *Time* magazine explained that meditation can effectively treat some emotional disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). After more than ten weeks of meditation, 12 of 16 patients had significantly reduced symptoms. This approach was named “cognitive-behavioral therapy” (CBT) and it has become more common in recent years. The results are very effective because the treatment has the same effects as pharmacotherapy.

On page 50 of the same issue, *Time* also ran an article on a study by Dr. Richard Davidson, a professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. This study proved that meditation can control feelings of satisfaction and happiness. Dr. Davidson stated that the left frontal cortex of the brain was more active during deep meditation, showing high levels of satisfaction, and compared this to the right side of the brain which only controls negative emotions. His experiment compared the MRI



results of a monk who had over ten thousand hours of meditation experience and a college student who only had a crash course on meditation. The results showed that the electrical waves in the frontal cortex and the chemical reactions in the brains of the two subjects during meditation were different. The electrical activity in the left frontal cortex of the monk was extremely high, showing higher levels of affection and happiness, and his right frontal cortex had no significant activity, showing no negative emotions. For the college student, both sides of the frontal cortex were equally inactive.

The three experiments mentioned above show how our brain can affect learning and training, treat emotional disorders, and create feelings of happiness, and show that we have power over many things—the key is whether or not we have control of this “cognitive” ability. If you say, “Yes, I am aware and I understand,” do you have the willpower and perseverance to accomplish your goals? These scientific studies show us that if we think of something day and night, we have an opportunity to achieve our ambitions. Just like the northern martial arts master Gong Yutian said to Yip Man in Wong Kar-Wai’s movie, “The Grandmaster,” “Today I leave you my reputation. Later on you will face many challenges, and I hope you will be like me and never lose your focus. Never forget your past or who you are.” The well-known Taiwanese author Zhang Da-chun’s insightful dialogue shows the same reasoning—there will be many obstacles in life as we focus on achieving our goal, but if you keep it in your heart and never forget, one day your mission will be accomplished. In other words, live in the moment: when you walk, focus on your feet; when you eat, focus on your tongue; when you listen, listen intently; when you look, look intently. Then you will succeed with whatever you have put in your heart.

8) Our outlook decides our success

Most people's cognitive ability involves comparing things before knowing whether or not that path or that thing is right for them. After going to five different ramen restaurants, you'll know which one you prefer. Sometimes you need to walk down several paths before you know which one you want to take. However, sometimes you're on the right path and it's the one you like, but you still find yourself far from success. We fail for many reasons: sometimes it's because we don't want to work hard, sometimes it's because we're not confident, and sometimes it's because of the views of others. Therefore, you must constantly develop courage in order to conquer your fears and face your responsibilities.

You might ask, "How is it possible to eliminate these 'cognitive' difficulties and 'change myself'?" An effective way to change yourself would be to have an objective third party at your side to help you out, and point out some of the problems. However, trying to improve yourself on your own is also possible. The key to most changes is in opening our "self-defense mechanisms." As they become part of our nature, they sometimes protect us too well, making change extremely difficult. Change is accomplished through several steps. Is there a shortcut? Sorry, but there's no easy way.

- Calmly face your problems and shortcomings; do not run away
- Make friends with proactive and positive thinking; the goal is to train yourself to only accept "positive thinking"
- Read more *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and other types of self-improvement books. Reading can effectively suppress the fear of the unknown, and others' experiences can lead us to the right path and encourage us to try again
- Don't limit yourself; try new things and new ways of thinking
- Learn from past successes and failures, reflect on them, accept an imperfect "you," and decide to make a change
- Find the source of your problem, and decide how to change it
- Believe in your method of change and slowly initiate it (with your values and being determined to adapt and accept change)

Actually, the most difficult thing is being honest with yourself—that's the only way to analyze your current situation and problems. Telling yourself you need to change is not enough. Facing past problems will inevitably bring up feelings of inferiority and the pain that those past failures caused. Our "self-defense mechanism" will subconsciously try to steer us away from these

feelings, but that means that the problems will always exist. Therefore, the first step is to mentally prepare yourself to accept the pain that will be caused by digging up past problems, and not to think of a thousand ways to escape. Do you want to know why society is still unfair, or why some people always succeed despite decreasing odds? If you let yourself hide behind immature and fantastical lies, it's like taking drugs—it's a short-term escape, but you'll still be trapped in an eternal abyss with no way out.

It takes longer to accept new things as people grow older. Changing becomes even harder, and you may spend your entire mediocre life locked in an ivory tower. For example, a recent college graduate had trouble at work, yet wasn't bothered to find the reasons behind this trouble, and was unaware that it might be his own problem. He simply wanted to run away from reality, so he returned again to school. After some time, he graduated again and once again encountered difficulty at work, so he forced himself to get a doctorate. He was over 30 when he graduated again, and at that age, it became even harder to adjust to the stresses of life and work.

If he had been willing to face his problems when he was younger, he might have been able to save himself a lot of trouble and would not have wasted his youth. "No amount of gold can buy what we needed when we were young" is an enlightening expression. Our deficiencies leave us no choices, no escape routes, and they teach us that the only way to obtain what we need is through the determination to rally and push forward. Sometimes, having no choice is the best choice. Parents should learn from Zheng Geru, the mother of Robert Kuok, the Sugar King of Asia, who said, "If my children become like me, they won't need a large inheritance; if they don't become like me, even a large inheritance won't do them any good." As such, I suggest that you remind yourself often not to let your "self-defense mechanisms" control your life; be responsible for your life, and accept that acknowledging your faults is the first step in changing your behavior. This is the only way to proceed if you hope to change.

9) Conclusion

From my first steps in joining the workforce to establishing Oriental Logistics on my own, I've always had a diligent attitude toward every challenge and difficulty, big or small. However, I also unconsciously gave quite a bit of stress to my co-workers, and wasn't able to convince everyone I worked with of the benefits of my hands-on style of managing. Over many years, Oriental Logistics has proven our professionalism to our customers and, through everyone's hard work, has accomplished many seemingly impossible tasks. This is a source of pride; would we be where we are today without your diligence? Diligence involves having the integrity to persevere. It includes our spirit of devotion, persistence, and tenacity. You can go farther if you do

everything, handle every problem, and grasp every opportunity with diligence. The logistics industry demands 100% of your diligence.

I've spent a lot of time writing this article, and the topic is a bit abstract as I've seen many difficulties with "cognition." Normally the truth is covered by a façade which results in mistakes in comprehending; therefore, it is my hope that everyone can understand my message clearly. Those who are naturally intelligent have an easier time succeeding, but no accomplishment has ever been made without hard work. I truly believe that you control your destiny and that you can achieve anything. A good offense is the best defense, and being able to diligently strive to succeed in the face of adversity is the harshest of tests. You are never fully prepared for everything in life; you need to always have sharp and accurate insights, move with the times, and seize your opportunities. Also, like Mozart and Tiger Woods, you must constantly learn, read more, and improve yourself because persistent learning and practice will inspire new thoughts and changes, and will ultimately culminate in success. Also, to ensure our future, we must work hard even through life's struggles to set a good example for our children.

"Cognition" is the source of our value chain and each segment of that chain affects the whole. Our "cognition" affects our ideals and our ideals affect our behavior, habits, character, and our destiny. Problems with "cognition" become tiny flaws which can create enormous mistakes. A successful life can be easy—just look to see if you are actively and positively facing your challenges, open your heart and accept the opinions of others, sincerely strive to find the root of your problems, break free of the difficulties with your "cognition," constantly try to improve yourself, and always work toward your goals. These are the keys to living a fulfilling life.

Remember that rewards come to those who work hard. God will always take care of the diligent.

Finally, I'll end with an interesting couplet I have had in my home for over twenty years:

"Hard work is the basis for every success. Failures all stem from insisting you're blessed."

** The End **